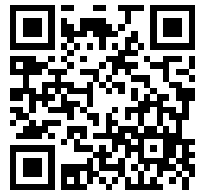

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**HISTORY OF
THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

UNITED KINGDOM CIVIL SERIES

Edited by SIR KEITH HANCOCK

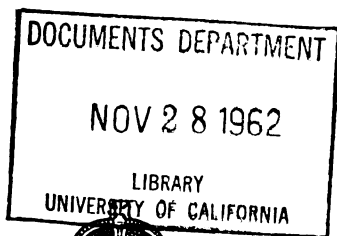
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FOOD

VOLUME II
STUDIES IN
ADMINISTRATION AND
CONTROL

BY

R. J. HAMMOND, M.A.



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CONTENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE		Page
PREFACE		IX
		XI

A: FOODS MAINLY HOME-PRODUCED

PART I: FRESH FISH

CHAPTER I. Pre-war Plans and the First Distribution Scheme, 1936-9	3
II. The Movement Towards Re-control, 1939-41	13
III. The Second Distribution Scheme, 1942	25
IV. The Period of Fullest Control, 1942-5	41

PART II: EGGS

V. The Framing of the Control Scheme, 1939-41	65
VI. Developments in Control up to the End of the War in Europe	83

PART III: POTATOES

VII. The Pre-war Plans and the Establishment of Control	105
VIII. The 1940 Crop	117
IX. The 1941 Crop	129
X. The 1942 Crop	141
XI. The Crops of 1943 and 1944	152

PART IV: MILK

XII. The Background of Control	175
XIII. The First Year of War	189
XIV. The Second Year of War	205
XV. The Completion of the Control Edifice	220
XVI. The Rationalisation of Collection and Distribution	234
XVII. The 'Safe Milk' Proposals: Developments in the Price Structure, 1943-45	252

B: EMERGENCY AND COMMUNAL FEEDING

XVIII. Emergency Preparations	275
XIX. Food and the Invasion Threat, 1940-41	290

CONTENTS

XX.	Anti-Invasion Precautions, 1941-3; the Creation of Emergency Stocks	303
XXI.	The Lessons of Air Bombardment	317
XXII.	Emergency Feeding.	351
XXIII.	Communal Feeding: the British Restaurant Movement (1)	381
XXIV.	Communal Feeding: the British Restaurant Movement (2)	395
XXV.	Miscellaneous Communal Feeding Arrange- ments.	413

**C: RATIONING AS AN
ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEM**

PART I: BEFORE THE WAR

XXVI.	The Genesis of the British Rationing System	427
XXVII.	The Revival of the System, 1936-39	444

**PART II: THE ISSUE AND RENEWAL OF RATION BOOKS:
THE LINK WITH THE NATIONAL REGISTER**

XXVIII.	The Pre-War Negotiations and the First Ration Book Issue	461
XXIX.	'Brotherly Behaviour', 1940-42	478
XXX.	The Establishment of Joint Offices and the Reissue of Identity Cards, 1942-43	499
XXXI.	'Fusion' in Operation, 1943-45	523

**PART III: EXPANSION AND REFORM IN CONTROLLED
DISTRIBUTION, 1940-45**

XXXII.	The First Year of Rationing, January 1940- January 1941	543
XXXIII.	Extensions of Rationing, February 1941- July 1942	572
XXXIV.	The Problem of Supplementary Rations: 'Special Cheese'	591
XXXV.	Rations for Seamen	610
XXXVI.	The Control of the Retailer, 1941-43.	625
XXXVII.	Other Reforms in the Rationing System, 1941-45	643

PART IV: THE RATIONING OF MEAT

XXXVIII.	New Wine in Old Bottles, 1940-41	659
----------	--	-----

CONTENTS

vii

XXXIX. Crisis and Reform, 1941-42	675
XL. The Achievement of Stability, 1943-45	687

PART V: THE RATIONING OF TEA

XLI. Towards Rationing, 1937-40	699
XLII. The Drive for Conformity, 1940-42	712
XLIII. The Acceptance of Non-Conformity	730

* * * * *

XLIV. Conclusion: The Conditions of Success	753
---	-----

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Changes in Ration Book Format	763
B. Printing and the Ration Book	767
C. Recovery of Deceased Persons' Ration Books	769
D. Sugar for Domestic Jam-making	770
E. The Start of the Rationing Week	777
F. Mr. Vivian's Proposal for a Points Rationing System, December, 1917	779
G. The Ministry of Food and Clothes Rationing	782
H. Rationing and the General Post Office	786
J. Specimen of 'Food Office Procedures'	787-791

APPENDIX TABLES

Table	I. Fish (Fresh, Frozen and Cured): Landings of British Taking in the United Kingdom	795
	II. Fish (Fresh, Frozen and Cured): Foreign Landings (Imports) in the United Kingdom	795
	III. Eggs in Shell: Numbers Passing Through Packing Stations (United Kingdom)	796
	IV. Potatoes: Acreage, Yield, and Utilisation in the United Kingdom.	797
	V. Milk: Estimated Total Production and Utilisation in the United Kingdom	798
	VI. Milk: 'Non-priority' Allowances, 1941-46	799
	VII. Milk: Prices and Distribution Costs, 1938/9-1945/6 (England and Wales)	800
	VIII. Non-local Removals Recorded in the National Register, 1939-45	801
	IX. Retail Outlets for the Sale of Food	802

CHARTS AND DIAGRAM

I. Fish (other than Salmon)	2
II. Eggs under Control (c. 1942)	64
III. Imported Egg Products under Control (1942)	82
IV. Potatoes (1942)	104
V. Milk (England and Wales) (c. 1943)	174
VI. Communal Feeding	394
Index	805

EDITOR'S NOTE

IT WAS ORIGINALLY intended to complete the history of food policy and administration in two volumes, but it has now been decided to publish three. In making this decision the editor has met the wishes of the Ministry of Food, which pleaded the educational benefit that members of the food trades, students of administration and other interested persons would gain by examining in their detailed context the historical lessons of food control.

Certainly, this volume contains considerably more detail than has appeared in any previous volume of the Civil Histories. The difference, however, belongs chiefly to the tactics of publication. Every volume of the series, including even the present one, is in varying degree the distillation of drafts that have been written at very much greater length. In meeting the request of the Ministry of Food, the editor has been able at the same time to serve a professional purpose of his own: namely to exemplify the close attention to detail that is required if war-economic history is to rest on firm foundations.

The detail in this book, moreover, should prove of interest not only to persons who have a close professional concern with food but to others.

W. K. H.

PREFACE TO VOLUME II

THE STUDIES making up this volume fall into three distinct groups. The first group comprises four foods—fish, milk, eggs, and potatoes—that from the wartime administrator's point of view had several features in common. All were wholly or mainly home-produced; none required an indispensable process of manufacture before it could be consumed; none, therefore, was susceptible of strict control, let alone rationing, based on complete or virtually complete Ministry of Food ownership. Unlike the major commodities to be studied in the next volume, in which the Ministry was completely involved from the first in the trading process, these show it mainly intervening by way of regulation, through the medium of statutory rules and orders. (Milk is an exception in that after 1942 the Ministry momentarily became the owner of all milk in England and Wales not marketed through producer-retailers; even so, its control over distribution was never rigorous.) They represent, in fact, the nearest that food control in the United Kingdom approached to the circumstances of a normal country whose principal supplies are not derived from imports; and hence display the system's limitations clearly.

The second group of studies deals with food control in emergency, i.e., when the normal system of controlled distribution proper to a war of attrition broke down, or was in danger of breaking down, under air attack or apprehended invasion. Important in themselves, they throw light by contrast upon the settled conditions in which the system flourished and grew ever more complicated. As the Ministry's provision for communal feeding was inextricably mixed with its emergency arrangements, the two are discussed successively.

The third group is entirely concerned with a single large administrative problem—rationing—that breaks up into two principal (as well as numerous subsidiary) problems. The first of these—the issue and renewal of consumers' ration books—might seem to be simple; in practice, partly for political and historical reasons, it turned out to be highly complex. More complex still is the second, namely, the management of supplies to the retailer through the paper instruments of coupons, returns, and permits. The history of these might be described as morphology; a term applied to the study of living things is the more appropriate because the development of rationing consisted in evolution and adaptation rather than design. For that reason it displays numerous variants that came into being in response to the characteristics of different foods, to the increasingly stringent

limitations on labour and paper, and to the changes of policy, for instance on differential rationing, that the progress of the war brought about.

The emphasis of the studies, however, is not mainly upon policy. That of milk, for instance, takes largely for granted the efforts to promote higher production and to 'steer' consumption by means of welfare subsidies. The nutritional aspects of rationing are likewise not discussed. These matters have been touched on in the first volume and in any case will be tolerably familiar to readers. It was thought better to devote what, notwithstanding the book's length, was still limited space to subjects either unfamiliar in themselves, or upon which the detailed examination of Departmental records threw an unfamiliar light. Above all, the writer has striven to make clear the processes of food administration, both by attention to their almost day-to-day development and by reference to their remoter antecedents.

The pursuit of the origins of rationing procedure, in particular, has had fruitful results. It early became apparent that certain practices of the second world war could only be fully explained in terms of their predecessors of 1917-18. A critical examination of documents that remained from that time made it clear that the accepted accounts of the earlier schemes contained—to put it mildly—a strong element of myth, and that the myth-making process had begun as early as 1919. The whole subsequent history of rationing in Britain was profoundly affected by this fact, and analysis of it contributes much to the understanding of practice in the second Ministry of Food. Such analysis is necessarily detailed; the generation of myth was, indeed, largely possible because the details of past practice had been forgotten or overlooked. For that reason, much detail, though accompanied (it is hoped) by sufficient discussion to render it meaningful, has been included about later rationing methods.

The sources are mainly the files of the Ministry of Food, with occasional reference to other Departments. The Ministry's files run to many thousands, and the number of separate documents that have been examined must exceed a million. Not much guidance, except on occasion, is to be had from 'high level' documents, for the matters here discussed, many of them quasi-technical, came to the surface but seldom; this is particularly true of rationing. To the multiplicity of sources have been added difficulties arising from the conditions in which many of them were created: war-time pressures, shortage of clerical staffs, and dispersion of offices. (The last was not an unmixed evil, for to it is owed the creation of much material—especially teleprinter messages—that ordinarily might never have been written down.) Though laborious, the search has been rewarding

and satisfactory in that no point of policy or administration that seemed important has had to go unexplained for lack of material.

I could not have tackled this mass of evidence unaided; and the finished work owes a great debt to those who undertook the research for, and drafted, the original monographs on which it is based: Miss M. A. Cotterill, on fish and milk; Mrs. G. W. Briggs, on potatoes and eggs; Mrs. E. B. Given, on emergency services and communal feeding; and, last but not least, Mrs. R. D. Cutler, who sustained the whole burden of the investigation into rationing techniques. For the form in which their labours now appear, for any expressions of opinion, and for any errors that remain, I take responsibility. Among the many officials who have offered valuable criticism of drafts and elucidation of knotty points I may especially mention former members of the Ministry of Food's Rationing Division and the staff of the General Register Office, if only because of the highly technical matters with which they were concerned. The Registrar-General for Scotland kindly furnished the unpublished material for removals, printed in Table VIII; the remaining tables are due to the Statistics and Intelligence Division of the former Ministry of Food, and the 'flow charts' (Figures I to V), are simplified versions of charts made in that Division during the war. Mrs. C. A. E. Felvus has again helped to see the volume through the press.

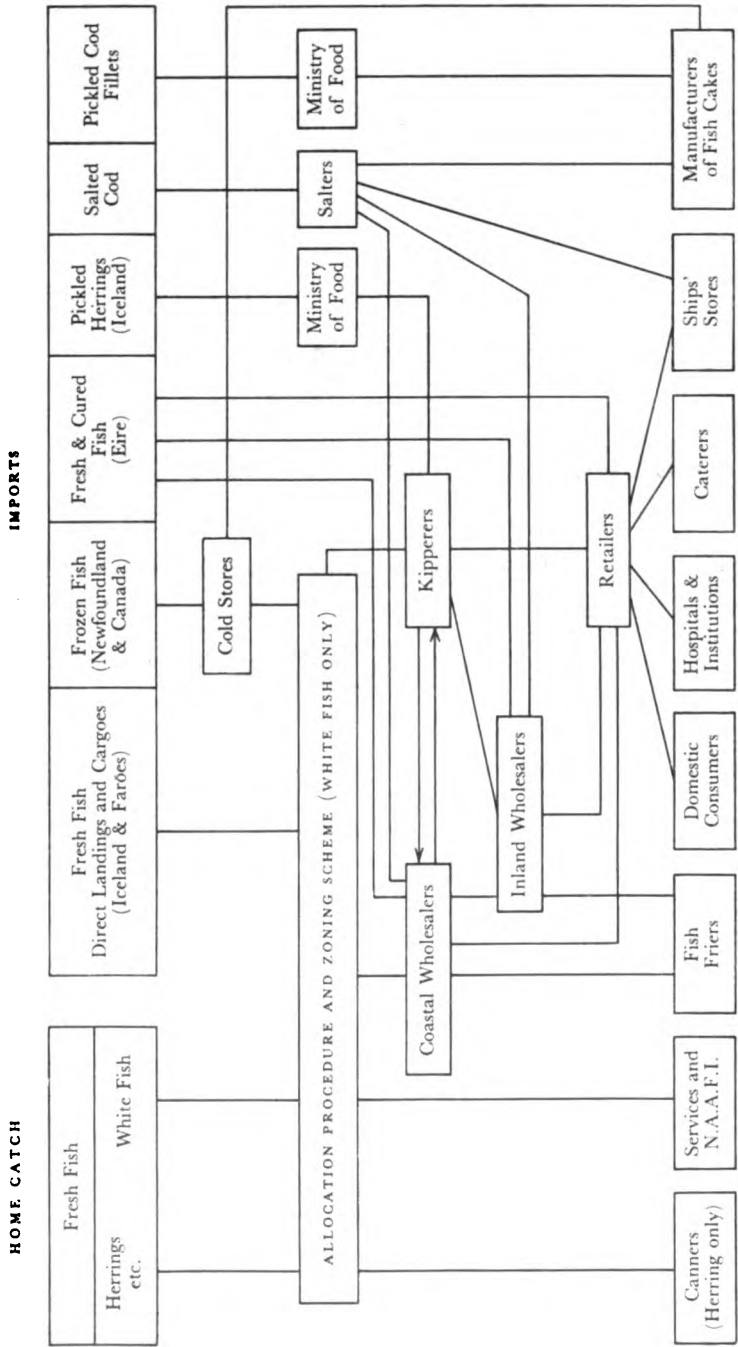
R. J. HAMMOND

August 1955

A:
Foods mainly Home-produced

Part I: Fresh Fish

FIGURE I
Fish (Other than Salmon) under Control



CHAPTER I

Pre-war Plans and the First Distribution Scheme, 1936-9

I

'Control of the distribution of fish must necessarily be both difficult and partial. Neither the time, place nor volume of landings can be foreseen; the perishable nature of the produce demands promptitude and elasticity in handling; little time is allowed for the application of a rigid system to be worked by officials acting on instructions from headquarters. Any system must be difficult to frame or administer, and any scheme that is adopted must be framed with disinterested knowledge, and above all in the interests of increased production'.

THUS Mr. R. E. Prothero,¹ President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries in 1918, expressed the quintessence of the war-time fish problem in a paper for the War Cabinet. He was opposing what he thought was an attempt by Lord Rhondda's adventurers to trespass, in setting up a control of fish distribution, on the territory of the old-established Fisheries Departments. The Ministry of Food was acting, he claimed, in ignorance of fishery affairs and under trade influence; the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, by virtue of knowledge and experience, had the right to be consulted about fish distribution policy, and to be utilised, so far as possible, in carrying it out. 'There can be no difficulty about this, provided the Ministry of Food will recognise the Board as part of the machinery of Government, and not as a rival concern to be run out of business as quickly as possible.'

Whether the disclaimer that this broadside evoked from the Ministry of Food was a reaffirmation of existing policy or a prudent change of front is not clear; for although Lord Rhondda replied that he hoped to avoid 'any complete control' of fish, there was at any rate talk within his Ministry of rationing it. The Ministry was at that time learning the danger of half measures with fish. Its first price control Order, which fixed merely maximum *retail* prices, had dislocated distribution badly; prices at all stages rose to the maximum, and retailers and wholesalers could not live without breaking the law.² Price control had therefore to be extended to all stages of

¹ Later Lord Ernle; author of *British Farming Past and Present*.

² This lesson had to be re-learned for eggs in 1940. See below pp. 68-69.

4 FOODS MAINLY HOME-PRODUCED : FISH

distribution and, as a logical consequence, a system of licensing of fish traders introduced. Finally, in July 1918, control was applied to all white fish landed at the larger ports, viz., Aberdeen, Fleetwood, Grimsby, Hull, Milford Haven, North Shields, and later Lowestoft. It had to be sold at the port's wholesale market, and Fish Distribution Officers allocated it to wholesalers in proportion to their trade in 1917; they in turn were expected to observe the same principle in supplying their customers, and might be directed so to do in case of complaint.

These measures did not aim at much more than stabilising the already high prices of fish; but they did at all events achieve that much, without causing landings to decrease. The rapid release of fishing vessels from minesweeping duties eased the supply position, but relaxations of control, early in 1919, proved to be premature and it had to be fully reimposed in November. It was finally abandoned in May 1920. At no time had it meant any serious interference with normal distribution down to the retailer; after the inadvertent upsets arising from the initial price Order, care had been taken to allow all types of trader, as well as the producer, a sufficient return. In particular, provision had been made for the inland wholesaler, through whom the large cities were supplied, to get his fair share of the trade. On the other hand, there was probably only nominal regulation, and only nominal enforcement of price control, in the local trade depending on landings at the smaller ports.

In the period between the wars, the first Ministry of Food's fish control received little or no attention. Neither Beveridge nor Coller does more than mention it, and although, early in 1936, the committees on war-time food supply that had been set up in the Board of Trade and the Ministry of Agriculture caused some preliminary investigations to be made into past activity and future prospects, these were not immediately pursued when the Food (Defence Plans) Department was set up. As its Director said later to the Committee of Public Accounts:¹

'... we had to take essential commodities in our preparations in some sort of order; we could not do that all at once; at the beginning we concentrated on the most essential items, and fish did not come in until a few months before the outbreak of war.'

It was, in fact, the Munich crisis that caused the Department to become active about fish, and that gave its preparations a new and, in the event, unhappy slant. For because they began when they did—under the shadow of expected devastation from the air—they were

¹ Committee of Public Accounts: Minutes of Evidence, dated 13th May 1941, paragraph 2150.

from the first unduly influenced by the most vulnerable part of the fish trade, namely Billingsgate Market.

In the second week of September 1938, the Department put its scheme for decentralising the Smithfield meat market before first, the Superintendent of Billingsgate, and secondly, the Chairman of the London Fish Trade Association (Mr. J. T. Bennett, a prominent fish merchant),¹ and asked whether a similar plan could be applied to fish. The answer was 'yes'; and those consulted undertook to arrange the practical details immediately. A ring of railhead depots around London was selected, in co-operation with the railway companies, at which incoming fish trains might be unloaded; the specialist road transport was allocated between depots, for which managers and staffs were chosen. A tentative financial plan to cover the scheme was also agreed in principle between Mr. Bennett and the Department. All individual wholesale trading would cease, not only among the Billingsgate merchants but also in the ports and in the large inland markets. Fish merchants would, in fact, be formed into a pool to be fed out of a fixed wholesale margin, each member drawing remuneration in an agreed proportion.

This proposal, amounting to complete nationalisation of the wholesale fish trade, was a startling outcome of an emergency scheme for the physical dispersion of market facilities in the metropolis; and it says much for the prevailing atmosphere of crisis that it should have won such ready acceptance. The idea of a pool, indeed, fell on such fertile ground in Billingsgate circles that when the Food (Defence Plans) Department circulated, in January 1939, an outline scheme for fish control in war-time, Mr. Bennett criticised it for not including a pool; the Department, he said, was merely copying the 1914-18 scheme. This was not strictly accurate, for the Department had considerably elaborated previous arrangements; not only were port wholesalers to be formed into distribution committees with a Ministry of Food chairman (performing the functions of the Fish Distribution Officer in the former war), but inland wholesalers would be similarly organised. The latter proposal reveals the basic weakness of the Department's fish plans—want of detailed information about the working of the trade. For, as another critic, MacFisheries Ltd., pointed out, the provincial inland markets were not accustomed to supply all retailers outside the range of Billingsgate, many of whom would need to draw their supplies direct from the coast.

This indication of the complexities that a scheme of fish control must take into account might have given the Department pause—more especially as there had been trouble with the coastal merchants

¹ Mr. Bennett was also Chairman of the National Federation of Inland Wholesale Fish Merchants. But he could not speak for the *coastal* merchants, nor for one of the more important inland centres—Birmingham.

6 FOODS MAINLY HOME-PRODUCED : FISH

about direct supplies at the time of the Munich crisis. At an earlier stage of the food preparations it would almost certainly have done so.¹ But the sheer urgency of getting some sort of scheme ready appears to have delivered officials into the energetic and sanguine hands of Mr. Bennett, who was appointed Director-designate of Fish Supplies early in April 1939. He proposed to extend the 1938 distribution scheme from the hinterland of Billingsgate to the rest of Great Britain, which would be divided into about 60 zones.² In each zone there would be a single depot, to which would be consigned the whole of the fish allocated day-by-day to the fishmongers and fish-friers registered there. The basis of allocation would be pre-war performance, though adjustments might later be made to meet shifts of population. Price control would be imposed at all stages of distribution and, of course, first-hand auctions in the ports would cease. Allocation, both at the ports and at the depots, would be undertaken by Committees of Wholesalers responsible to the Ministry of Food. The costs of distribution would be met by a levy, initially estimated at 2s. a stone (14 lb.) on the total receipts from sales to retailers and fish-friers. The balance remaining from this sum after meeting the expenses of the inland depots and coastal committees would be distributed among wholesalers in proportion to their datum turnover.

The scheme had thus two aspects—the financial and the geographical—and when it was put before the trade, towards the end of April 1939, criticism concentrated on the former. Its obvious weakness, from this viewpoint, was that the men who actually went to sea were the only people not specifically provided for. Retailers and friers were promised a ‘reasonable profit’; wholesalers the net proceeds of the levy; the producer was to get what was left:

‘The Panther took piecrust, and gravy, and meat,
While the Owl had the dish as its share of the treat’.

Moreover, emphasis was laid on the need to keep prices down as one of the reasons for introducing the scheme. Small wonder that trawler owners protested, and that although the Department was constrained to promise them a guaranteed price, it could not dispel, in the short time remaining before war broke out, a sense of suspicion and grievance among them. The guaranteed producers’ price, as

¹ An indication might also have been found in the Sea-Fish Commission’s Reports on the Herring and White Fish Industries (Cmd. 4677, 1934, and Cmd. 5130, 1936, respectively). The reader is referred to these for a brief description of fish problems between the wars.

² The original number agreed with the railway companies in July 1939 was 59; but later lists of depots show additions, more especially in Scotland. The final number is given as 83.

the Department appears to have realised, was such an obvious *quid pro quo* of price restriction in what otherwise must have become a sellers' market, that one wonders how it came to be omitted from the scheme in the first place; more particularly from a scheme so revolutionary in other respects.

What is, indeed, less remarkable than the opposition of the trawler-owners to the plan is its comparatively ready acceptance—on paper at any rate—by others. Birmingham and Bristol wholesalers both grumbled about submerging the identity of individual firms in a pool, but did not press their opposition; the railways co-operated in the selection of the depots and agreed to transport fish at a flat rate irrespective of distance; the Fisheries Departments offered no criticism other than a plea for the producer. The original argument in favour of a depot scheme, the threat of air raids, was by now reinforced by another—the probable need, under war conditions, to operate fishing-boats from unaccustomed ports. If, that is to say, there were to be an allocation scheme merely, by which retailers and friers were tied to particular merchants, some of these might, owing to the movement of the fishing fleet, find themselves without fish, while those in other ports had plenty. Or, to put it another way, the price of insistence by a retailer on direct supply from the coast might be deprivation of supplies for weeks or months at a time. The depots were a precaution at once against over-concentration of fish marketing—as at Billingsgate and the large inland centres—and against the failure of individual traders' sources of supply.

These were powerful arguments, if the expected conditions were realised; and they seem to have obscured, from both officials and the trade, the enormous disturbance the scheme must cause, even were it to be carried through without a hitch. Every fishmonger in the country, even were he wholly dependent on local inshore fishing, would have to seek his supplies at a depot, perhaps many miles away, in the siting of which he had not been consulted, and that would be managed, as likely as not, by a 'foreigner' from London or Hull. Long established trade connections, based on local preferences for certain species of fish, would be abruptly broken—for instance, the supply of hake, landed at Cardiff, for consumption in Grimsby. These and other inconveniences might not matter, if they could be justified and explained to those who would have to put up with them. But the Department, overworked and pressed for time as it now was, never seems to have imagined how its scheme would pan out in (say) Lyme Regis, Stowmarket, or Skipton. Thus the selection of depots, a task demanding (one would have thought) the closest study of local conditions, appears to have been done purely on the basis of a railway map of comparatively small scale, without regard to the numbers and distribution of retailers in the area. In

8 FOODS MAINLY HOME-PRODUCED : FISH

no other way can one explain the choice for this purpose of places like Blair-Atholl and Lostwithiel.

These defects in the scheme were not perhaps beyond remedy, given time; what proved fatal was the decision to introduce it before one absolutely vital piece of preparation—the compilation of the register of traders entitled to use each depot, with their basic quotas—was complete. The intention was to obtain this information from the White Fish Commission, the statutory body set up for the industry by the Sea Fish Industry Act of 1938.¹

Under this Act, however, the Commission were debarred from divulging the figures of any individual trader's turnover without his consent; and though the Food (Defence Plans) Department was able to override this by citing the Essential Commodities Reserves Act,² it was in its turn forbidden to disclose the information. A plan for 'farming out' the compilation of separate depot registers to a firm of accountants familiar with the trade had therefore to be abandoned; an alternative, to do the work within the Department on the basis of overtime, failed because the Treasury refused to sanction overtime payment for a month or more, preferring that staff should be transferred from other Departments. Altogether, more than two months were lost by these delays, so that the compilation of the registers did not begin until a fortnight before war broke out.

It is doubtful whether the Director of the Department was aware, when he gave authority on 3rd September³ for the scheme to be started, that the registers—without which the superintendents of depots would be unable to allocate fish—were not ready. As late as 21st August other arrangements—for instance for a pool of fish boxes and for the headquarters of the control at Oxford—were incomplete, and the Director-designate of fish had been asked whether, therefore, he regarded it as 'unthinkable' that the fish scheme should come into operation a week late, instead of at the outbreak of hostilities. His reply had been that control must come into force immediately; 'there was no half-way house between full control and chaos'. In the event, the country was to get both.

II

Immediately war broke out, therefore, the signal was given for the Coastal Committees and Inland Depots to be established; and on 6th September an Order⁴ was issued forbidding the sale of fish by

¹ 1 & 2 Geo. 6. Ch. 30.

² Vol. I, p. 23.

³ Sir Henry French accepted responsibility for this decision before the Committee of Public Accounts, in 1941. Report of the Committee of Public Accounts, *loc. cit.*

⁴ S.R. & O. (1939) No. 1128.

wholesale or retail other than by authorised persons. Auctions at the ports¹ were already suspended and the fish being requisitioned by representatives of the Coastal Committees on behalf of the Board of Trade and subsequently the Ministry of Food. As yet no statutory schedule of controlled prices, whether at first hand, wholesale, or retail, was in operation, though such a schedule appears to have been conveyed to the depot superintendents in the form of an instruction from the headquarters of the Fish Control, now established at St. John's College, Oxford.

At once a flood of complaints began from every section of the trade. Trawler-owners and crews, who had been accustomed to be paid for the catch on the day of landing, found their fish being taken over at uncertain prices for settlement *sine die*. At Milford Haven and Plymouth they refused to put to sea; at Fleetwood they were barely persuaded to do so, after delays in forwarding had held up catches in port so that they deteriorated. From Grimsby complaint was made that the scheme had suppressed a speciality of the port—the direct trade from coast to fishmonger in headed and filleted fish. As a corollary, a factory that employed 300 men making fish meal from the residues was in danger of closing down. It was clear that, so far as the ports were concerned, the scheme could only be made to work given a price agreement with the catchers, and one, moreover, that took account of the increased importance of the more costly near-water and inshore fishing, now that so many of the deep-water boats had been taken by the Admiralty.

To such an agreement the Ministry of Food urgently bent itself. Meanwhile, however, the clamour against the rest of the scheme—the system of inland depots—was undiminished. Much of it was directed against errors in siting, that resulted in Isle of Wight fish-mongers having to seek fish at Wimborne, many miles away on the mainland; or in retailers and fish-friers from towns where the fish was landed having to make round journeys of as much as 80 miles to and from the depots, only to find that no fish, or derisory amounts of it, was to be had. In the absence of complete registers of those entitled to attend a given depot, superintendents had to use their discretion. At Manchester, on 5th and 6th September, 'scenes approaching rebellion' were reported from the fish market; lorries were said to have been raided and fish secured by main force. Market inspection became impossible and fish was sold in a bad condition; wholesalers were said to have bought at the pool price and resold at a profit. Birmingham appears to have refused to work the scheme at

¹ That is to say at the ten principal ports, namely, Fleetwood, Milford Haven, Swansea, Aberdeen, Hull, Grimsby, Newhaven (Edinburgh), Lossiemouth, Lowestoft, and North Shields.

What happened at the lesser ports is not clear. At many of them it was not customary for catches to be sold by auction.

first; when, at urgent persuasion, the depot there was opened, it was inundated with far more fish than could possibly be sold. When the Lord Mayor protested to the Director of Fish, he was threatened with a complete cessation of supplies. Cornishmen were indignant at the influx of people from Hull and Grimsby who knew nothing of local conditions. Above all, the general shortage and high price of fish, which must have resulted from the requisitioning of vessels, were blamed on the scheme.¹ As *The Times* remarked by way of epitaph, 'nothing was left of Billingsgate except the language the scheme provoked'.²

For a fortnight officials struggled to mend this side of their plans also, in face of demands in Parliament and elsewhere that the whole scheme be scrapped. The staff at Oxford was strengthened; redress was promised, and in some cases given, to local grievances; and efforts were made to complete the retail registers. But reform failed to keep pace with indignation. Had the Ministry of Food been able, at this moment, to call to its assistance as Director of Fish some figure commanding the support of all sections of the trade, a measure of control might have been retained. But no such superman existed; the trade was utterly divided, horizontally and vertically. (The scheme had made these divisions worse; Hull owners joined those of Aberdeen outside the British Trawlers' Federation on 30th September; and the Hull association was itself split over the merits of the scheme.) On 18th September, therefore, the Minister decided to drop the scheme; on the 20th, he announced the decision in the House of Commons; and on the 22nd, the Control Order was duly revoked.³

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry later described the collapse of the scheme as 'the one major disaster that the Ministry of Food met with in the early days of the war'.⁴ It was recognised as such at the time:

'I fear', wrote the official whose responsibility the scheme was, 'that once the producers have tasted high prices and high profits, it will be extremely difficult to get them to accept lower prices and that they will always be out to wreck any scheme of control which gives them lower prices. If it is true that we should not be able to get prices down again, then we should consider very seriously whether we ought not to hold on to the present scheme and substitute any new scheme that we may prepare gradually and perhaps piecemeal without letting go of control'.

¹ This was to happen also with eggs in 1941. See below, pp. 80-82.

² *The Times*, 21st September 1939.

³ By S.R. & O. (1939) No. 1254.

⁴ Evidence of Sir Henry French before the Committee of Public Accounts, 13th May 1941, paragraph 2150.

Events were to bear him out, and very quickly. When the decision was made to abandon the scheme, it was intended to preserve what the Minister himself called 'the shadow of control' by making a Maximum Prices Order. But when the Ministry proposed to put into an initial Order a maximum price schedule based on the scale of 'near water' prices that had been agreed with the trawler owners before control was abandoned, the owners refused to accept it on the grounds that these were not *guaranteed* prices; and the Ministry was in no position to coerce them. It was to be mid-1941 before price control was introduced for white fish. Moreover, the debacle made itself felt everywhere in the Ministry, and especially in those fields where drastic control measures had been proposed. The political difficulties over the meat scheme, over pool margarine, over the introduction of rationing, all owe something to the loss of face over fish.¹

Could the scheme have been made to work? Were its defects those of imperfect preparation and haste, or were they more fundamental? There were those who, having experience of the trade and of the difficulties of the first fortnight, believed not only that the scheme was feasible, but that it presented the only fair means of protecting the weaker members of the trade from being forced to the wall by the fish shortage. (Cf. the arguments used in favour of the concentration of industry by the Board of Trade in 1941.) The depots, in one form or another, were clung to as the only means of securing even distribution in the event of bombing, or the diversion of vessels to unfamiliar ports. Certainly it would be wrong to condemn a depot system in principle merely because it had been introduced in circumstances other than those for which it was intended, and in a state in which it could not be expected to work. The wonder is that the chaos was not worse. Nor ought one to forget the casual misfortunes that beset it, of which the hot weather was perhaps the most notable.

Nevertheless there remains doubt—a doubt supported by the high authority cited at the beginning—whether so complete a control, admitting of no exceptions, could ever work for fish. It is significant that those quoted in the scheme's support were one and all connected with Billingsgate Market. London is not England, more especially when it comes to fish; it is on the contrary, regarded as the least discriminating of any market, accepting species that will find a sale nowhere else. The provinces, to say nothing of Scotland, pride themselves on a nicer taste in such matters and (because fish plays such a small part in the diet) might be expected to indulge it even in war-time. Fish, that is to say, could never be just fish, as butter was butter. Moreover, the fish trade is, in much of the North and Midlands, combined with the trade in fruit and vegetables—a link that

¹ See below, p. 111, for the effect on the potato control scheme.

the depot scheme must break. Finally, it seems unlikely that the small proportion of fish landed away from the main ports, with their established methods of forwarding to the distant consumer, needs ever be brought under more than nominal control.¹

It is of course possible that ingenuity and skill in negotiation might, given time, have overcome all these obstacles, and that, had the Department begun, as it had originally intended, with something like the last war scheme of allocation, it might have been able to evolve a control sufficiently complete to take care of the disturbances and dangers that war was expected to bring. As things were, the best became the enemy of the good; a scheme that only great energy, public spirit, and resource could have brought so near to completion in the time granted to it, had worse effects than something less ambitious. The expert, driven by a sense of urgency and unrestrained by any imaginative realisation, either on his own part or on others', of what would be the practical effect of his devices, did more harm than a lesser man could possibly have contrived.

¹ Among the complaints reaching the Ministry was one from the Vicar of Holy Island (Lindisfarne) complaining that there was no fish because the local fishermen were obliged to send their catches elsewhere (i.e. to Berwick-on-Tweed). This sort of thing must bring any *complete* scheme into contempt.

CHAPTER II

The Movement Towards Re-control,

1939-41

I

THE OUTBREAK of war had not failed to bring about the expected shortage of white fish. Total landings by British catchers, in the six months September 1939-February 1940, were 2.6 million cwt., compared with 7.1 millions for the corresponding period a year earlier; an increase in foreign landings from .7 to 1 million cwt. did little to offset this loss, which was, of course, due to the Admiralty's having taken so many distant-water vessels for minesweeping. Prices had correspondingly risen at the coast from an average of 19s. 6d. cwt. to 39s. 6d. cwt. for British landings; for foreign landings, which had commanded a higher price before the war, the rise was less, from 30s. to 36s. The reduced British catch was largely composed of near-water qualities and varieties of fish that generally command higher prices even in peace-time and that, moreover, would have to do so if the near-water vessels were to pay their way; the average prices before and after the outbreak of war were not, therefore, strictly comparable as a measure of trawlers' earnings. By the same token, the fortunes of war differed greatly between the ports; landings at Milford Haven and Fleetwood were almost normal, while Grimsby and especially Hull were badly hit. (By June 1940 there was said to be not a single vessel left fishing from Hull, whose fleet was the most up-to-date and therefore best suited for the Admiralty's purposes.)

For herrings, the position was quite different, as about two-thirds of the pre-war catch was exported to markets (Germany, Poland, and the Baltic States) that were now cut off; the taking of drifters for minesweeping barely restored the balance between supply and demand. Indeed, the Ministry of Food had been able, in October 1939, to secure the herring catchers' agreement to a maximum landed price of 3s. 6d. a stone (14 lb.) in return for a guarantee to take over all surplus herrings at 30s. a cran.¹ This had enabled it to fix maximum retail prices for herrings, kippers, and bloaters,² and

¹ A cran is a unit, not of weight, but of measure: for the purpose of its control Orders, however, the Ministry treated a cran of herrings as equivalent to 392 lb.

² S.R. & O. (1939) No. 1426.

incidentally to make a substantial profit (£29,000) out of the herrings¹ taken over. Herrings, however low the price, are not seriously competitive with white fish, for which the public does not regard them as being a substitute. Above all they could not be used by friers to replace the cheap, distant-water fish, such as cod, dog-fish, and catfish ('rock salmon'), that was the foundation of their trade. (Before the war, three-fifths of the total white fish consumed in Great Britain is said to have been sold through fish-friers.) These varieties had naturally risen most in price since the outbreak of war; the price of 'wet fillets' (mainly cod) was 12s. a stone in February 1940, all but four times what it had been in June 1939.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the friers' representatives on the Fish Advisory Committee set up by the Ministry of Food in December 1939 should have clamoured for price control, more especially as it could not have been applied to the fish once cooked. Other sections of the trade were, however, in varying degrees opposed to price control. Trawler owners contended that having regard to especial war risks and the increased cost of gear, the prevailing prices were not excessive. Coastal and inland merchants, and retail fishmongers, objected not so much to price control as to its corollary, a system of allocation at the ports; but they agreed in principle that price control might become necessary at some later, unspecified date. Desultory and protracted discussions, in which the Ministry endeavoured to wear down the objectors' resistance, went on through most of 1940; but on 1st November the Fish Advisory Committee, by a majority, voted in favour of maximum prices being imposed as soon as possible.

Meanwhile the Ministry sought to ease the supply position by importing frozen cod fillets from Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Iceland. Four large firms in the trade, mainly connected with the 'depressed' ports of Hull and Grimsby, had already formed a group to import these fillets, which were landed at Liverpool, railed across to the East Coast and distributed through the wholesale merchants at Hull and Grimsby, the main centres of the pre-war trade in *fresh* fillets. Initial shipments had gone well, but the group appear to have felt that any large-scale importation, such as would make a serious impression on the shortage of fish for friers, was too risky to be attempted by private concerns. Although friers would take frozen fillets for want of anything else, they would always prefer fresh, even at a price one-third higher; and hence it would only need a spell of good landings at British ports, for frozen-fish importers to incur a heavy loss. The group therefore approached the Government with an offer; if it would take over the risk of loss on unsaleable stocks,

¹ A similar scheme, whereby the Ministry took over (for curing) surplus herrings from the Scottish catch of 1940, was, however, a failure.

they would run the scheme as agents for a fee of 6d. a stone, as against the 1s. 6d. then being earned by them on private importations.

The possible scale of operations was certainly considerable; a million cwt. of frozen fillets (equivalent to about 900,000 cwt. of fresh fillets, or roughly twice that amount of whole fish) annually. The outlay would be of the order of £2½ millions a year. But the risk, particularly on unsold stocks when the war should end, was equally considerable; and it is not surprising that the group should have been unwilling to take it. On the contrary, it is remarkable that for a short time in January 1940 they should have contemplated going ahead without Government assistance. If, however, the Ministry of Food were to come to their support with a guarantee, it would obviously need, in the consumer's interest, to establish complete control. This, it was thought, would mean that the Ministry should become the sole importer of frozen fish, with the original projectors acting as managing agents; and that it should impose price control at all stages of distribution.

For the adoption of such a scheme, the time at which it was formulated (April 1940) was favourable. The Ministry of Food was much concerned with the effect of high food prices on the poor; fish-and-chips was highly regarded by scientific opinion; supplies of fish from Scandinavia had been cut off. The risk of loss to the Government seemed limited to that on end-of-war stocks; and even though this might be estimated as high as £500,000, there was a possible offset by way of potatoes. If the fish-frying industry could be saved from collapse by the import of frozen fish, its consumption of the other ingredient in fish-and-chips might, in a single year, save the Government as much and more in respect of its guarantee to potato-growers.

Treasury assent was readily obtained; but the completion of the scheme occupied a further six months, and it was not until 1st November 1940 that the Ministry of Food was ready to take over the sole importation of frozen fish. Two points in particular were difficult of settlement; the manner of distribution and the remuneration of the projectors who were now to act as importing agents. The claim of the Humber (Hull and Grimsby) merchants to sole distributing rights, on the ground that they had virtually monopolised the sale of fresh fillets before the war, was resisted by the inland wholesalers both on principle and because to transport the whole of the fish landed from Liverpool to the Humber would be wasteful. The projectors, moreover, put in a claim for a special allocation to themselves by way of reward for their pioneer work, over and above the share that their associated companies might expect out of the common pool; and this was conceded by the Ministry though without publicity. The eventual share-out provided that 8 per cent. of the landings should go direct

to the group, and 92 per cent. be distributed by the Humber merchants; out of this latter, 60 per cent. should go to inland wholesalers and the remaining 40 per cent. be reserved for direct sales.

As for the importing agents' remuneration, the Ministry had been prepared to agree to 6d. a stone for the first 10,000 tons and 4d. thereafter; but the Treasury described this claim as 'sheer effrontery', pointing out that 6d. a stone was, on the group's own showing, a reasonable trading profit when they were acting as principals, but that under the Ministry scheme they would carry no risk at all. Agreement was, in fact, promptly reached on a counter-offer of 4½d. a stone for the first 15,000 tons, with a review of actual expenses if imports exceeded that amount. It is not clear, however, whether the special 8 per cent. allocation, which was calculated to yield the group some £30,000 gross, was made known to the Treasury.¹

Meanwhile, prices overseas had hardened; and when the Ministry came to work out its price schedule for incorporation in an Order,² it was constrained to work on a landed cost of 8s. a stone, 1s. more than the original figure on which discussion had been based. The eventual structure may be tabulated as follows:

	s.	d.	per stone
Landed cost	8	0	
Importers' commission		4½	
Freight and cold storage	1	0	
Provision for loss on end-of-war stocks		5½	
Flat rate of carriage		8	
<hr/>			
Selling price to primary buyers ..	10	6	
" " " inland wholesalers ..	11	0	
" " " fish friers and retailers	11	6	
Retail price	17	6	(1s. 3d. a lb.)

The respective margins were considered by the Ministry of Food's Director of Costings to be fair and reasonable; since coastal merchants had undertaken to sell 60 per cent. of their turnover to inland wholesalers, their true margin would be in the neighbourhood of 8d. a stone. The retail margin was somewhat higher than the Director of Costings thought justified, but less than their pre-war percentage margin.

II

By the time the frozen-fish project had matured, however, the prices of fresh white fish had risen still further. At the end of 1940 British

¹ A covert 2 per cent. allocation (out of the 92 per cent.) was also arranged for those importers of frozen fillets who were not members of the group.

² S.R. & O. (1940) No. 1997.

landings, always at their lowest at that time of year, had fallen to a quarter of the pre-war quantity; moreover the meat ration had been cut and supplies of canned fish, which in the summer of 1940 had actually exceeded the pre-war average, were being progressively reduced. The landed price in February 1941 of such fish as cod, haddock, hake, and plaice, was two to three times what it had been a year earlier, or perhaps five times the pre-war average landed price. Public grumbling, whose absence had been remarked upon with surprise by the Ministry of Food in 1940, was now constant. Nearer home, the Treasury was increasingly alarmed at the effect of fish prices on the Cost-of-Living Index; the food subsidies, it pointed out, were not achieving their purpose because two commodities, fish and eggs, were not effectively controlled. Moreover, it added, these, simply because they were so scarce in war-time, would provide a particularly cheap way of subsidising the index in terms of 'pounds per point'. Or (to turn the argument the other way about), the scarcer the food, compared with the 1904 supply on which the index was based, the higher its price was likely to rise and the higher still its effect on the index number. The avowed adoption of rigid price stabilisation in the budget of 1941 made the introduction of fish price control urgent. Despite its acceptance in principle by the majority of the trade the previous November, little progress had been made towards control in practice. There was still a vocal minority in the trade, notably among the coastal merchants and the retailers, who were opposed to it, and the Minister himself decided to go slowly. A second failure in fish could not be faced:

'It is a simple matter', wrote a Ministry official, 'for anyone to say that there should be control of fish prices but this would not be practicable if any important section of the Trade were opposed to the Scheme and no matter what virtues it possessed or how well it was planned, it would be sabotaged by a hostile section'.

As much might be said of any food; the peculiar difficulty with fish arose from the fragmentation of the trade into independent and frequently hostile groups. Not merely were the various classes of trader—coastal merchant, inland wholesaler, retailer, frier—unable to find common ground, but divergences of interest also arose vertically, so to speak, between different types of fishing and different ports. Exasperated officials were apt to put this down to a treble dose of original sin. But to impute blame to the members of the fish trade for their inability to agree is to fall into an error all too common in discussions of economic organisation,¹ namely to make notions,

¹ The Perry Committee on Milk Distribution was guilty of this error when it called upon the high-cost distributors to 'put their house in order'. See below, Chapter XIII.

however well-founded, of tidiness, or administrative convenience, or efficiency, morally obligatory upon others. The onus of proof that a fish control scheme was fair and workable rested on the Government; and it was only just that, after the fiasco of 1939, the Ministry should find the trade difficult to convince.

If precipitate action might be disastrous, caution had its perils too. It was difficult for the Ministry to impose control by stages, because it might be accused of tinkering with the problem; moreover partial control was almost certain to be ineffective. The Ministry therefore had endeavoured, even at this late hour, to get the trade itself to take voluntary control measures. Cod caught in Icelandic waters was chosen as a suitable object for an experiment in price restriction and allocation, and a committee drawn from the trade undertook to draw up a scheme, to operate from 31st March 1941. When, however, the scheme was ready, the committee requested the Ministry to give it legal sanction by issuing a maximum price Order.

This request put the Ministry in a dilemma. The prices proposed were too high for either Ministry or Treasury to endorse. Moreover, the Ministry's Legal Adviser held that it was impossible, at any rate in the time available, to draft a control Order that was capable of enforcement. Icelandic cod, once removed from its boxes to the fishmonger's slab, was indistinguishable by the housewife from other cod, say from the North Sea or the Faroës; price control at the retail stage must therefore be nugatory. But this was not all; the distinction, vital to any form of fish control that preserved the existing channels of trade, between 'inland' and 'coastal' wholesale merchants and dealings, was foreign to the law:

'The futile attempt' (wrote the Legal Adviser) 'to define "inland" and "coastal" wholesale sales has been abandoned and I have adopted the criteria (specified in the Schedule) of the undefined expressions "inland wholesale merchant" and "coastal wholesale merchant", These like a heap of stones are incapable of legal definition but I understand that they have established identities and in the circumstances I feel that no useful purpose would be effected by attempting to define them.

'From the legal point of view this is a weakness but the Order itself is otherwise weak and difficult of enforcement and as a stopgap it will have to do'.

For all that, the Ministry could not very well refuse official backing to the members of the trade who had devised the voluntary scheme at its own request, more especially as Fish Division had nothing ready to put in its place. In making the Order,¹ the Minister and his

¹ S.R. & O. (1941) No. 440.

advisers recognised that 'a full Government scheme is inevitable sooner or later and probably sooner than later'—a belief reinforced by a temporary suspension of Icelandic supplies in mid-March and a request from the Iceland Government that the British should either convoy the fishing fleet or purchase fish f.o.b. Reikjavik. The Ministry responded by sending a mission to Iceland, to negotiate an agreement whereby it should become the sole purchaser of fish from thence.

Control of Iceland cod prices thus became clearly no more than an interim measure. The intention to bring in full control of fish was openly avowed in the press notice announcing that the Order had been made; moreover it was accompanied by another Order¹ prohibiting sales of fish by wholesale except under licence. The Ministry was at this time vaguely contemplating some sort of 'concentration' of the wholesale trade in fish, on the analogy of the Board of Trade proposals for industry. Prudently, it did not tell the trade this when it persuaded them, on 27th March 1941, to agree to the extension of allocation and price control to all cod in the near future. Another move in the same direction had been taken when, in mid-March, it was decided to seek for a candidate to fill the dormant post of Director of Fish Supplies—from outside the trade.²

Now, however, with the stabilisation policy duly announced on 7th April, the Treasury began to force the pace. It wanted not merely a standstill on fish prices, but a substantial reduction—one that would affect the Cost-of-Living Index by $2\frac{1}{2}$ – $3\frac{1}{2}$ points; and it wanted this by 1st July, as part of the plan for avoiding the seasonal jump in the index resulting from the advent of new potatoes.³ Heedless of administrative difficulties, the Interdepartmental Committee on Food Prices talked of a forced rationalisation of the fish trade; nor did the Ministry of Food, it seems, demur. Meantime fish prices were still rising. On 6th May a meeting of the trade at Leeds passed a resolution approving of a very simple scale of maximum prices at the ports. Hake and all flat fish were to be £1 per stone, others, except sprats and salmon, to be 10s. The trade suggested that these prices, together with schemes of allocation, should come into force on 1st June.

As with Icelandic cod, the Ministry, while regarding these prices as too high, was once again prepared to accept them in order to get a scheme going while it prepared something more drastic; there was talk of setting up a company that would take over all fish supplies at the coast. The Treasury, however, received the trade proposals with surprise and disappointment. Had not the time come (it asked) to take a firmer line with an industry that was exploiting the national

¹ S.R. & O. (1941) No. 417.

² The appointment of Mr. John Adamson, an accountant, was announced in June.

³ See Vol. I, Chapter XIV.

emergency to secure for itself a quite inordinate profit? High fish prices were not merely endangering the stabilisation policy; they were producing other embarrassments—criticism of the large sums being earned by the Danish vessels fishing from British ports; difficulties in negotiation with Iceland; troubles over the replacement of lost vessels, as a result of the ‘ridiculously high price which the most decrepit trawler can command at the present time’. Crews, the Treasury alleged, were making such large sums on a single voyage that they were unwilling to go to sea again immediately. Supplies of fish were therefore reduced, and local authorities had to cope with numbers of ‘drunken and disorderly fishermen’. To remedy these evils the Treasury advocated that the trade should be threatened with ‘heroic’, but none the less (it claimed) feasible measures; the requisitioning of trawlers by the Ministry of Shipping; the appointment of the owners, or if necessary ‘other persons’, to manage them at a ‘suitable and moderate remuneration’ and the setting up by the Ministry of Food of a distributing and selling organisation.

The Ministry of Food, however, regarded the Treasury’s proposals as unworkable¹ and the threat to use them as a ‘very dangerous weapon. No one knows better than the trade that the catching of fish can only be carried on with the goodwill of the trawler owners and crews’. A great part of the difficulty in imposing maximum prices was that the remuneration of skippers, mates, and crews was determined wholly or partly by the proceeds of each voyage; they could therefore be relied upon to make common cause with the owners against any reduction in prices. Indeed, in so far as owners’ profits were subject to Excess Profits Tax, their interest in high prices might be said to be less than that of the fishermen. The Ministry therefore hit on a means to deprive the crews of any grievance they might have as a result of its rejection of the trade’s price schedule. The difference between the men’s share under, respectively, the trade proposals and the maximum first-hand prices the Ministry would agree to was roughly 1s. a stone. This amount would be added to the maximum prices, but the whole of it would be handed to the fishermen by prescribing that owners should settle with them² as if the trade proposals were in force. As the men’s remuneration amounted to one-quarter to one-third of the landed price, this device enabled the Ministry to secure a reduction of several shillings per stone without

¹ The Agricultural Ministers, who were responsible for the production side of the industry were also, as was to appear later, opposed to requisitioning of vessels, at any rate as a punitive measure.

² By Section 10 of the Order (S.R. & O. (1941) No. 924). The provision applied to crews signed under British articles only. An attempt was made to levy a corresponding charge on catches landed by foreign vessels; but this provoked so much protest that it was dropped after a few months. The Order revoked the earlier Order for Icelandic cod.

affecting the crews' earnings. In addition, it undertook, as a temporary measure to lower the retail price and ease the working of the new allocation system at the ports that must come into force along with price control, to pay the carriage charges on fish consigned to inland wholesalers, fish friers, and retailers.

III

Meanwhile, at the insistence of the Legal Adviser, the framework of control was taking a rather different shape from that which the Fish Division had originally contemplated. The 'broad principles' that the Division had laid down for conducting allocation at the ports were, he remarked, 'not much use for the purpose of drafting an Order'. The General Directions that it proposed to issue, to the effect that wholesalers should continue to supply their normal trade customers, had 'about as much legal effect as a homily in church'. On the proposed exception from allocation at the ports of fish 'normally consigned to another market', he observed that 'Fish arriving to-day at, e.g., Hull, cannot be identified with fish which was consigned last year to a particular destination, e.g., Birmingham'. In consequence, it was decided not to include in the Order any provisions for allocation, but instead to embody the allocation arrangements for each port in a schedule attached to a formal Direction, signed on behalf of the Minister, and sent to the Chairman of the Allocation Committee at that port. This arrangement would extend to white fish what had already been done for herrings in the summer of 1940, when three sets of Directions—one for the Moray Firth, one for the Firth of Clyde, and one for the rest of Great Britain—had been issued. Before it could operate, however, Allocation Committees for white fish must be set up at all those ports—some 60 in number—where it was customary to dispose of catches by auction. The trade was not sufficiently well-organised, outside the eight main ports¹ to do this for itself; and the Ministry therefore enlisted the help of the Fisheries Departments. Their local Fishery Officers set up, and generally acted as Chairmen of, the Allocation Committees in the smaller ports; a member of the trade acted as part-time or full-time Allocation Officer, at a small wage paid by the Ministry.

The Allocation Committees' first, and indeed main, task was to

¹ Aberdeen, Fleetwood, Hull, Grimsby, Milford Haven, Cardiff, North Shields and Hartlepool.

draw up a rota of merchants qualified, by having bought white fish at the port during a datum period, for an allocation under control. (For the smaller ports generally, the datum year was the calendar year 1940; in one or two of the larger ports an earlier year was adopted, by agreement among the trade.) Each merchant's share in the landings was to be fixed in proportion to the *value* of his purchases in the datum year, though allocation itself was to be by *weight* of fish landed. Each merchant, or group of merchants, in the larger ports, would be given a number indicating his order in the rota, and allocation would begin on each day with a different number in order that all might have a turn at first pick of the market. These principles had been worked out in laborious negotiation with the trade during most of 1940.

Allocation was, of course, unnecessary at those ports where a single buyer habitually took over the fish on landing, or where the fishermen themselves marketed the catch. (War-time shortage of fish had, however, led merchants in some districts to seek supplies at creeks they had hitherto neglected, and this had the result of extending the effective jurisdiction of allocation committees.) Moreover, allocation did not imply the complete suspension of auctions, since it only came into operation when the maximum price was bid—or, in practice, when in the judgement of those locally responsible, it was likely to be bid. If, that is to say, landings at a particular time and place were especially heavy, of unpopular species, or in poor condition, the pre-war procedure would be restored. Nor did allocation at the ports do anything to secure fair distribution, within the framework of controlled prices, lower down the chain; even though the temporary arrangement whereby the Ministry paid carriage removed any incentive for coastal merchants to favour nearby customers at the expense of others.

Indeed, when Lord Woolton announced the proposals in the House of Lords on 25th June 1941, he explicitly stated that price control was only a beginning and that 'a scheme of reorganisation of the fish trade', whose 'extravagant prices' he condemned, was forthcoming.¹ However, the new arrangements worked more smoothly than had been expected; study of the implications of reorganisation appears to have convinced the new Director of Fish Supplies of the need to hasten slowly; and by October the Parliamentary Secretary was telling the House of Commons that 'a more drastic scheme of control' would not be introduced 'so long as the existing system of price control continues to function satisfactorily'.² The tone of this answer was perhaps a little sanguine, for the further reduction in

¹ *Official Report*, House of Lords, 25th June 1941, cols. 511-514.

² *Official Report*, House of Commons, 15th October 1941, col. 1368.

prices that the Ministry had enforced by a new Order¹ on 25th September, coinciding as it did with the beginning of the seasonal fall in landings, was to expose the weaknesses in a system of allocation that began and ended in the ports. To the complaints that reached it in increasing numbers from October 1941 onwards, Fish Division was constrained to make the stock reply that the whole question was being looked into.

It was already clear that the allocation procedure needed to be freed from uncertainty and anomaly. Trouble had arisen, mainly at the major ports, because this or that merchant found himself excluded from allocation through a particular year having been chosen for the datum period. Inland merchants who had changed their coastal suppliers since the datum year might find themselves unable to get fish either from the old or the new source. Different ports followed different practices. Moreover, the authority of the Allocation Committees rested on no firm statutory basis, and the directions to them could not readily have been enforced. But no amount of administrative and legal tidying up could in itself do much to solve the problem of distribution, which was at bottom a problem of knowledge. As the Director of Fish Supplies put it to a leader of the trade in November 1941:

'Having done all that [cleared up the procedure] there is still the difficulty in finding out where the fish is going. As you know, there are really no statistics in this industry at all apart from landings. . . . Until that is known . . . it will be very difficult to tamper with the distribution.'

A result of the Ministry's undertaking to pay carriage on fish consigned from the ports was to throw up a mass of information on this very subject. At the end of November, the statisticians attached to Transport Division produced an analysis of fish movements during a single week, 30th June—6th July 1941. They presented a criss-cross of overlapping hauls. The large cities were taking their supplies from almost every port in the kingdom; London, for instance, drew on every one of the 19 major ports and on 41 others. There was a

¹ S.R. & O. (1941) No. 1468. It reduced all prices by 1s. or 1s. 6d. a stone, according to type, and added a special category for hake, which had been erroneously classified as flat fish in the June Order. This, in itself a compromise decision to avoid the troubles with West Coast fishermen that would have resulted from classifying hake merely as 'round fish', was even so undertaken with some misgiving, since the price of 9s. 6d. a stone was 7s. below the previous price. The Ministry professed to have made arrangements to requisition trawlers at Milford Haven, should the crews refuse to put to sea; but it is by no means clear that it would have been able to man them. At the same time, a Treasury Charges Order (S.R. & O. (1941) No. 1495) imposed a transport levy of 6d. a stone on all fish landed by British vessels, and 8d. a stone on that from foreign vessels that were not bound to settle with their crews on the specially-enhanced terms. This latter provision aroused so much protest that it was revoked after five weeks (S.R. & O. (1941) No. 1755).

24 *FOODS MAINLY HOME-PRODUCED : FISH*

correspondingly wide dispersion of the destinations to which ports sent fish; Aberdeen, the extreme case, sent it to every one of the Ministry's Food Divisions, and the other ports were not far behind. Moreover, ports were also receiving fish from other ports—a practice that the Ministry endeavoured to stop by refusing liability for the carriage charges except for approved cases.¹

The conclusion drawn by Transport Division was that fish like other foods ought to be 'zoned'—an undertaking for which the Ministry had taken powers by the Food Transport Order² of October 1941. As early as August of that year the first of a series of transport rationalisation proposals had been drawn up, in agreement with Fish Division. It proposed to divide the country into five regions, served by five main ports (Hull, Grimsby, Aberdeen, Fleetwood, and Milford Haven); to limit supplies passing through inland markets to the amount required for local needs, and to restrict the circle of redistribution through these markets. Distribution from lesser ports was likewise to be confined to the zone in which they were situated; that from coves and landing beaches to their immediate neighbourhood. London, on account of its size, would be allowed to receive fish from any of the ports, and would, in fact, provide a useful cushion to absorb casual surpluses that might arise.

¹ Namely, fish consigned in bulk from Fleetwood to Hull and Grimsby for redistribution thence in boxes; and herrings requiring to be cured or salted at another port for want of facilities at the port of landing. The Ministry experienced great difficulty in enforcing this embargo.

² S.R. & O. (1941) No. 1694. For the general background of the Ministry's transport economy measures, see Vol. I, pp. 335-6.

CHAPTER III

The Second Distribution Scheme, 1942

I

AGREEMENT between the Fish Division and Transport Division on the principles of zoning was easy; the putting of zoning into practice proved to be a long and tedious business. For the Director of Fish Supplies, transport economy was no more than incidental to the larger problem of securing fair distribution between one part of the country and another. The scheme for a Ministry-owned company to take over all fish on landing had been put aside; the alternative, now being devised, meant the tying of each and every fishmonger and frier, some 50,000 in all, to a particular merchant or merchants. It also meant the calculation, for each of these traders, of a basic quantity of white fish¹ that he would be entitled to receive. The Division had decided to adopt, not the datum performance principle that was used in allocating ingredients for cakes, or for manufactured meats, but one that was intended to guarantee each of the zones and sub-zones, into which the country was to be divided, an equal share of fish in terms of its population. It would, however, still require to know the amount of each trader's dealing during a datum period, in order to determine his share of the total fish to be allowed to each sub-zone. An attempt to obtain these particulars through the trade associations was only partly successful. Many inland wholesalers, it appeared from the replies to a Ministry-inspired questionnaire, did all or part of their business for cash and might not even know the names of their customers. It was necessary for Fish Division to think again.

Meantime those responsible for transport matters, both inside and outside the Ministry of Food, were becoming impatient. On 2nd March 1942 the Ministry of War Transport, in full though covert agreement with the Director of Food Transport, sent the latter a formal threat: unless a transport economy scheme were promptly devised and executed, Lord Leathers would be advised to limit, by Direction to railways and road hauliers, the distance for which fish might be consigned. By this time a revised version of the zoning scheme had been discussed in detail with the railway companies; and the Director of Fish Supplies was induced to declare his intention

¹ It would have been impracticable to 'zone' herrings, because the catch and the ports of landing vary with the season.

of introducing it on 31st May. This date was accepted by War Transport with reluctance, for 'the invasion season is approaching'; but it was completely unreal. Indeed, the difficulty in obtaining returns from the trade was about to drive the Director to the conclusion that zoning ought to be abandoned, or at any rate deferred until another reform he had in mind was complete—'concentration' of the wholesale fish trade. The Director might be excused for thinking that this reform was his principal *raison d'être*. Had not the Minister referred, in the House of Lords,¹ to his new adviser's knowledge and advice on problems of business reconstruction² and to the 'scheme of reorganisation of the fish trade' for which he was to be responsible? Had not a pre-war committee of inquiry³ declared that there were too many port wholesalers, and did not the mere fact that landings had fallen to one-third of the peace-time level emphasise the redundancy? Surely (he might think) nothing could be more reasonable than to tell the trade, through its recently constituted representative⁴ body, the Fish Industry Joint Council, that it must put its own house in order and submit a scheme of concentration to the Ministry not later than the end of March, failing which the Ministry would itself introduce a scheme.

The Director had not realised that a Government Department might not use its war-time powers to bring about reforms for their own sake. Already he had had to be told that information might not be extracted from traders by threatening that defaulters' licences would not be renewed.⁵ Nor was he aware, it seems, of the special meaning that the Government had given to the word 'concentration'; that it was a device to be justified, not on grounds of efficiency, but solely by its yield in resources to the war effort, and that it was expressly designed to secure the re-emergence, after the war, of firms that might otherwise be extinguished.⁶ The request to the Joint Council had been sent without previous consultation with the Board of Trade, the Ministry of Labour, or for that matter the Fisheries Departments. When, on 14th April, a deputation from the Council asked the Fish Division for firm assurances that firms who merged their labour resources would recover their right to trade after the war, and that the labour required after concentration would enjoy protection against call-up—assurances that were, in fact, basic

¹ *Official Report*, House of Lords, 25th June 1941, Col. 514.

² In the steel industry.

³ The Sea-Fish Commission for the United Kingdom in their *Second Report* of 1938 (Cmd. 5130), esp. pp. 58, 74.

⁴ Not wholly representative; Hull trawler owners and Birmingham wholesalers refused to join it.

⁵ The ruling from 'higher authority' deserves quotation; 'We feel that we must keep the power of revoking licences to some important offences which will be recognised in Parliament and the country generally as being prejudicial to the interests of the consumer rather than merely inconvenient or a nuisance to the Ministry of Food'.

⁶ See Vol. I, p. 322 *seq.*

principles of the policy laid down in the White Paper on Concentration—the Division professed itself unable to give them. One cannot wonder that the Council should prefer to put the onus of devising a scheme back into the hands of the Ministry, when from first to last neither the principles of concentration, nor the safeguards the Government had proposed for individual firms, were properly explained to it. The process visualised by the Board of Trade, in which temporary 'marriages' were negotiated between firms, was one eminently suited to the fish trade; indeed, two enterprising firms at Hull had actually made such a marriage as early as October 1941. The Ministry of Food, however, so far from treating this as a welcome precedent, had found some difficulty in knowing what to do about it, and had had to ask the Board of Trade for advice.

The trade's refusal of responsibility for concentration left the Division's own plans—which were at once ambitious and vague—in the air. It was forced to bring them to earth by itself undertaking investigations at the main ports and inland centres—a process that could not be got under way until the end of April 1942. The result, broadly speaking, was at once to confirm the Division in its view that concentration was intrinsically desirable, and to show that it would release no useful premises and only a limited amount of unskilled and clerical labour. Even so, as late as September there was still talk of a Ministry concentration scheme, and even, once again, of setting up monopolistic companies at the ports; and it was not until the end of December 1942 that these projects were finally abandoned.

Inflated, because *à priori*, expectations of what benefits might accrue from the concentration of industries were so rife in 1941–42 that the Fish Division cannot be judged too harshly for sharing in them.¹ But it was fortunate for the Ministry's reputation that the Division's proposal, made before its local investigations had even begun, to postpone the zoning scheme until concentration should be complete was overruled. Instead, the Division was told to get on urgently with zoning; the outstanding difficulty in allocating supplies through inland merchants, namely the absence of datum figures, was settled by entrusting this task to local committees drawn from the trade, with an independent chairman appointed by the Ministry. (These new Fish Distribution Committees would be separate from the Allocation Committees set up the previous year at the ports.)

II

Much had yet to be done, however, before the zoning scheme would

¹ See Vol. I, Chapter XXV; also Hargreaves & Gowing, *Civil Industry and Trade* in this series (H.M.S.O.).

be ready to operate. It still needed to be discussed formally with the Fish Industry Joint Council and the various interests not represented on that body. In the ten months or so that had elapsed since the scheme was first drafted, the Ministry and the trade had become increasingly at cross-purposes about it. Repeated requests, more particularly after unauthorised details of the Ministry's plans had appeared in the trade press in February, from this or that interest to be heard had been met by the reply that the Ministry would reveal them through the Joint Council when it was ready. At the same time certain members of the trade were known to be in the Fish Division's confidence¹—a fact that only aroused additional mistrust of the Ministry's intentions among those who were not. Suspicion and dislike of the concentration proposals, which were not always distinguished from those for transport economy, added to fear of the latter. The dictum 'fish is fish', used by the Ministry to mean that the preference of individual consumers for particular types or species of white fish must yield to the need to eliminate long hauls and cross hauls that had arisen to serve this preference, was, sometimes at any rate, misconstrued to mean that fish at the coast would be 'pooled'; and always opposed lest it mean that certain species would become unsaleable.

At the end of May 1942, before the Ministry's scheme was ready to be presented to the Joint Council, the latter put forward what professed to be a 'rough outline' of proposals that would economise transport 'without dislocating the distribution of fish'. There could be no doubt that these proposals were not a satisfactory alternative to zoning, for they did little or nothing to end the long and cross hauls of which the Ministry of War Transport and the railways complained. The Ministry of Food's decision to refer the proposals thither was, therefore, no more than a courteous gesture, and its result a foregone conclusion. Nevertheless the ensuing negotiations lasted several months and but for the fact that the Ministry's scheme was not yet perfected might have delayed it seriously. Only when the Fish Industry Joint Council was convinced, after several full-dress meetings with the Ministry of War Transport and the railway companies, that these as well as the Ministry of Food regarded the trade's proposals as inadequate, did it perforce assent that zoning should be tried. At a meeting with Lord Woolton himself on 22nd September representatives of one section of the trade after another expressed misgiving, but also promised co-operation.

Zoning was—it must again be emphasised—only part, and that the simplest, of the new deal for fish distribution. The pressure on

¹ The preponderant influence in the Fish Division's counsels at this time appears to have been that of Hull—the most up-to-date and efficient, and therefore least typical, fishing port.

Fish Division from the transport authorities altered, and perhaps hastened the completion of, the Division's schemes; but it had been groping of its own accord towards a reorganisation that would have aimed at a more equal apportionment of fish between different parts of the country, and that must have contained some such device as the 'customers' list', now introduced as part of the zoning scheme. Port merchants¹ were furnished, through the newly appointed Fish Distribution Committees, with a list of customers, retail or wholesale, showing the proportion of the merchant's allocation to which each was entitled. The merchant was obliged to offer his fish, whether allocated or 'free' (i.e., bought by auction below the maximum price), to the customers on his list; only when they were completely satisfied might he offer it elsewhere and then only to customers within the zone allotted to his particular port. There had been one major alteration to the zoning scheme as originally planned; the Birmingham area was allowed to draw supplies from Hull as well as from Fleetwood. Similar provisions applied to the inland wholesaler, who was, in addition, forbidden to re-consign fish more than 20 miles from his premises.² A wholesaler who was also a retailer might not divert surplus fish to his own retail business. To watch over all these arrangements, the Ministry appointed full-time Fish Distribution Officers at the principal ports and at the Divisional Food Offices, thus for the first time giving Fish Division adequate representation 'in the field'.

Simultaneously with the two Orders³ enforcing the zoning and distribution schemes, there was introduced a third⁴ that for the first time established the Port Allocation Committees on a firm legal basis; unlike the others, it applied to herrings as well as white fish. The limits of jurisdiction of each Committee, in terms of a stretch of coastline and five miles inland therefrom, were set out; a standard procedure for allocation was laid down, including a special priority for buyers of white fish on behalf of hospitals and NAAFI. All three Orders came into simultaneous operation on 17th October 1942.

At once it became apparent that the Joint Council's promise of co-operation was hollow. For months before the introduction of the scheme the trade press had resounded with cries of woe and forebodings of disaster. 'The whole industry—fish-friers, fishmongers and merchants', cried the fish-friers of Leeds on 13th October, 'will have to smash this scheme if we want to try to preserve the industry'.⁵ A

¹ Initially, in the ports of Fleetwood, Milford Haven, Swansea, Cardiff, Newlyn, Brixham, Grimsby, Hull, Aberdeen, Fraserburgh, Buckie, Lossiemouth, Arbroath, and Eyemouth. (Newhaven [Leith] ranked as an inland market.)

² Special provision was made for the London and Birmingham areas.

³ The Fish (Distribution) Order (S.R. & O. (1942) No. 1982); Food (Transport) Directions (S.R. & O. (1942) No. 1983).

⁴ The Fish (Port Allocation Committees) Order (S.R. & O. (1942) No. 1981).

⁵ *Fish Trades Gazette*, 17th October 1942.

few days later the Joint Council, presenting its annual report, was at pains to disclaim any responsibility for the scheme;¹ the Council resolved to hold another meeting on 23rd November, at which reports from its constituent bodies on the working of the scheme would be considered. That day immediately became for large sections of the trade a day of decision, when the final battle with the Ministry of Food would be joined. As the *Fish Trades Gazette* put it:

'Its [The Joint Council's] assembling time... was apparently regarded as a sort of zero hour and the gathered forces started manoeuvring. Last week the friers tested the defences of the Ministry, when they asked that delegates should be received to stress their plight through maldistribution. . . . Then on Monday morning retailers attending London's Billingsgate had a skirmish with the Fish Distribution Officer for the metropolis and peppered him with their complaints. . . . Also on Monday the retailers went into action and after an all-day engagement fired a telling shot in their demand for an inquiry. And on Wednesday the coastal wholesalers completed their plans for going into the line with the remainder of the industry on Thursday. . . .'

A cynic might have said that the trade were united for the first time since September 1939, and from similarly selfish motives. On the face of it, there was nothing in the Ministry's plans to justify the mingled truculence and hysteria with which they had been greeted; no reason why the fish trade should not, after three years of war and in the manifest national interest, submit to inconveniences no greater than those inflicted on many others. So too the appointed leaders of the trade, the members of the Fish Industry Joint Council, might at the very least have counselled their constituents to have patience for a few months. At the same time, it ought to be acknowledged that this crisis in the relations of trade and Ministry was at bottom a crisis of confidence, for which the trade ought not to take all the blame. Clearly, the Ministry had not succeeded in living down the fiasco of September 1939, itself largely brought about by attempting to run fish distribution from the centre. It had not dispelled the suspicion of being under the influence of the 'big battalions' in Hull and Billingsgate. It had been publicly identified with vague, and to the trade menacing, threats of concentration, of a kind for which it had neither legal powers nor Parliamentary mandate, and in pursuit of which emissaries of the Director of Fish Supplies, sometimes without any first-hand knowledge of the industry, had but recently been visiting the ports and inland markets. The average small fish merchant, making a good living perhaps for the first time in his life, could not be expected to know that the bark of the gentleman from Ministry

¹ *Fish Trades Gazette*, 24th October 1942.

headquarters was worse than his bite. If he were an Aberdonian, he would still remember the day when large quantities of fish were sent by Government order to decay in the railway yard at Blair-Atholl, deep in the Grampians.¹

If, that is to say, the trade were tilting at windmills, it was partly in a mistaken but sincere attempt at self-defence. But that did not make it any less necessary that the Ministry of Food should stand firm under the hail of resolutions, letters, and questions in Parliament that now fell upon it. To the demand of the Fish Industry Joint Council, unanimously adopted on the 23rd November, that the scheme should be withdrawn, Lord Woolton decided to make a personal and public reply in terms of unequivocal frankness. On 8th December he told the Council that he would not consider abandoning the scheme, which had already justified itself in terms of transport savings. After referring to the efforts the Ministry had made to get an agreed scheme, he went on:

'We never expected perfection but the scheme might have been much nearer perfection if the members of your trade had come forward and helped it at an earlier stage. . . .

'I must also tell you that I am not prepared to allow this scheme to be sabotaged by anybody.

'I propose to make a communication to the Press in the precise terms which I have used to you to-day. . . .'²

A few days later the Parliamentary Secretary (Mr. William Mabane, M.P.) in replying to a motion on the adjournment by Mr. Gallacher, took the same line; the need for transport economy had been urgent, the Ministry patient, the trade unco-operative:

'The trade predicted failure before the scheme was introduced. Within a few weeks resolutions were being passed announcing failure. I myself, at Question Time in this House, did my best . . . to give accurate replies yet from time to time even the accuracy of my replies was challenged outside. We admitted that there were mistakes but emphasis was laid on the mistakes'.³

The display of resolution was sufficient to quell both the protestants in the trade and the doubters in Parliament. The Fish Industry Joint Council appointed a committee to co-operate with officials in amending and improving the scheme; the Ministry, as always, showed itself conciliatory in matters of detail; doubtless the dropping of the concentration proposals helped to improve the

¹ When the writer visited Aberdeen in 1946, this happening was still fresh in men's minds.

² *Ministry of Food Bulletin* No. 168 (11th December 1942).

³ *Official Report*, 17th December 1942. Col. 2184.

atmosphere. At any rate, for the remainder of the war, and indeed for the whole period of control, there appears to have been fair harmony between trade and Ministry. One reason for this may well have been the very existence of controlled distribution; though irksome to the trade, it brought the Ministry, through its Fish Distribution Officers, to master the idiosyncrasies of each individual fishing port, to establish personal contact with the merchants, and hence, almost inevitably, to abandon the *à priori* approach that had hitherto been all too obvious in its dealings with fish.

III

Although the control of distribution had been the Ministry's main concern, and was certainly its most important achievement, since the introduction of price control more than a year earlier, it had also continued efforts to increase the supply of fish, particularly from Iceland. Icelandic trawlers had been, of course, landing a certain amount of fish direct at British ports; in addition various carrier ships were bringing fish from Iceland. One firm of trawler owners, Hellyer Bros. of Hull, had suggested as early as October 1940 that the Ministry should itself charter carrier vessels for this purpose. The Ministry had declined, but the firm had undertaken the enterprise itself and had volunteered to hand over the profits to the Ministry. So successful was the enterprise that in eleven months, October 1940–August 1941, the Ministry had been paid about £250,000.

In the spring of 1941, with price control in the offing and alarm being expressed in Iceland at enemy attacks on trawlers, Mr. Owen Hellyer suggested that the time had come for the Ministry of Food to buy the whole exportable catch of Icelandic fish. In conjunction with the Ministry of Economic Warfare, a mission, of which Mr. Hellyer was a member, was sent to Reikjavik in April. After lengthy negotiations in which, *inter alia*, the Icelanders stipulated that the United Kingdom should supply them with about 140,000 tons of coal, an agreement was initialled in Reikjavik in August 1941, whereby the United Kingdom undertook to buy the entire production of white fish for the year 1941–42. The Ministry of Food opened an office in Reikjavik; the handling of the fish was entrusted to Mr. Hellyer and his firm as the Ministry's agents, on terms that represented a refund of their expenses, including an Icelandic sub-agent's commission.

A novel item in the Icelandic contract, so far as most British consumers were concerned, was a large quantity of fish (mainly cod) that had been *wet-salted*, i.e., immersed in strong brine for several

days and afterwards dried in the open. Before the war, such small quantities as had been imported into the United Kingdom had mainly been converted into dry-salted fish for export. The Ministry believed, however, that in the present shortage, and given a proper send-off by publicity, wet-salted fish would make an acceptable substitute for use both in the home and by fish-friers. On arrival, the fish would be handed over to salters to undergo a process described as 'washing and pressing', and thereafter distributed through coastal merchants.¹ Before cooking, the fish would need to be de-salted by soaking for 24 hours or more; and the intention was that this should be done by the retailer, who would thereby profit from the 20 per cent. or more of water that the fish would absorb. The salters and coastal merchants took up the new addition to the country's food resources with enthusiasm; the Ministry's Public Relations Division launched a mammoth campaign to coincide with the first release of supplies, re-christened 'fresh-salted' as supposedly more attractive; press advertisements and radio talks were focused on it, three-quarters of a million recipe leaflets² were distributed through fishmongers, and posters were displayed in Food Offices and fish-friers' shops.

Few of those persuaded by the campaign to try the novelty were willing to make it a habit; its wholesomeness and low price (9d. a lb.)³ were not sufficient to outweigh its leathery texture, unaccustomed colour, strong smell, and the difficulty of de-salting it enough for eating. Fish-friers, to whom it had been confidently recommended, refused to repeat their orders. Within a fortnight of launching the fish on the market, the Ministry was constrained to explore ways and means of disposing of it. A proportion of the cargoes arriving was

¹ Salters were allowed a quota of up to one-fifth of the total for direct distribution to their customers.

² One recipe will exemplify the ingenuity of the Ministry's experimental kitchen in combining ingredients on other than gastronomic principles. 'Brown Fish Stew with Beans. 1 lb. of fresh-salted cod prepared by the fishmonger. 2 cupfuls of small haricot beans. 1 lb. of carrots. 1 pint of brown gravy. 1 tablespoonful of Worcester sauce. 1 tablespoonful of dripping. 1 teaspoonful of sweet herbs. Pepper. Soak the beans in cold water for at least 24 hours, then simmer for 1½ hours; add the carrots sliced thinly and simmer for a further ¼ hour. Melt the fat in a saucepan. Cut the fish in small pieces and toss it in the fat till lightly browned. Add the beans, gravy, sauce and seasoning. Simmer for 20 minutes. Serve with wheatmeal toast.'

Haricot and other beans were being almost thrust upon the United Kingdom under *Lend/Lease* at this time (October 1941); the biggest carrot crop in British history was about to come to market; and the campaign to popularise National Wheatmeal Bread was making little or no headway. (A fourth over-plentiful food, American 'fat heavy bellies' of bacon, formed with haricot beans the centre-piece of another recipe in the same advertisement.)

Even so, the description of this and similar recipes as 'delicious' was surely stretching the meaning of that word too far; it recalls Lord Buckmaster's complaint in May 1917, that the measures of Lord Devonport had been recommended to the public by means that had 'hitherto only been extensively used by the vendors of "quack" medicines' (quoted Beveridge, *op. cit.*, p. 39, footnote 1).

³ Prescribed in the General Order already cited (S.R. & O. (1941) No. 1468). Retailers alone were allowed to sell the fish de-salted; its absorption of water to an extent variously estimated as from one-third to one quarter by weight enhanced what would otherwise have been a small profit (2s. a stone).

infected by 'pink'—a virus disease affecting its appearance—and would in any event have to be converted into dry-salted fish, for which there was a ready market in Spain. Several fish-smokers had experimented with it as a substitute for finnan haddock, with results described by the Ministry's experimental kitchen in terms varying from 'very nice' to 'terrible'. In the hope of finding a large-scale outlet, the Ministry set up Smoked Salted Fish Advisory Committees at the ports, and prepared a schedule of controlled prices for the smoked product.¹ Wet-salted fish of a quantity unsuited for the retail or frying trade was offered to fish-cake manufacturers.

During January and February 1942 the Fish Division continued to 'push' wet-salted cod. Early in March it was decided to amend the price-control Order to allow wholesalers to de-salt and fillet it, in the hope that it would then be acceptable to friers. But by the time the amended Order² was issued, on 28th March, the supply position had completely changed. Salters were coming to the end of their stocks; the 4,000 tons earmarked for Spain had had to be reduced by 1,000. Expectations that 30,000 tons of wet-salted fish would come forward from Iceland in the new year were to be falsified; owing to shortage of labour and the high profits to be had from fresh and frozen fish, only a few hundred tons had been salted down.

If the prospective famine in wet-salted fish threatened to embarrass the Fish Division, the successful disposal of the 20,000 tons that had been imported still carried with it a note of triumph:

'I pay no attention', wrote a member of the Division, 'to what has been said by the fishmonger or the fish frier about salt fish—the fact remains that we bought 21,000 tons and this, on the top of 5,000 tons in the country at the time . . . has, apart from the shipments to Spain, been eaten. . . . Is our present Iceland policy sound? Ought we not to push the trawlers on to salting . . . without salt fish we may be in a sorry position next winter'.

It was fortunate for the Ministry of Food that the recommendation that followed—that 40,000 tons of wet-salted fish be procured—was not, or could not, be carried out. For closer analysis suggests that the principal means by which disposal was achieved could not have been repeated in any subsequent season, simply on account of the development of the Ministry's own fish control.

Detailed figures of what happened to the 1941–42 imports do not appear to have been recorded; but one or two indications are suggestive. In the first place, the net quantity that had to be sold on the

¹ Embodied in S.R. & O. (1941) No. 1904, which came into force on 1st December. Fish Division would have liked to describe the smoked fish as 'Smoked Fresh-Salted', but this contradiction in terms was too much for the Legal Branch.

In January a further category was added; dry-salted fish, which could thereafter be sold on the home market (S.R. & O. (1942) No. 4).

² S.R. & O. (1942) No. 585.

home market was not 20,000 tons, but less than half of that amount. Indeed, as early as 10th November the leader of the Grimsby salters had concluded, from an analysis of a representative cargo, that after allowances for loss of weight on the journey and during processing, and the rejection of fish not suitable for marketing as 'washed and pressed', the 'out-turn' was not much more than one-third of the weight of fish packed in Iceland. Secondly, the requests for further supplies that began to reach Fish Division from about March 1942 onwards came, not from fishmongers or friers, but from contractors supplying what one might call captive consumers—in mental hospitals, for example. Thirdly, salters had great difficulty in disposing of wet-salted fish otherwise than through the wholesale trade in fresh and frozen fish or to smokers. A cargo of 800 tons, specially consigned to an Exeter salt-fish merchant for distribution in the West Country—a region where *dried* salt fish is habitually eaten—proved so difficult to sell that nearly half of it was left in March, and had to be moved to other ports for disposal, mainly by drying.¹

It seems likely that a Leith salter was on the mark when he wrote to Fish Division: 'It is no secret that coercive measures were employed by the fresh fish trade to ensure the marketing of the salted fish'; in other words, that acceptance of salt fish was made a condition of the supply of fresh or frozen fish. No other explanation is sufficient to reconcile the indifference or hostility of fishmongers, friers, and public alike, with the fact that the fish was got rid of. As for the advertising campaign, it seems to have been so much out of scale with the actual quantity on offer, that, had it been fully effective, a shortage of salt fish would have occurred like that of oatmeal a year earlier.² That this did not happen, even allowing for the inherent unattractiveness of the fish to most British palates, may perhaps be set down to the near-coincidence of its release with the first, and most lavish, issues of luncheon meat and canned salmon on points. Had the Fish Division been in closer touch with the food supply situation as a whole—had it been aware, when negotiating the Iceland contract, that heavy Lend/Lease supplies of canned meat and canned fish were on the way—it might have thought twice before importing salt fish in abnormal quantities. (Its location in London, away from the rest of the Supply Department in Colwyn Bay, may explain this isolationist outlook.) At any rate, the ability of the trade, as yet unrestrained by zoning and customers' lists, to unload the surplus by whatever means, served the Ministry well, and even enabled it to make a profit.

¹ 155 tons is recorded as having been sent to Hull, 80 tons to Grimsby and 72 to Liverpool. A further 150 tons, infected with 'pink', had been sent to Leith earlier that winter—making a total of more than half the original cargo.

² The publicity campaign was avowedly 'geared' to secure a consumption of 1,000 tons a week. On the basis of the Grimsby salter's calculation, this would have exhausted supplies in about seven weeks; in fact they lasted six months.

Imports on such a scale were never again attempted; even so, in the season of 1943-44 when 10,000 tons were brought in, mainly from Canada and Newfoundland, several bulk movements contrary to the zoning scheme—e.g., Leith-Northern Ireland, Leith-Liverpool, Grimsby-South West England—had to be made, at Ministry expense, to clear salters' stocks. In fact, the Ministry did not succeed in developing any new markets for wet-salted fish. All it could do was sell more than formerly in those areas, like Liverpool and the West Country, that had always consumed salt fish; even then, it had to contend with regional preferences that made Newfoundland fish unacceptable in the Scottish Lowlands, and large Iceland cod unsuited for the Liverpool trade. Even fish-cake manufacturers, who had at first been willing to take up sizeable amounts, began to express perturbation at the declining demand for fish-cakes made solely of salt fish, and had to be offered a proportion of frozen fillets to mix with it.

It will be convenient here to recount the subsequent history of the bulk contracts with Iceland. After the United States took over from the United Kingdom responsibility for the defence of that country, it was arranged that payment for fish supplied to the United Kingdom should be made under Lend/Lease, and a new Agreement had been drawn up accordingly, in November 1941, to expire on 30th June 1942. In the negotiations for a new Agreement, the Ministry of Food could, therefore, merely advise the Americans about price, and it was with some misgivings that it saw them concede to Icelandic importunity an increase of about 28 per cent., compared with an estimated general price rise in Iceland of about ten per cent. However, the particular fear that British fishermen would in their turn demand much enhanced prices for the winter of 1942-43 was not realised.

This Agreement was extended beyond its term of a year, and it was not until February 1944 that a new Agreement was reached, to run until 31st December. The United Kingdom reassumed liability for payment—half in sterling, half in dollars; the prices of fresh and frozen fish were unchanged, that of the cheapest item, salt fish, of which the Ministry, in face of the small demand, would take only 3,500 tons, was raised by about 30 per cent. The Ministry also secured the insertion in the contract of two clauses to protect itself against the supply of poor quality fish, one providing for the inspection of cargoes both in Iceland and on arrival, the other for the black-listing of vessels that repeatedly delivered inferior cargoes. These precautions had been rendered more necessary because the Faroese and Icelandic carriers who brought much of the fish, finding their profits squeezed between increased prices to the catchers and stationary controlled prices in the United Kingdom, were tempted to overload their vessels and stint the ice in which the fish must be packed.

IV

One minor consequence of price control gave Ministry of Food legislators a good deal of trouble during 1942. Before the war, in order to protect the fishing grounds against depletion, the Fisheries Departments had issued Orders¹ regulating the size (i.e., the mesh) of nets, and also prohibiting the landing of fish below a certain length—generally nine inches. Such of these smaller fish as would inevitably be caught in trawls of an approved mesh must, that is to say, be thrown back into the sea, where many of the fish might be expected to survive. In October 1939, however, the Fisheries Departments had revoked this latter Order² on the ground that the waste of possible human food that might result would in war-time be indefensible. The Nets Order, however, was deliberately kept in force.

Even before the imposition of price control, there were hints that fishermen were taking advantage of the relaxation and purposely landing the undersized fish. As early as May 1940 the Fisheries Departments issued a warning to trawler-owners against this practice. With price control in force, more particularly as the winter of 1941-42 advanced, the Ministry of Food began to receive complaints that undersized fish, of no food value except to cats, were being included in allocations, boxed, iced, and forwarded (at the Ministry's expense) to inland markets. Test samples taken by the Superintendent of Billingsgate Market in April 1942 showed that some boxes of flat fish were counting 32 to the pound avoirdupois.³ In November 1941, the Fisheries Officer at Milford Haven reported that trawlers were deserting the more distant and more hazardous hake fishing in favour of very small dabs and whittings close inshore. Fish Division asked the Fisheries Departments, therefore, to consider reimposing the prohibition on landing immature fish. The English Department, and the Northern Irish, were willing to do so, the Scottish was not:

'... many Scottish fishermen, in the belief that the original Revocation Order applied to mesh of nets as well as to immature fish, are now fishing with a smaller kind of net than is legal, and, if the Immature Fish Order was restored, difficulties might arise as to equipping themselves with new nets'.

¹ The Sea Fishing Industry (Fishing Nets) Order, 1937 (S.R. & O. (1937) No. 281); the Sea Fishing Industry (Immature Sea Fish) Order, 1938 (S.R. & O. (1938) No. 1506). Nets used for herrings, whitebait, and shrimps were excepted.

² By S.R. & O. (1939) No. 1323.

³ The Superintendent later estimated that as many as 100 boxes—7,000 lb.—of these tiny fish were coming into Billingsgate daily.

The deadlock between the merits of prohibition, as seen by the English Department, and its political disadvantages, as seen by Scotland, was complete. Both sides were, however, willing that the Ministry of Food should prohibit the sale of immature fish for human consumption. If the only outlet for this fish were the fish-meal factory, there was no risk at all that catchers would seek it out deliberately.

When, however, Fish Division proposed to include a provision to this effect in its newest Order on prices, the Ministry of Food's Orders Committee threw the proposal out on the grounds that it was proper to the Fisheries Departments; and the Committee maintained its objection in the face of explicit assent by the Minister to an Order being made on his behalf. It was, however, over-ruled, and a simple Order prohibiting the sale of fish (with certain exceptions) less than seven inches long came into operation on 1st June 1942. (In October, the limit was increased to nine inches.)¹

At about the same time, price control was extended to fresh salmon as the outcome of a course of action devised as an alternative to it. In January 1942 Fish Division, while concluding that control of salmon prices was 'impracticable', had sought to prevent exporters in Eire from reaping scarcity profits by itself becoming the sole importer of Eire salmon, just as it had for Icelandic cod. The Eire Government was constrained—by the absence of another outlet—to agree to a bulk contract at prices that, although generous by comparison with past seasons, yet could not but disappoint expectations from this one. Nine firms pre-eminent in the salmon trade were selected to act as Ministry agents; these stood out successfully for a commission of 5 per cent. as against the 2½ per cent. that the Treasury thought sufficient.²

Arrangements were complete—had, indeed, already been announced by the Eire Government—before, in accordance with established procedure in the Ministry of Food, they were submitted to the Food Supply Board³ in Colwyn Bay, which recommended that they be not authorised unless price control were introduced. There it was felt that the Ministry would otherwise be open to the charge of profiteering; the view that price control was impracticable was, moreover, vigorously rebutted by expert advice that happened to be on the spot. Since there could be no going back on the Eire deal, this meant that the Ministry would now be committed to control the

¹ The Immature Sea-Fish Order, 1942 (S.R. & O. (1942) No. 957; amended by S.R. & O. (1942) No. 2102). The Scottish Home Department fought a strong rear-guard battle over the amendment, claiming that there was a good market for eight-inch haddocks; eight-inch flat fish were also said to be saleable in Lancashire—points that underline the difficulty of legislating for fish 'as fish'.

² The exclusion of other firms that had previously imported Eire salmon appears to have been contrary to general Ministry of Food practice, and evoked some protest.

³ For the functions of this body, see Vol. I, pp. 217-18.

price of all salmon. Much against its will—for it had no illusions about the likely effect of price control without control of distribution—the Fish Division set about drafting an Order. Once again the Division's isolation—geographical and mental—from the rest of the Supply Department at Colwyn Bay proved a stumbling block. The Margins Committee declared that the proposed producers' price of 4s. a lb. which the Division had fixed after discussion with them and the Fisheries Departments, was 1s. too high,¹ and had to be overruled by higher authority on the ground of urgency.

The Margins Committee also objected, in accordance with the principle of 'fair remuneration for services rendered',² to the Division's proposal to make no provision for smoked salmon in the Order, i.e., to kill the salmon-smoking trade by making it unprofitable. If it were proposed to prohibit salmon-smoking, well and good; but in default of such a policy decision, the Committee 'would be concerned to recommend the appropriate reward for the service'. Inevitably, therefore, the Ministry was driven to control smoked salmon prices also.³ Moreover, when it sought to cancel the agreement with Eire, on the ground (a) that price control had destroyed the need for it (b) that much poor quality fish was coming forward under it and (c) that a differential price was unfair to Irish producers, the Treasury refused to agree; the opportunity of making a profit on a Government deal in food (said the Treasury) was too rare to be forgone. (Notwithstanding the introduction of price control, the Ministry made a profit of £160,000 on Eire salmon in 1942.)

So far as salmon distribution was concerned, the Ministry contented itself for the 1942 season with a request to catchers and wholesalers of home-caught salmon to base supplies to their customers on performance in 1940. That year was chosen in preference to 1941 because in the later year the established pattern of the trade had already been distorted by a growth of direct sales from catchers to retail fishmongers and above all to catering establishments. The request was not invariably complied with, and for 1943 it was made legally obligatory on producers in Scotland and Northern Ireland and on all wholesalers, i.e., on all the organised part of the trade.⁴ Salmon netted in England and Wales, and all salmon caught by rod and line, were exempt (though not from price control); supplies from Eire continued to be dealt with through the Ministry panel of agents. These arrangements, with some amendments, of which the most

¹ 'If margins are to be decided by negotiation' (minuted the distinguished accountant who acted as Chairman of the Margins Committee) 'then heaven help the consumer'.

² See Vol. I, pp. 109-10.

³ From 17th August, by S.R. & O. (1942) No. 1561. The Order controlling fresh salmon was S.R. & O. (1942) No. 956.

⁴ S.R. & O. (1943) No. 110.

important was the inclusion of salmon netted in the Coquet and Tyne fishery districts, and in the River Tweed, in the controlled scheme of distribution, remained in force until the end of fish control in 1950. (Salmon, but not smoked salmon, was also included in the varieties whose supply to catering establishments was restricted by Order.)

As far as one can judge, salmon control worked smoothly enough and without complication within the unambitious limits that were set for it. The merits of controlling a purely luxury article are, of course, arguable, and were argued at all times; had not the War Cabinet in August 1940 resolved that such foods should be allowed to find their own price level? Such detachment from the moral aspect of famine prices, even for foods consumed by the wealthy, was however, not practical politics for the 1942 Ministry of Food.

CHAPTER IV

The Period of Fullest Control, 1942-5

I

THE STRUCTURE of fish control, as completed in October 1942, was not fundamentally changed for the rest of the war. However, changes in the supply position, and the need to keep allocation and distribution at once firm and flexible, meant that the Ministry could never reduce its administrative activities merely to routine, nor desist from amending the Control Orders.

The proper working of first-hand allocation at the ports, on which the whole subsequent process of distribution depended, required a nice balance between opposing tendencies to malpractice on the part of catcher and merchant, which turned on the right of the latter to refuse any lot he considered unsuitable. Scruple was, indeed, to be enjoined on him by enactments protecting the inland wholesaler and retailer from the consignment (at Ministry expense) of, for instance, sharks, squid, fish heads, skeletons and livers, unskinned dogfish and catfish, and monkfish with their heads on.¹ But the provision in the Allocation Order whereby, if four buyers in succession on the rota refused a lot of fish, that fish might be withdrawn and sent for auction, i.e., rendered 'free', lent itself to collusion, which at one port, Aberdeen, became so serious as to undermine the whole system. After much discussion, the Order was amended so that if, of fish so rejected, a certain proportion reached controlled price at auction, those who had refused it should 'lose a turn' instead of being offered another lot. In general, however, allocation at the principal ports did not cause much trouble, because the trade was well organised; but the effort to enforce it at some of the smaller Scottish ports was out of all proportion to the amount of fish involved. What was perhaps an extreme case—the attempt by the Ministry to discipline the fishermen of St. Abbs, in Berwickshire—will illustrate this law of diminishing returns very aptly.

St. Abbs is about three miles from the much larger port of Eyemouth, and in the past such small quantities of white fish as had been caught by St. Abbs boats had been landed at Eyemouth for auction. In 1940 John Burgon & Sons, a firm of fish merchants that had formerly been mainly interested in the herring trade, took up the white-fish trade seriously, and in that year handled 70 per cent. of

¹ S.R. & O. (1943) No. 546, Art. 3: No. 497, Art. 15 (b).

catches; with the result that when the Ministry of Food set up an Allocation Committee in 1941, Burgons acquired the right to that proportion of white fish passing through Eyemouth. So great was their domination of the market that in the summer months when whittings in particular were plentiful, they could maintain prices at well below the control figure; other local merchants had not the labour to increase their turnover of fish, and outsiders were, of course, excluded from admission to the Eyemouth rota.

In the autumn of 1941 certain fishermen of St. Abbs began to land their catches there instead of at Eyemouth; one Hugh Wilson, a crippled ex-joiner and relative of some of them, acting as agent on their behalf, iced, packed, and consigned the fish to traders, mainly retailers, in Edinburgh. The Eyemouth Committee protested to the Ministry of Food, which directed the fishermen to resume landings at Eyemouth; this they declined to do, and as Port Allocation Committees had as yet no statutory foundation, there was no means of coercing them. With the issue of the Allocation Order of October 1942, however, the Eyemouth Committee obtained authority over the coast-line south of St. Abbs Head, and in January 1943 it appealed to the Ministry of Food to stop the evasions. At the end of March the Ministry formally warned the skippers that they were breaking the law and that if they continued to do so, it would refer the matter to the Procurator-Fiscal. In May a representative of Fish Division in Edinburgh visited St. Abbs and saw the fishermen and their agent; he was told that they would not willingly agree to anything that would deprive Hugh Wilson of his livelihood, and would, indeed, cease fishing rather than submit to allocation.

Fish Division in London confessed itself at this point to be 'in a cleft stick'. The amount of fish escaping allocation was not large—perhaps 5 per cent. of the landings in the Eyemouth district. There was no question of black market, and Wilson was said to have kept admirable records and paid the levy on landings regularly. To deprive him, a small man, of his livelihood for the benefit of Burgons, the large firm, might lead to political trouble for the Ministry. (Moreover, though the Division does not appear to have noted the fact, the one was as much an interloper into the white-fish trade as the other; it was a pure technicality, the choice of the 1940 datum, that gave Burgons their right to a virtual monopoly.) On the other hand, not only the Eyemouth Committee, but the Distribution Committee at Newhaven was up in arms against toleration of an abuse that allowed certain Edinburgh traders to get an extra amount of fish, and would not co-operate with Headquarters by adjusting the supplies that these traders received from Newhaven to take account of their supplies from St. Abbs.

Reluctantly, therefore, Fish Division turned the case over to Enforcement Division, whose officers arrived on the scene in August, a few days after 200 stone of fish had had to be dumped in the sea at Eyemouth because the buyers would not take it. This naturally

was made the most of by the St. Abbs men, and Enforcement's Edinburgh representative found the argument convincing. The fishermen, he said, had good reason for refusing to send to Eyemouth; it would be inadvisable to prosecute, and indeed 'it is extremely doubtful if any Procurator-Fiscal would entertain prosecution in the circumstances'. The Procurator-Fiscal for Berwickshire, consulted at the beginning of October 1943, endorsed this view. It would be better, he thought, to license Wilson and his fishermen to continue.

In November, therefore, Wilson accepted a verbal proposal on behalf of the Ministry that he should receive a wholesaler's licence together with a 'customers' list' made up of Newhaven secondary wholesalers. News of the Ministry's decision, however, got abroad before it could be put into effect; Burgons and the Eyemouth Allocation Committee sent in protests, and the Chairman of the Newhaven Committee threatened to resign. Fish Division in London thereupon sent a senior officer to Eyemouth and St. Abbs to seek a solution, and as a result put forward a compromise: to set up a special allocation list at St. Abbs to include both Wilson and the Eyemouth buyers; to make Wilson part-time Allocation Officer at a small wage from the Ministry; and to license him as a wholesaler, as already proposed.

What seemed a reasonable proposal to London, however, was regarded by the Ministry's Enforcement Officer in Edinburgh as 'untenable'. Wilson and the fishermen utterly declined to accept it; the twenty per cent. share the former was now offered in St. Abbs landings would, he claimed, not give him a living, and to add insult to injury the Ministry was going to hand over fifty per cent. or more to Burgon. An attempt to persuade the latter to reduce his claim on the St. Abbs fish failed. Finally, Wilson, who had previously indicated more than once that he would like the Ministry to take him to court, sent what officials described as a 'flat defiance' of the Ministry order; and with misgivings, at any rate on the part of the Divisional Food Office in Edinburgh, it was decided to prosecute him.

The case came up for trial at the Duns Sheriff Court on 30th June 1944, and Wilson was acquitted, on the ground that he was no more than an Agent on behalf of the fishermen and as such not liable to penalty under Scots law. The Ministry was now in worse straits than ever. It could not take away the wholesaler's licence that had been issued to Wilson at the time of its near-agreement with him, for he had been proved guiltless of any offence; it could not prosecute the fishermen as principals because their separate catches once boxed could not be identified as having been sold to Edinburgh fishmongers; moreover, several of them were exempt from prosecution by reason of having appeared as Crown witnesses (in which capacity they had torpedoed the prosecution's case by their evidence of Wilson's Agency). Consultation with the Lord Advocate suggested that the point of law taken by the Sheriff had never been settled in relation to a statutory, as distinct from a common-law, offence, and though a case to determine it might be brought in the High Court, the outcome was uncertain. There seemed no alternative to capitulation, which

was negotiated between the Divisional Food Officer and Wilson's attorney on 18th December 1944; but before it could take effect, Wilson had fallen sick and died, and amid general consent the business passed to his widow.

On 24th March 1945, licences were issued to seven St. Abbs skippers authorising them to sell their fish through the agency of Mrs. Wilson, who was given a wholesale licence and a customers' list composed of the inland wholesaler and the five retailers who had hitherto taken St. Abbs fish; their entitlements at Aberdeen and Newhaven were docked accordingly. St. Abbs became a 'specified port' from which the Ministry of Food would pay carriage inland on a first-hand sale. (Mrs. Wilson continued to trade till July 1949, when she voluntarily gave up her licence because catches had become too poor to make it worth while.)

Ironically enough, this solution of the problem might have been achieved earlier if officials had been less unwilling to take extreme measures, since the quirk of Scottish law that gained Wilson his acquittal might have been disclosed, whether in court or otherwise. But the acquittal was not in essence technical at all:

'I cannot help thinking'—wrote an official in November 1944—'that the decision of the Court was influenced by a broad view of what was equitable, with first consideration given to the party who normally is least able to help himself and is most open to victimisation—the small producer. Other injustices . . . dwindle in comparison with the crime of giving the fisherman nothing, or less than his due, for his labours. The St. Abbs men have been in that position . . . the Wilson developments . . . have been brought about by inequitable administration of the plan [of allocation at Eyemouth].'

On this view, all would have gone right but for Burgons' exploitation of their dominant position in the local market. One may grant that, and yet not exculpate the Fish Division for its handling of the case. The conferment, through the operation of the 1940 datum period, of quasi-monopoly powers on a single buyer was something of itself calling for vigilance; indeed, one might have expected administrators to grasp any opportunity for providing a safety-valve. Three times in 1942 alone they rejected such chances: in January, when a reasoned petition from the St. Abbs fishermen against compulsory allocation was rejected out of hand; in the summer, when the Order defining the jurisdiction of Allocation Committees was in preparation; and in October, when six St. Abbs fishermen were refused licences to sell as producers. In the last resort, it was lack of imagination that vitiated the Division's repeated efforts to be conciliatory.

The main lesson of the St. Abbs case, however, may not lie here or

in the pitfalls that Scots law presents to English administrators.¹ It is rather in the revelation of the basic disadvantage of any control measure that depends on the 'freezing' of a particular pattern of trade; namely, that the controllers will find themselves enforcing something not because it is equitable, but because it happened to exist at a particular point of time. For fish, the situation was exacerbated by the late date at which control was imposed, so that the trade was already distorted by war, and also by the sheer absence of information on which to construct an equitable system. (After the war, the Ministry was to encounter the full force of this problem—that of change under control—when it had to expand the controlled market to meet increased landings and provide for traders returned from the Forces.)

II

During the winter of 1942-43 the zoning-cum-distribution scheme experienced, as one member of Fish Division put it, 'continuous rough weather'; but with the spring, the seasonal improvement in supplies enabled the Ministry to relax the scheme's provisions, and so both appease the trade and itself gain respite for overhaul. In April new Orders were issued making a number of changes in zonal boundaries² and altering, for the time being, the obligation of the wholesaler, primary or secondary, to offer his supplies to his customers in the proportion specified by the 'customers' list'. This rule still applied to those customers, e.g., of a port merchant, who were secondary wholesalers; for the others it would suffice if they were offered not less than the amount supplied during the four weeks beginning on 27th February. After these requirements were fulfilled, the wholesaler might supply other customers within his zone (or in the London area), whether they were on his list or not.³

Fish Division had thus temporarily conceded a point vehemently made by its trade critics, namely that the attempt to relate supplies to the population of each sub-zone, instead of to datum performance, was unsound in principle and unworkable in practice; it had led (the critics said) to some country districts being over-supplied with fish, while industrial areas went short. But the Division was

¹ Another such pitfall concerning fish was revealed after the war at Arbroath, when the Ministry, seeking to prosecute a fisherman for withholding part of his catch from allocation (he had claimed that it was the crew's 'fry', or perquisite, though it amounted in total to 54 stones) found that the Crown Office in Edinburgh considered that there was nothing in the Order to compel a fisherman to bring his catch to allocation unless he intended to sell it fresh, e.g. he might smoke it and thereby put it outwith the Regulations. Although the English Courts had taken the opposite view, the Ministry was constrained to amend the Order, even at so late a date. (Cf. Article 4 and Regulation 5 (1) of the new Order (S.I. (1949) No. 1297) with Article 3 and Regulation 5 (1) of the former Order (S.R. & O. (1943) No. 1657) already cited.)

² S.R. & O. (1943) No. 547.

³ S.R. & O. (1943) No. 456.

unwilling to give up its equalitarian ends without a further attempt to make the means of achieving them more efficient. One cause of inequality, the variation in landings in different zones, was admittedly incurable, though it could be mitigated by releases of frozen fish from cold store (and of salt fish, if the public had been prepared to eat it). But at this stage of the scheme the Division could reasonably argue that a more potent cause was the inadequacy of the original customers' lists. The information on which these were based had not shown, for instance, what proportion of an inland trader's supplies were taken in fillets whose weight is equivalent, broadly, to twice that amount reckoned in whole fish. Friers, in particular, who habitually take all their supplies in fillets, found their entitlement half what it should have been; a phenomenon that of itself might account for the emergence of apparent plenty in country districts within the same 'sub-zone'.

During the summer, therefore, customers' lists were completely revised in the light of fresh returns from coastal merchants distinguishing between whole fish and fillets, and on 5th October a fresh Order¹ was issued reimposing, as from 16th October, the obligations contained in the original Distribution Order. In addition, fish sold by a wholesaler on commission was made subject to them, and powers were taken to serve customers' lists on individual first-hand sellers, i.e., to regulate distribution inland from the smaller ports where no auctions took place. But though the scheme appears to have worked more smoothly than in the previous winter, it soon became apparent that the equal distribution at which it aimed was as far off as ever, simply because, with the improvement in the war situation, the pattern of landings was beginning to shift back towards that prevailing before the war. The Fleetwood and Milford Haven zones, the latter partly because preparations for the invasion of Europe had disturbed fishing, were losing ground to the East Coast ports, as the following table shows:

Distribution of White Fish Landings by Ministry of Food Zones

Zone	Percentage of Total Landings			
	(a) 1938	(b) 1944 (proposed)	(c) October 1943 - June 1944 (actual)	(d) Single Week Ending 17th June 1944
A. Fleetwood	9.3	27.4	26.9	18.5
B. S. Western	7.3	10.3	8.1	4.8
C. Grimsby	30.9	13.8	15.3	25.0
D. Hull	41.3	17.7	19.0	19.7
E. Aberdeen	11.2	30.8	30.7	32.0

¹ S.R. & O. (1943) No. 1445. Coastal merchants claimed that the Division could have had this information from the beginning, if it had asked for it; the Division, that it had previously been told that returns in such detail could not be supplied. The point is mainly interesting as evidence of the unsatisfactory relations (by this time fortunately improving) between Ministry and Trade.

Moreover, there was reason to suppose that this trend would continue with the reopening of North Sea fishing grounds, and the departure for their home waters of Allied trawlers working out of Fleetwood. In consultation with the trade and the railway companies, therefore, the zonal boundaries were revised and with them, of course, the customers' lists, to take effect on 4th November 1944.¹ These revisions in great part achieved their aim in adjusting distribution to the proportions desired in each zone, taken as a whole. But it was suspected that the population figures for March 1943, on which the entitlements of inland wholesalers and retailers had been based, were by the spring of 1945 outdated; and returns to the Ministry were to show that equal *per capita* distribution was nowhere near being achieved:

Retailers' Receipts of White Fish by Food Regions
(expressed as a percentage of their
theoretical entitlement on a population basis)

Food Division	November 1944	December 1944	January 1945	February 1945
Northern	81.2	97.6	92.0	100.2
North Eastern	113.8	123.6	130.4	122.8
North Western	96.9	86.8	100.7	96.4
North Midland	97.0	100.8	101.5	107.2
Midland	94.8	83.1	103.3	91.7
North Wales	69.0	58.4	74.6	63.3
South Wales	60.7	44.1	58.6	46.5
Eastern I	89.7	97.0	79.6	95.2
Eastern II	83.4	88.4	81.3	91.9
Southern	90.8	96.3	80.8	100.3
S. Eastern	97.3	100.4	98.8	101.9
South Western	76.6	70.0	79.4	69.1
London	161.9	157.3	153.4	141.9
North Scotland	67.4	96.4	66.7	107.2
North East Scotland	80.7	91.2	64.9	81.3
South East Scotland	102.6	103.8	81.6	111.8
East Scotland	99.9	126.1	99.6	120.7
West Scotland	101.0	115.2	86.9	95.1
Northern Ireland	29.4	31.6	27.9	30.6

The more spectacular discrepancies, such as those between London and South Wales (to say nothing of Northern Ireland) cannot be explained either in terms of out-of-date entitlements or the failure of landings in each zone to fulfil expectations. (The amount of fish going to London is all the more remarkable when one recalls that it was the winter of the flying-bombs and rockets.) The trade (it was commonly said among members of Fish Division) was indifferent or

¹ By a new Transport Order (S.R. & O. (1943) No. 1234) made under Defence Regulation 55, replacing the Directions previously made by virtue of the Food Transport Order, 1941. Cf. Vol. I, p. 336, n. 1.

hostile to equal distribution; certainly its representatives had made no secret of their preference for a simple datum line, rather than the complex 'notional points' system of the Ministry, as the basis for entitlement. However that may be, it looks as if fish had an inveterate tendency to go where it was most wanted, and that Londoners got the lion's share because they were traditionally the least choosy about species. The excess supplies in London represented not a consistent diversion, which would have been remedied by a revision of entitlements, but an accumulation of casual surpluses, whether in species, such as dog-fish, roker, and berghyllts, that many traders were unwilling to take, or arising simply from the inability of small fishmongers, or friers whose turnover was limited by their supplies of frying fat, to handle more than normal war-time quantities.¹ Moreover, because London was allowed to receive supplies from all zones, it had obviously the best chance of getting any such surpluses.

The fact is, of course, that the whole thesis—'fish is fish'—on which the zoning scheme was based was something that the consuming public just did not accept. The regional preferences and dislikes, to serve which the fantastic criss-cross of rail journeys had developed, were not to be smothered by a universal fish-hunger, even with supplies down to one-quarter of normal. In war-time, even more than in peace-time, fish held the status not of a necessity, like bread, meat, or sugar,² but of a semi-luxury like (say) cereal breakfast foods, the less popular varieties of which proved an embarrassment under zoning; and as with these, price control tended to reduce or obliterate distinctions between types and qualities. While the customer might be willing to spend money and probably effort in queueing or 'shop-crawling' to secure fish of a kind that was known and, if not liked, tolerated, she would not, generally speaking, do so for another kind that might require special treatment. It seems unlikely that the equal *per capita* distribution all over the country at which the Ministry aimed could have been achieved even without zoning. But the interdiction of the free movement of different species to their customary points of consumption must have added to the inequalities. This disadvantage was, however, small compared with the saving of transport that the scheme accomplished.

For the winter of 1945-46, with a prospect of increasing landings, mainly on the East Coast, as trawlers were released from war service, the Ministry reverted to the relaxed form of the distribution scheme

¹ Compared with the industrial areas of the North, the London area is short of fish-friers. Some pre-war figures are in the Sea Fish Commission's Second Report (Cmd. 5130), pp. 47-9.

² *Ibid.*, p. 49 for the relative unpopularity of fish in peace-time. According to the Report of the *Consumption Levels Inquiry* (1944) (loc. cit.) the category 'Poultry, Game and Fish' (of which fresh white fish accounted for approximately one-half by weight) supplied on the average about one per cent. of total available calories, five per cent. of protein and one per cent. or less of other nutrients in the calendar year 1943.

that had prevailed during the summer of 1943, i.e., fixing a minimum quantity to which each retailer would be entitled; not, however, this time in relation to a datum period, but to a 'notional' total of weekly landings of white fish, which was fixed, for the whole country, at 8,000 tons. Fish in excess of the due proportion of this figure for each port was deemed to be 'free fish', that the coastal merchant might send to anyone within his zone (though he must offer the inland wholesalers on his list their proportionate share of this, as of 'tied' fish). Furthermore, the permitted radius of redistribution by inland wholesalers was increased from 20 to 30 miles, and from Billingsgate, over the whole of Kent, Surrey, and Sussex.¹

Even before this revised scheme had come into operation, however, the Ministry was coming to the conclusion that the transport restrictions should be removed entirely. They were the one feature of control to which the trade remained completely unreconciled; others—licensing, price control, the transport levy—it was willing should remain, at any rate for the time being. As with other foods, the case for abolishing zoning was strengthened, politically and psychologically speaking, by its being almost the only relaxation that could safely be allowed as a result of the Armistice. So, amid only faint expressions of regret from the transport authorities, it was announced early in the New Year that zoning would end on the 2nd March.² The structure of port allocation and regulated inland distribution was, of course, unaffected by this change. Just over a year later, in May 1947, the increase in fish supplies enabled the Ministry to dispense with control of inland distribution and licensing of retailers.³ A clause saving the rights of inland wholesalers continued, however, to be imposed on coastal merchants until the abolition of price control, and with it port allocation, in April 1950.⁴

III

Shortly after the end of zoning, there was 'suspended'⁵ another provision of the full distribution scheme—that by which supplies of fish were restricted to catering establishments other than fish-friers. An Order⁶ to this effect had been rather hastily introduced in December 1942, in an effort to get more fish to the householder in the famine season. As caterers bought by retail, the Ministry had not had any means of controlling their purchases, whereas those of friers were

¹ S.R. & O. (1945) No. 1136, 1137. The latter redrew certain zonal boundaries so as to open additional areas to 'free' fish; 'tied' fish, of course, continued to be regulated by customers' lists that were not, on this occasion, revised.

² This was done by S.R. & O. (1946) No. 249.

³ S.R. & O. (1947) Nos. 741; 2068.

⁴ S.I. (1950) No. 559.

⁵ S.R. & O. (1946) No. 508.

⁶ S.R. & O. (1942) No. 2538.

limited by the new Distribution Scheme. Various devices, such as restricting the service of fish to two days a week, were considered but rejected in favour of a link between the return of meals served—on the basis of which a caterer got his supplies of rationed food—and the amount of fish he was authorised to buy. An allowance, in pounds weight per 100 main meals and breakfasts served, varying according to season, would be worked out and notified to each caterer by his local Food Office.

The analogy with rationed foods was not very close, because the essential feature of a permit system—a tie between customer and supplier—was omitted. There was nothing to prevent a caterer from hawking his authority from one supplier to another; no obligation on the supplier to see that the amount authorised was not exceeded. The provision, usual in such Orders, that the caterer must keep records of his purchases, could readily be evaded by, for instance, invoicing the correct quantity of prime fish and supplying a large quantity of cheap fish. In short, the scheme, as the Ministry's Rationing Division had seen from the beginning, was 'bound to be largely bluff, anyhow'; which meant that it bound only the virtuous caterer. Some of these were hit hard; Madame Prunier herself wrote to complain that her supplies were cut to one-tenth of what they had been. Could not the Ministry make an exception for those caterers who used nothing but fish? The reply was that it could not, or rather would not; but it would allow them to have meat on the same terms as ordinary caterers. (The rejoinder, if any, is not on record.) More pathetic was the case of another, probably unique, London restaurant that sold nothing but boiled fish and therefore could not be treated as a frier; its proprietor was reported to be trying to keep going with shell-fish, which were exempt from the Order.

Wholesale recourse to shell-fish was, of course, ruled out for the majority of caterers by their price, as well as by the eating habits of customers. Already before the introduction of the Order, however, there had been some pressure on the Ministry to control the price of crabs and lobsters, on the ground that fishermen were giving up white fishing in favour of the more profitable and less arduous search for shell-fish. At first all the complaints of this practice came from the north-east coast of England, but in February 1943 complaints were heard from Glasgow and Edinburgh caterers that London firms, doubtless with higher permitted charges for meals, were paying up to 10s. a pound for lobsters. In April, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries made an Order¹ which had the effect of confining crab and

¹ This, the *Regulation of Fishing for Crabs, Lobsters and Crawfish Order, 1943*, was not printed by H.M. Stationery Office, and was therefore not included in the numbered series of S.R. & O.s. It prohibited such fishing within the waters adjacent to Northumberland and Durham, except under licence from the Port Fishery Captain at North Shields.

lobster fishing from Northumberland and Durham to those boats that had previously engaged in it; the Ministry of Food proposed to introduce price control for crabs and lobsters.

On trade advice, and as it seems without knowledge of the difficulties that had arisen with other foods, the new Order¹ imposed maximum prices at the retail stage only. Caterers were not slow to take advantage of the opportunity, nor fishermen of the advantage of selling direct to caterers; the ordinary wholesaler and retailer found themselves without lobsters altogether. To their complaints Fish Division responded by proposing a further extension of control, i.e., including shell-fish in the Order limiting caterers' supplies of fish; and when this was opposed by Catering Division, it proposed instead that all shell-fish should be made to pass through wholesalers and retailers, by prohibiting caterers from buying except from a retailer. The 'rationing and catering' side of the Ministry poured scorn on this proposal also; it was, they said, 'put forward for the benefit of the fish trade and for no other purpose':

'The Ministry' (wrote another senior official) 'has never set out or intended to ration everything or to secure absolute equity in everything to everybody. Any attempt to pretend that it is trying to do such a thing is just asking for trouble. Even if by such a manoeuvre as is proposed here a few more individuals acquired a few more shell fish I cannot see that the war effort is assisted one little bit'.

Nevertheless the Minister, in October 1943, approved the proposal. When, in the customary way, the draft proposals were put before a representative meeting of caterers, they evoked loud protest. In particular, it was claimed that the majority of caterers buying lobsters had always done so from the coast direct, and that it was unreasonable of the Ministry to stop them doing so.

By this time it was becoming clear that the Ministry's ground for doing anything at all about shell-fish was nothing like as firm as it ought to be, and, with a new Minister about to take office, the Order was held up for further enquiries. The claim that most lobsters for caterers were bought direct could not be substantiated but neither could the counter-claim that the inland wholesaler was being bypassed under the existing Order. Three out of four Billingsgate merchants whose books were examined by the Finance Director of Fish Division had actually increased their turnover in lobsters since the controlled price had been introduced. Nor did the allegations of malpractice made by the fourth—whose lobster branch was losing money and on whose advice the Division was proposing to introduce more complete control—find support in his competitors' accounts.

¹ S.R. & O. (1943) No. 631.

Protests from other sources appeared to have died down, perhaps because loopholes had been found.¹ In short, the trade had settled down under the Order, and it seemed best to let it rest.²

At the other end of the range of control, and completing it, was the Order of December 1942 controlling the price of fish-cakes, valued by the Ministry as a means of eking out fish supplies, of using-up unpopular varieties, such as salt-cod and pickled fillets, and of encouraging potato consumption. The Ministry already controlled the price of the separate ingredients, and to control the final product, both in price and composition, was not only a natural step to protect the public but in line with the general policy for manufactured foods of all kinds. The standard fixed—a minimum fish content of 25 per cent.—likewise embodied the compromise between quality and economy that was typical of war-time. In November 1944 the standard was raised to 35 per cent., but with the rider that manufacturers must now use the proportions of fresh, pickled, or otherwise 'processed' fish that the Ministry might prescribe—a measure designed, as it appears, less for the protection of the consumer than for the disposal of the various imports made by the Ministry under bulk contract. At the same time, the minimum weight and maximum price of fish cakes were raised respectively from 2½ to 2¾ ounces and from 2¼d. to 3d. apiece.³

IV

More important than these extensions of price control were the negotiations with the producers over the general level of white fish prices. When, in September 1941, the Ministry issued its second price control Order,⁴ it had arranged with trawler owners for a monthly return, voyage by voyage, showing the proceeds of the catch and its distribution between expenses, men's remuneration, overheads and estimated net profit; all of which should serve as a guide in the future determination of prices. During the winter of 1941-42 landings were

¹ One was the exemption of 'dressed crab' from price control. An indignant London stockbroker, in April 1944, vainly complained to the Ministry that a well-known luxury store had charged him 10s. 6d. for a small piece of crab meat in a small scallop shell.

² The re-enactment of the Order (by S.R. & O. (1944) No. 312) was only necessary because the original summer and winter prices had been so specified as to operate for one season (1943-44) only. The new Order continued to operate without alteration till 1947, when it was revoked by S.R. & O. (1947) No. 776, which ended price control of shell-fish.

³ S.R. & O. (1942) No. 2622; amended by S.R. & O.s (1943) No. 819, (1943) No. 1593, (1944) No. 1278. When price control was abolished in 1950, the minimum standard was re-enacted by itself (S.I. (1950) No. 589).

⁴ See above, p. 23.

so low that the trawling industry lost money for the first time since war began; and it was therefore agreed to let the same controlled prices run throughout the summer of 1942, i.e., for a full year. With the spring, landings and profits recovered, and the small loss on the winter season's working was rapidly wiped out; indeed, the profit of the whole fleet, for the year ended September 1942, was £1½ millions, or 1s. 2d. per stone of fish landed. Revised prices embodied in an Order of that month¹ showed only slight reductions (6d. a stone on hake, 3d. on the coarse varieties described as 'other fish'); it was thought inopportune to be more drastic at the beginning of the winter season.

For the summer of 1943, however, substantial cuts were planned, which the industry, having accepted the winter prices and pleaded that they should be higher than the summer prices, could scarcely resist in principle at any rate. Profits were still rising; thanks to a good autumn, they totalled £1½ millions for the calendar year 1942. As the Treasury, intent on an absolutely stable Cost-of-Living Index, did not want fish prices in the shops to vary by even one-halfpenny a pound, the Ministry of Food decided to vary its transport levy, reducing it to 1d. a stone in winter and raising it to 1s. in summer. This levy, being paid by the first-hand buyer, would offset exactly the proposed price changes to producers and thus enable the maximum prices at subsequent stages of distribution to remain unaltered. In addition, the Ministry proposed yet again to attack the price of hake, which it contended was no more costly to catch than other round fish, and should therefore be included among them.

These changes were calculated to make, other things being equal, a reduction of some 7½d. per stone, or one-half, in the trawler-owners' average net profits; and were not likely, therefore, to be well received, even allowing for the cushion effect of Excess Profits Tax. The profit—upwards of half a million pounds—expected to be earned on the new prices was nevertheless generous in terms of the capital value of the rump of the fishing fleet, variously estimated at two to four times that amount; or compared with the charter-hire of those modern vessels taken by the Admiralty. And, in fact, the owners proved to be quite unable to make out a case against the Ministry proposals. A cut in prices, however, also meant a cut in crews' pay; a cut, moreover, that would be embodied in the revised Third Schedule of the price-control Order, laying down the fictitious prices on which owners and crews were to settle. For the varieties making up the bulk of the catch, the settlement price was now to be 7s. 2d. a stone as against 8s. 9d. (11s. for hake).² Moreover, deductions for fish sold ungutted were increased from 12½ to 20 per cent.

¹ S.R. & O. (1942) No. 1910.

² This represented more than a proportionate reduction compared with the actual prices, i.e., it was an arbitrary readjustment in favour of the owners.

For some time past the trawler-owners and the Transport and General Workers' Union had been attempting to negotiate a new wages agreement, which, *inter alia*, would have reverted to actual prices as a basis for settlement. These negotiations appear to have been taking place on the assumption that the existing controlled prices would continue; and though both sides of the industry must have been well aware that prices were likely to be reduced for the summer season, it was unfortunate, from a tactical point of view, that Fish Division should not have taken the earliest opportunity of informing the men's leaders of its plans. Instead, they were allowed to learn of them first through the employers, by the medium of a conversation between the Director of Fish Supplies and the Vice-Chairman of the Fish Industry Joint Council (on which labour was not represented); whereupon owners and men jointly appealed to the Ministry to hold its hand, until they should have more details.

This was on 25th February 1943. In the first week of March the draft price schedules were sent to the parties, and in the following week, the Director of Fish Supplies had meetings both with the owners' and men's representatives and with the Fish Industry Joint Council, all of whom asked that the new Order—due to come into force at the beginning of April—should be postponed so that they might complete their negotiations. The Director, however, refused to offer more than a fortnight's grace, on the ground that there was no imminent prospect of a new wage agreement; and indeed it was admitted by the men's leader that there were 'big principles involved'. Amid continued protests, therefore, the new Order¹ was made on 30th March, to come into effect on 10th April.

Before that date, crews at Milford Haven, North Shields, and Fleetwood had gone on strike against the new prices; and it became the duty of the Ministry of Labour to intervene. At an eleventh-hour meeting on 9th June of the two sides of industry and departmental representatives, Fish Division agreed to postpone the Order for two months on condition that the prices therein were accepted; the question of the Third Schedule was left for discussion between the owners and the men's representatives. On 21st May the parties—*pace* the continued misgivings of the Division—reached agreement on terms allowing for the abolition of the Third Schedule, and a revised Order² was thereupon issued. Even so there were unofficial strikes at Milford Haven and Fleetwood about the price of hake; but the fishermen were induced to return to work by a promise that it would be re-considered when the winter prices came up for review.

Fish Division made no secret of its belief that the trawler-owners

¹ S.R. & O. (1943) No. 497.

² S.R. & O. (1943) No. 820. The postponement of the earlier Order had been effected by S.R. & O. (1943) No. 558.

and the men had connived to drag out the wage negotiations in the hope of securing better prices, from which both might benefit. (That the former would leave no opportunity, however unlikely, of defending their profits is shown by their appeal, early in April, to the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries; an appeal that was promptly and effectively countered by a request from the Minister for detailed figures to support it.) If that were so, the Division had presented them with the opportunity by its neglect of protocol. To make an Order that in specific terms reduced the men's wages, without full and formal consultation with their representatives, was so unprecedented as to bring rebuke from the Ministry of Labour. As in the matter of concentration, the Division evinced a strange unawareness of the obligations of a Government Department; and this enabled the industry to extract advantage, both moral and financial, from a situation in which the merits of the case were overwhelmingly on the side of the Government. Nor was the moral advantage merely temporary; for the rest of the war the mere threat of a fishermen's strike was to hamstring officials' efforts to reduce profits they considered to be exorbitant.¹

V

For the winter of 1943-44, the general level of prices was restored to what it had been the previous winter; but as a measure of assistance to inshore fishermen, an increase of price equal to the difference between the rate of levy in summer and winter was awarded on prime fish (brill, soles, and turbot), halibut, and other flat fish, the prices of all of which had not been reduced for the summer months. For the sake of industrial peace, hake was once again removed from the ruck of common fish and given a small premium of 7d. a stone. A number of minor changes were made in distributive margins, of which the chief was a readjustment between those of coastal and inland wholesalers, to the advantage of the latter; but, armed with costings data, the Division was able to resist claims from the Fish Industry Joint Council for a general increase.² In the spring of 1944, however, the trawler-owners asked that the winter prices should be maintained, and that the price of hake should be put *up* by 1s. 2d. a stone, i.e., to 8s. 1d. They claimed that the costs of running trawlers

¹ One ought not, in discussing this matter of prices, to forget that the war risks run by fishermen, especially from air attack, were great, though diminishing after 1942. There was one deliberate and sustained attack on the Milford Haven fleet towards the end of 1941. Some typical experiences of fishermen are given in *Fisheries in War Time* (H.M. Stationery Office, 1946), Chapter IV.

² S.R. & O. (1943) No. 1465.

were constantly going up, particularly the price of coal; that the east coast ports had only done well recently because of the opening of new fishing grounds in the North Sea, and these were already showing signs of exhaustion, and that the west coast ports, which largely relied on hake, were not doing so well. Moreover, they regarded the present price of hake as 'scandalous', compared with that of inferior species like cod or dogfish, which before the war had commanded nothing like the same price. (There can be no doubt that the Ministry's persistent effort to degrade hake prices, however well justified on the grounds of costs, showed a want of feeling for established tradition; it may also have encouraged the landing of species whose yield in food was less.)¹

The Ministry was not impressed by the general claim, for it estimated that the trawling industry as a whole had already made in the six months from 1st July 1943 a profit equal to that it was expected to make in a whole year. 'There is only one thing wrong with fish prices', declared the Ministry's Finance Department, 'and that is that they are too high'. Even the west coast ports (with the possible exception of Cardiff) had not done too badly; Hull, though with only eight trawlers, was earning 1s. 10d. a stone estimated *net profit*. If, therefore, a further concession were to be made on hake, it ought to be offset by a cut on something else; but to all the possible candidates there was some objection. To reduce the price of plaice or whiting would hit the inshore fishing industry; to do the same for dogfish would have a disproportionate effect on certain small ports like Mevagissey. In no case would the really high profits, at Hull or Grimsby, be touched. After much debate it was decided, and the Treasury persuaded, that an increase of 7d. a stone over the previous summer's hake price (i.e., a reduction of 4d. on the winter price) might be given without any other change.²

In September, fortified by an analysis of the trawler-owners' trading profits for the whole year ended 30th June, the Finance Department again put forward proposals for reducing prices. Mainly thanks to improved landings, on the east coast particularly, that profit was put at £1½ millions net—not far short of, if not equal to, the total assets employed. It suggested a cut of 1s. a stone on 'flats' and 7d. on 'rounds', estimating that this would still leave the trawler-owners with more than a million pounds net profit per year. Administrators, admit though they must the evidence of the figures, felt

¹ The Fisheries Officer at Milford Haven in December 1941 had expressed this view clearly. 'During these winter months, the hake are mainly withdrawn into the deeper water, and the men will not risk working far from land in the track of commerce raiders, to catch hake at 9s. 6d. a stone [the then price] while they can get trips of a sort by landing small whittings and flat fish and dogfish nearer home. . . .' 'The Ministry of Food's policy', he had urged, 'should be to encourage the trawlers to work more for hake and less for mixed kinds of fish'.

² S.R. & O. (1944) No. 511.

however that any change would be inopportune. It was the winter season; the benefit to the consumer would be negligible or (in the case of the supplies going through fish-friers and caterers) *nil*; the cut would fall with severity only on the inshore fishermen and the less prosperous trawling ports. Was it not better (they asked, to the scandal of the Ministry's Finance Department) to leave Excess Profits Tax to do the job? The debate was carried to the Minister, who accepted a compromise proposal that no change be made at once,¹ but that producers be warned of a reduction in the spring; 'I fully agree' (he wrote) 'that we must take steps to reduce the very large profits which producers of fish are now making'.

The warning was duly given; and in December the Ministry put forward to the various sections of the trade its proposals, to operate from 15th March 1945. Briefly, there was to be a cut in producer prices amounting, on the average, to 11d. a stone, assuming that landings of the different species remained in the same proportion; cuts in distributors' margins estimated to save 1½d. a stone at the wholesale stage and 3d. a stone at the retail stage; and a consequent cut in retail prices averaging 1½d. a lb. These would operate for the summer season only; and the Treasury was now willing to see a rise in retail prices in the autumn.

As in the spring of 1943, the trawler-owners opposed the reduction without being able to produce any decisive arguments against it; the men again opposed the consequent cut in their wages, and talked of restoring the fictitious basis of settlement in force from 1941 to 1943; the inshore fishermen claimed that they were already suffering from the high cost of gear and from the loss of the quality premiums their fish commanded before the coming of price control. The Ministry had some sympathy with these last, and got the Treasury to agree that they might be given relief by prescribing a higher maximum price and a lower levy for inshore-caught fish. It also prepared to make some concessions on the general price proposals.

Nevertheless, it was uneasy about the outcome. There were many inshore fishermen (it was expertly advised) who were doing as well or better than trawlermen at the smaller ports; the proposed concession might therefore evoke outcry if it were general, and would certainly do so if it tried to distinguish between one set of inshore fishermen and another. The possibility of a strike seemed all the more menacing because the world food situation had sharply deteriorated with the prospect of peace. The Ministry's trade adviser indicated what he called the 'easy way' out—abandoning general price reductions and instead making them only on the coarser species, such as dogfish, skate, and coalfish (*saithe*)—and the Minister, who had already thought it best to put the problem before

¹ The winter prices were restored by S.R. & O. (1944) No. 1165.

his colleagues in the Lord President's Committee, grasped at this suggestion, with which, he said, he personally would be content. The Fisheries Departments, who had also been uneasy, concurred; Ministers agreed; and the new Order¹ was made accordingly. In the words of the Ministry of Food's Finance Department, the decision 'renders any further examination of fish producers' earnings of academic interest only'.

That bitter comment was not, in fact, to be justified in the long run, for the autumn of 1945 was to see the first of a series of reductions in both producers' prices and distributive margins, that were more drastic than anything hitherto proposed.² They took place, of course, amid restoration of fleets, increasing landings, and the impending disappearance of the hated zoning scheme; and under a Government whose hand was strengthened from a recent General Election, instead of being weakened by a coming one. There was not, as there had been in March 1945, a prospect, however illusory, of early decontrol to cast doubt on the wisdom of driving control too hard.

VI

By contrast with the complex and turbulent history of the white-fish control, that of herrings was uneventful. The seasonal character of the trade, more marked in war-time when the East Anglian autumn fishing was suspended, and the varying ports of landing, rendered zoning out of the question; but herrings were, of course, subject to port allocation, which had indeed begun with them.³ Some excitement was caused in August 1943 by the heaviest Scottish landings since before the war; despite a hasty exemption, by General Licence,⁴ of 'fresh, roused and sprinkled herrings' from the catering restrictions, a feverish publicity campaign, concessions on carriage charges, and an increase in the controlled price for pickled herrings, there were yet instances of catches having to be dumped back in the sea.

For the following season, therefore, the Ministry opened negotiations with the trade at Aberdeen and the Moray Firth ports in order to secure the orderly marketing of as many herrings as possible. Its

¹ S.R. & O. (1945) No. 353.

² By S.R. & O. (1945) No. 1444; *ibid.* (1946) Nos. 484, 806, 1642. The main changes are outlined in the explanatory notes appended to each of these Orders, the last of which marks the lowest point in controlled fish prices. Thereafter rising costs impelled a reverse trend.

³ See above, p. 21.

⁴ S.R. & O. (1943) Nos. 1229, 1266, 1347 and 1439 (Revocation). The same procedure was occasionally applied to all or some classes of white fish.

scheme was to underwrite, by the promise to purchase for Relief, an arrangement whereby 'surplus' fish, i.e., those not required by kipperers and 'freshers', should be handed over to salters and 'redders' at a fixed price (of 55s. a cran). An essential corollary to the Ministry's offer was an agreement between fishermen and buyers on the minimum price for the home market, i.e., the price below which herrings should be deemed surplus; failing this, a price war might develop as a result of which fish might be 'dumped on the Ministry instead of into the sea'. Another corollary was the regulation of sailings by mutual agreement so as to avoid if possible the temporary gluts, followed by complete cessation of fishing, that had occurred the previous summer. Negotiations were not easy, for buyers and fishermen mistrusted each other and the latter were (it was said) still incensed by the reduction in maximum prices, from 98s. to 91s. a cran, that the Ministry had made in the spring of 1943. In mid-May, however, the two sides agreed on a minimum price of 78s. a cran for kipping and freshing, and that Joint Committees should be set up in each port to advise the Ministry's Herring Control Officer at Fraserburgh.

The scheme was due to begin on 27th June 1944; but a foretaste of trouble with the fishermen occurred a few days earlier, when a heavy landing of herrings called for a temporary closing of the ports. Certain fishermen at Macduff were only with great difficulty dissuaded from putting to sea; and the Division looked round hastily for means to reinforce the agreement. The Scottish Home Department agreed to delegate to its local Fishery Officers, who were working with the Herring Control Officer, the power, taken by Order in 1939, to issue Directions regulating the sailings of drifters. This power was only used on one occasion¹ but the apprehensions that caused it to be invoked were soon justified. The fishermen at Fraserburgh and Peterhead, dissatisfied with the proportion of the catch being taken by kipperers at the maximum price, repeatedly declined to co-operate with the Herring Control Officer in regulating sailings so as to produce a steady supply for curing. On 6th July and again on the 12th they refused to sail at all; on the 13th and 14th, having previously agreed to divide the fleet, they put the whole of it to sea and only the fact of light landings prevented a surplus. Then, for a fortnight, they fished with half the fleet and a restricted number of nets, although landings were palpably insufficient for market requirements. On 31st July, however, they decided to fish without restriction; it was freely stated in Fraserburgh that this was done to swamp the Ministry of Food in August Bank Holiday week, when

¹ At Buckie, on 10th August, when certain boats did not observe a general agreement to restrict fishing after the heavy landing on 7th August. The Order by virtue of which the direction was issued was S.R. & O. (1939) No. 1808.

demand is low. On 7th August, the Moray Firth fleet landed 10,500 crans, and fishing had virtually to be suspended for the rest of the week. By this time, thanks to the good offices of Mr. Robert Boothby, M.P. for the Division, the fishermen were persuaded that their interest lay in working the scheme so as to provide the heaviest landings that could be absorbed rather than in selling far fewer herrings at the maximum. From August onwards no serious hitch occurred; throughout the season no catches had to be dumped; and 65,000 barrels were cured of which 40,000 were made available for Relief.

Similar arrangements were made in every subsequent season until the end of control, and extended from the autumn of 1945 onwards to the East Anglian ports.¹ They illustrate very well the later and happier period of the Ministry's relations with the trade, arising from a sureness of touch which is evident from all the documents dealing with this herring scheme, and which is as evidently absent from many of the Fish Division's earlier transactions.

* * * * *

The comprehensiveness of fish control at its peak was something to have amazed Mr. Prothero, the author of the quotation with which this account began. Its dogged recovery from initial misfortune arouses respect, its ingenuity admiration. Its main weaknesses were, or came to be, recognised within the Ministry—too long a tolerance, imposed by political considerations as well as by very real administrative difficulties, of excessive prices to the producer, and an over-elaborate basis for distribution, inspired by an aim—equal *per capita* supplies in every part of the country—that was neither attainable nor even desirable. Whether, having regard to the small part that fish played in the war-time diet, control was worth while at all is a question that may legitimately be asked. The Cost-of-Living Index provides part of the answer; for the rest, it is clear that public opinion will not allow a Food Controller to restrict his activities to those that the economist or the administrator may consider to be rewarding. One

¹ From 1946 onwards the responsibility was assumed by the Herring Industry Board, the statutory body established under the Herring Industry Act of 1935. During the war the functions of the Board were suspended (apart from certain matters relating to loans for the construction of boats). In 1942 the Fisheries Ministers, on Scottish initiative, appointed a Committee to review the herring industry and the problems which were likely to confront it after the war, and the Committee reported in January 1944 (Cmd. 6503) in favour of the early reconstitution of the Board. In 1944 the Board was reconstituted, and the Herring Industry Act, 1944, gave it further financial assistance as well as providing that certain specified additional powers could be granted to it. The pre-war powers of the Board were restored in full as from 1st May 1946 except that the Ministry of Food retained responsibility for distributing herrings to the home market, including the fixing of maximum prices. See *Report on the Fisheries of Scotland, 1939-1948* (Cmd. 7726) pp. 28-9.

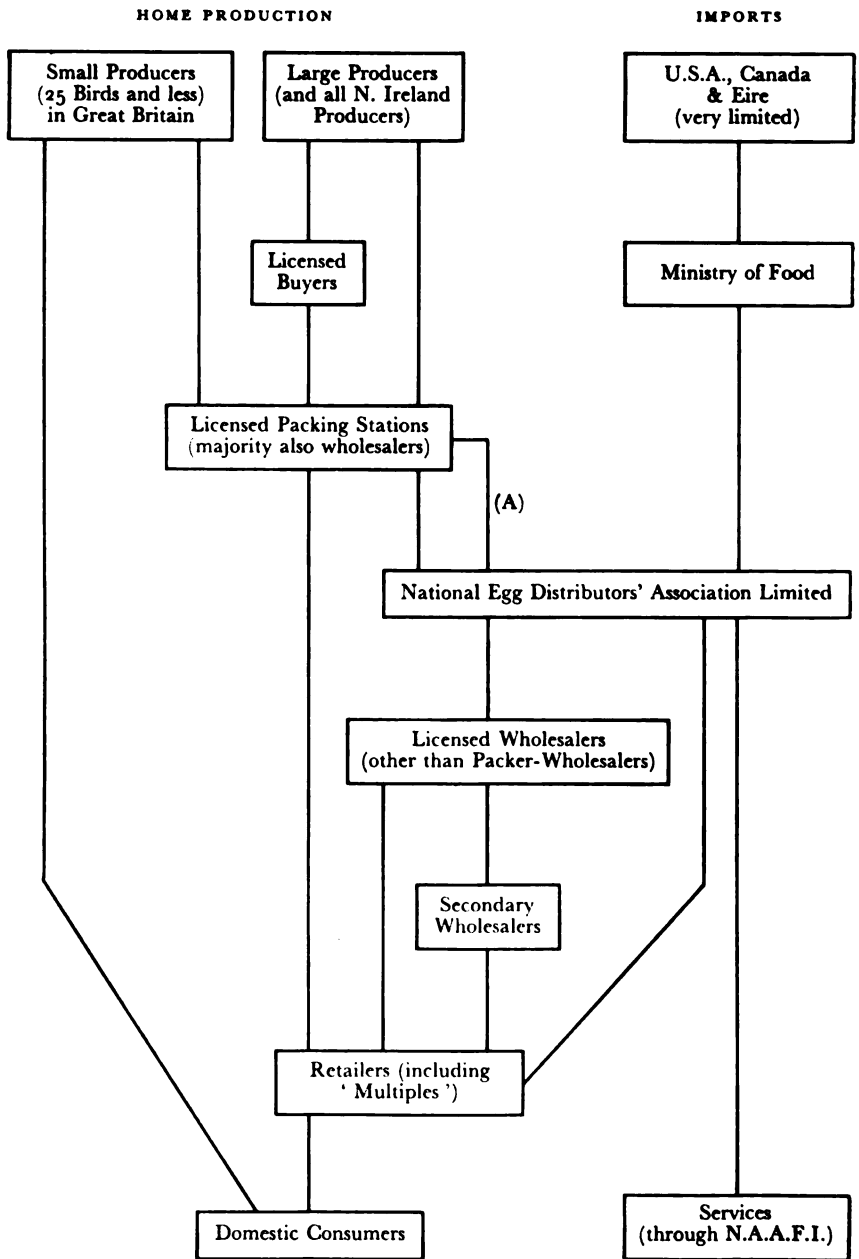
caveat may be added; the Ministry cannot be said to have attempted in its new schemes to solve the problem that the original plan for fish depots had at any rate faced; that of distribution under heavy air attacks. In that respect the experience of 1939-45 offers little guidance.

For

A:
Foods mainly Home-produced

Part II: Eggs

FIGURE II
Eggs under Control (c. 1942)



CHAPTER V

The Framing of the Control Scheme,

1939-41

I

IN TIME of peace, the United Kingdom's supplies of eggs were drawn in nearly equal amounts from home production and from more than a score of different countries all over the world.¹ Control of imported eggs presents few difficulties not common to other imported foods, and in the first world war the Government had itself become the principal purchaser from abroad. It had also decreed maximum wholesale and retail prices for *all* eggs, but had eschewed any attempt to control distribution of the home-produced article. Supplies of eggs from all sources are estimated² to have fallen, by 1918, to not much more than half the pre-war annual average of 280,000 tons; even so, to judge by the silence of contemporary writers on food control, the public must have found the situation tolerable.

This was as well; for the trade in home-produced eggs, then and later, did not lend itself to swift, brilliant, but essentially improvised control of the 1918 type. Eggs reached the consumer in many different ways. They might come from a specialist poultry-farmer through packing-station, wholesaler, and retailer, or by-passing any or all of these stages; they might come from general farm or small-holding to a country market, or be bought at the farm gate by a 'higgler' or even by a passing motorist. The marketing reforms of the nineteen-thirties did not touch them; the National Mark Scheme, which set up for the first time a network of packing stations working to statutory standards of grading,³ affected mainly the specialist minority among poultry-keepers. Legislation wider in scope was under consideration, for some years before the war, by a Reorganisation Commission, and had been embodied in a Poultry Industry Bill, which was up for Second Reading when the war broke out, and which would have, at the very least, ensured the systematic collection of much-needed information. Besides a complex structure to baffle the

¹ In addition to eggs in shell, there was a large import trade in various egg products—liquid egg in bulk, dried egg in flakes, and so forth—used in food manufacture, particularly in the bakery trade. Reasons of space preclude discussion here of the control of these products, which were mostly replaced from 1942 onwards by spray-dried egg.

² Beveridge, *op. cit.*, Table XX: 'Estimated Annual Consumption of Principal Foodstuffs'.

³ Under the Agricultural Produce (Grading & Marking) Act of 1928.

would-be controller, the home-produced egg trade presented another difficulty—the seasonal fluctuation of supply and hence of price.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the outbreak of war should find the Government without any comprehensive plan for egg control. Like fish, eggs had been late in the queue for attention from the overworked staff of the Food (Defence Plans) Department; a paper scheme drawn up at the end of 1937 was shelved until a year later, and discussions with the trade during the early part of 1939 did little more than reveal the complexities of the problem. This much only appears to have been clear—that Government control of egg imports would be essential; and accordingly a Director of Imported Eggs was, after some search, selected in August 1939. Even this appointment owed something to the importunity of the London Egg Exchange, members of which had been for some time anxious about their position in time of war. As for home-produced eggs, so little was the need even for preserving a possible nucleus of control regarded, that the Ministry of Agriculture in September 1939 suspended the National Mark Scheme.

It was not long, therefore, before the Ministry of Food had to embark on a series of expedients, in face of a sharp rise in prices. On 13th September 1939 it issued its first Price Control Order, which, in accordance with an interdepartmental agreement reached on 30th August, extended to wholesale and retail, but not first-hand prices, and classified eggs into four categories of diminishing merit.¹ Within two or three weeks, however, this Order led to trouble; shippers from overseas held out for maximum *wholesale* prices, and the wholesalers found their profit being squeezed out—some indeed were faced with a loss on account of carriage charges. When, towards the end of October, the Ministry prescribed an additional maximum price on a sale by an importer to a wholesaler, the latter still found himself at a disadvantage, for the former could still obtain a double profit by selling direct to a multiple or large retailer—a practice that aroused all the more protest because these favoured firms might use eggs as a bait to attract registrations for foods about to be rationed. As a palliative the Ministry raised the price of all types of eggs by 3d. a dozen² while it prepared its complete scheme of control for imported eggs.

¹ S.R. & O. (1939) No. 1170. The categories were:

- I. Home-Produced Fresh Eggs:
- II. Near-European Fresh Eggs:
- III. Preserved Eggs from the Dominions, North and South America, and from home production:
- IV. All Other Eggs.

They aroused considerable feeling, particularly among foreign Governments, and were frequently amended during the first months of price control.

² S.R. & O. (1939) No. 1554.

The initial steps were taken by an Order¹ of the Board of Trade, made at the Ministry's request, prohibiting the import of eggs and egg products except under licence; the Ministry had already entered into bulk contracts with the Governments of Australia and South Africa for their entire exportable surpluses. Elsewhere, direct Government purchase was found to be impracticable for want of suitable export monopolies in the country of origin; and the cumbersome alternative of allowing imports to be made privately under licence, only to be requisitioned on arrival and reallocated to the importers for distribution, lost its attractiveness when, with the peak of the seasonal shortage past, supplies began to improve. At the end of 1939, therefore, the scheme was put into cold storage. The only Ministry activities on the imported side of the trade that need be noted at this time were a 'political purchase' from Hungary and Rumania, made through a company of pre-war importers set up for the purpose as 'Ryepool Limited'; and a proposal to import 1,200,000 boxes of eggs from Argentina, sanctioned by the Treasury on the condition (very characteristic of this period in the war), that a 'substantial proportion' would be available for the 'poorer classes'.

Meanwhile similar symptoms of maldistribution had occurred in the home-produced egg trade, only to be remedied when the seasonal improvement in supplies set in, fortunately a little earlier than usual. By mid-December it began to be felt that the existing maximum prices were being treated by the trade as minima and were actually hampering the disposal of eggs; it was decided to revoke price control for home-produced eggs and rely on controlled imported eggs to keep the market stable. This was done in the week before Christmas; but prices failed to fall and the Ministry was reduced to exhortation; eggs, the housewife was reminded, were plentiful 'at reasonable prices' and retailers were admonished that the prices of imported eggs fixed in the schedule 'bear no relation to the present market prices'.² It was not, however, until two reductions in quick succession were made in the controlled price of imported eggs, that the general level of prices, in April 1940, fell below 2s. a dozen.

The attitude of the Ministry's Eggs Branch towards the home market was at this time a little equivocal. It had abolished price control in December in order to get prices down; yet in January, considering the rudiments of a policy for home-produced eggs (in the rather odd context of a further purchase from Rumania), it expressed the view that the livelihood of many producers was 'in jeopardy'. Questioners in the House of Commons were told, early in February, that 'whether steps can be taken to prevent prices from falling to

¹ S.R. & O. (1939) No. 1680.

² The revocation was by S.R. & O. (1939) No. 1840; the exhortations were contained in Ministry of Food Press Notices, Nos. 180, 210, and Ministry of Food Trade Press Notice, No. 212A.

unduly low levels in the spring is at present under consideration'.¹ Householders were urged to preserve eggs for next winter and given dispensation from the Order² forbidding hoarding; the trade was encouraged to store and pickle eggs by the promise of generous treatment over prices, should control be reimposed; and the Ministry itself proposed to buy in bulk for the same purpose from Holland and Denmark, and did actually buy in Eire.

The German advance in the West abruptly changed the situation. Prices of home-produced eggs rose in response to the loss of Danish supplies; the Ministry threatened to reimpose price control and the Inter-departmental Committee on Food Prices discussed its principles. On 9th May, the Ministry's Home Produced Egg Trade Advisory Committee, meeting for the first time, revealed widespread disagreement about the extent to which price control was desirable or even possible. Next day Holland was invaded and the Ministry at once issued an Order³ controlling the final selling price alone.

For some weeks no difficulty arose out of this hasty gesture; the price index for eggs for the beginning of June was less than it had been a month earlier, and market prices were reported to be below the maximum. The Order admittedly was not popular with retailers, for it obliged them to grade every single egg by weight; and this minor cause of complaint had not yet been dealt with when, at the beginning of July, a major crisis arose. It was put about in the trade that the Ministry was about to increase prices—a rumour believed to have had its origin in a discussion between the Minister of Agriculture and the chairman of the National Farmers' Union Eggs Committee—and a scramble for supplies followed. High prices were offered to producers which had repercussions even on the Northern Ireland market, and at the wholesale stage the prices rose to the maximum at which the retailer might sell, thus leaving him no margin. The Ministry realised that unless it raised the maximum prices it would 'get all the blame for the confusion and loss that will have been caused by the operations of the speculators'; but the same situation was likely to recur as eggs became scarcer, and to yield to pressure on each occasion would make a controlled price worthless. A seasonal increase in price was shortly due, however, and it was decided to bring this into force on the earlier of two dates⁴ already contemplated for it. But the increase did not relieve retailers' difficulties; wholesale, and in some cases producers', prices merely rose by the whole permitted amount.

¹ Replies to Questions by Mr. De La Bere, M.P. (1.2.40). Captain Medlicott, M.P. (8.2.40) and Mr. Henderson Stewart, M.P. (20.2.40). *Official Report*, cols. 1288-9, 437 and 1170 respectively.

² By General Licence (S.R. & O. (1940) No. 393, under S.R. & O. (1939) No. 991).

³ S.R. & O. (1940) No. 712.

⁴ S.R. & O. (1940) No. 1178.

Until this time, in defiance of what Lord Buckmaster in 1917¹ had termed the 'elementary economic truth' that controlling prices is unsatisfactory without controlling supplies, the Ministry of Food had resolutely refused to contemplate introducing control of egg distribution. The complicated machinery that would be required, it was said, 'could only be justified if eggs were of vital importance as an item of diet of everyone, which'—fortified by scientific opinion, it was declared—'is not the case'. Lord Woolton had told a Press Conference on 3rd June 1940 that eggs were not regarded as an essential food; nevertheless he interested himself personally in an ill-starred attempt to obtain eggs from Portugal that was being mooted in July. 'I want you to know that I would welcome any eggs from anywhere', he told officials. 'We must try to break the racket that is going on'. The Ministry had hopes, however, that the worst maldistribution might be ended by reviving the quality premiums for eggs handled by approved packing stations, on the lines of the discontinued National Mark Scheme—a plan on which an advisory committee drawn from the trade had been working since the beginning of May. It was a modified version of this plan that was put forward by the Ministry's trade advisers, along with proposals for a complete system of price control at all stages of distribution; and on the strength of it, the Order² embodying the next seasonal price rise, to come into force on the 19th August, for the first time included separate schedules of wholesale and retail prices.

The complete scheme was brought out on 29th August. It distinguished between fresh eggs marked with an 'approved mark', by persons licensed by the Minister, and fresh eggs not so marked; the former were to command a premium of sixpence a dozen over the latter, weight for weight, except for very small 'C' eggs, which got only fourpence-half-penny a dozen. Licensed packers had to satisfy certain conditions: have operated before the war, possess an efficient electrical grading machine, and to have an annual turnover of at least 2,500 boxes. *Notes*, issued by the Ministry for their guidance, asked for co-operation in the reorganisation of supplies where necessary, and expressed the hope that 'the required distribution of eggs will automatically be achieved without recourse to the Ministry's powers of compulsorily directing the movement of supplies'. (The licence obliged the packer to give information about sales and stocks and 'if required' to 'dispose of his stock of eggs in such manner as the Minister may direct'.) Simultaneously, the Ministry introduced complete control of imported eggs, by an Order that had been actually issued some six weeks previously, and on which it had been working since April. The Ministry would now become the sole

¹ Beveridge. *op. cit.*, p. 42, n. 2.

² S.R. & O. (1940) No. 1499.

importer; at each port supplies would be allocated to selected importing firms, to the number of three or four, styled now 'No. 1 distributors'. These, acting as the Ministry's agents on commission, would distribute to 'No. 2 distributors' (primary wholesalers) and to multiple groups such as Allied Suppliers Ltd; No. 2 distributors might in their turn sell to retailers, secondary wholesalers, or multiples. The margins of profit for these various types of transaction had, in accordance with the usual practice, been approved by the Treasury, subject to a costings investigation during the first few months of the scheme.

A feature of the controlled price structure for imported eggs was the denial to multiples of the full wholesale margin by the establishment, rather on the lines adopted for bacon, of a surcharge amounting to 3d. a dozen eggs, which accrued to the trading account of the Ministry. The ingenious idea was hit upon of using this money as what was called a 'balancing payment' to encourage the better distribution of home-produced eggs. Licensed packers, by receiving 3d. a dozen for all eggs sent to wholesalers, whence the Ministry could determine their ultimate destination, would be put in the same position financially as if they had sold at the wholesale price to a retailer. The administrative details of this plan were not, however, worked out in advance of its introduction.

The prospects of the combined operation were not good. Three-quarters of imported supplies had been cut off; home-produced poultry would, if the feedingstuffs policy already agreed on by the Government were to be carried out in its full rigour, fall to the number that could be fed on one-third of the normal supplies of cereals. Already, before this fall had even begun, egg prices were pressing against the ceiling and eggs were scarce in the towns. Even were it politically possible to hold the heroic line that eggs were an inessential whose price could be allowed to find its own level, the logic of the feedingstuffs priorities must compel the Government to abandon it. The milk supply, in particular, might be endangered by the diversion of cereals to hens that an uncontrolled egg price would stimulate. The low value set by the scientists on eggs, in defiance of all culinary principles, made their control more, not less, necessary; the combination of vanishing supplies with increasingly stringent regulation was paradoxical but inescapable. In face of the economic forces that could be seen to be at work, the 'balancing payment' shrinks to the dimensions of an insect. But the Ministry, though admitting that 'there is no easy way out of the egg problem', was not yet ripe for difficult and heroic measures.

II

The ultimate *deus ex machina*, the Cost-of-Living Index, had appeared in official discussions of egg prices as early as April 1940. In September it reappeared as part of a general survey of the situation, prepared by the Ministry of Food in an attempt to get a complete annual range of prices laid down in advance. Normally, the price in the season of greatest scarcity was roughly twice that in the flush season; such a variation would, at the prices then ruling, mean an annual fluctuation of $4\frac{1}{2}$ points in the all-items Index (7 points in the Food Index). It might be possible to reduce this fluctuation by conceding to producers relatively higher prices in the flush season and by releasing the cheaper imported eggs in the winter. Even so, there would still be a variation that might need to be evened out by some sort of subsidy, whether to egg producers or by way of compensation on other controlled foods. In the former case, the Ministry would require to control 'at any rate the greater part of the supply'; in any event, distribution under a régime of maximum prices, even with the new arrangements, was bound to be inequitable, and a modified rationing scheme, limiting but not guaranteeing consumers' supplies, would (the authors of the survey thought) be worth considering.

The pursuit and much-needed refinement of these proposals was for the moment sidetracked by a long argument over what was, by comparison, a minor matter—the determination of the exact price that ought to be paid to producers. The Ministry of Food was anxious to limit price increases to the actual rise in ascertained costs and to avoid encouraging the general farmer to divert feed to hens from higher-priority stock, and particularly dairy cows; the Agricultural Departments on the other hand were anxious to temper the wind to the specialist producer. Moreover, the two sides took divergent views about the actual rise in costs; calculations yielded 41 per cent. or 75 per cent. over pre-war, according to the base period chosen and the extent to which maize, the cheapest fodder, was held to be available at that time. A series of compromise solutions was reached for the earlier part of the season, but on the price to be paid in the flush period, from 24th March 1941 onwards, the Departments could only agree to postpone consideration until later.

Meanwhile the new distribution scheme was having numerous teething troubles. Its full operation had to be postponed twice (to 21st October 1940) because packing-stations were slow in applying for licences and the rubber stamps for marking the graded eggs were

not ready. Qualifications of the inevitable border-line cases for the balancing payment—multiples who did a wholesale business, wholesaler-retailers, wholesalers who were part of the same business concern as the packing-station—had to be determined, without any previous decision of principle by which to be guided. Some guiding principles were evolved during November; the areas into which the Ministry desired supplies to flow, to be known as 'zones', were defined as towns of 75,000 inhabitants or more. At the same time it became necessary to warn the Treasury that the scheme might cost more than had been expected, and that ends would only meet if the price of Dominion eggs were raised by 6d. a dozen. Again the Cost-of-Living Index was invoked and the possibility of a subsidy on imported eggs mooted; but the Treasury preferred that the scheme should be self-supporting and the rise in price was therefore authorised.

With the New Year, several forces combined to push the Ministry further along the path towards control. The 'balancing payment' was proving ineffective as a means for getting the eggs into the towns, and the powers of direction taken by the Ministry could no longer be held in reserve. It was proposed therefore to set up an organisation of wholesalers and licensed packers, to be known as 'Egg Central', 'by National Mark Egg Central out of the Wholesale Egg Distributors Association', by means of which a certain proportion of packing-station output could be moved to the 'zones'. The whole of that output, however, amounted to only about one-quarter of the total supply; and the question arose whether the new machinery would be worth while unless sales to the packing station were made compulsory. The same conclusion was being approached from another direction—that of livestock policy on which an Interdepartmental Conference was then sitting; would not the best use of feeding-stuffs, rationed on 1st February 1941, be secured by making their supply for hens contingent on, or even directly related to, deliveries of eggs to the control? Elsewhere in the Ministry, the Committee on the Distribution of Unrationed Foodstuffs¹ was naming eggs as one of the principal causes of public complaint, and was asking that means be devised to secure priority in their supply to children, expectant mothers, and perhaps invalids, and to cut down the numbers obtained by caterers, who because they could afford to pay the full retail controlled price, or more, to the producer, were said to be taking the lion's share. The Special Diets Committee of the Medical Research Council endorsed the need for priority supplies to the 'vulnerable groups'; as for caterers, the opportunity² was taken to classify even a

¹ Vol. I, pp. 195-198.

² Of a general Order prescribing 'austerity' in catering establishments (S.R. & O., (1941) No. 229).

solitary egg as a 'main dish', thus forbidding its inclusion in a meal with a fish or meat course, and the Maximum Price Order was amended to forbid the sale from one person to another, at the retail price, of more than five dozen eggs in any one week.¹

The postponement of price negotiations did not achieve the hoped-for aim of bringing the Ministry of Food and the Agricultural Departments closer, and towards the end of February the outstanding point at issue, namely of the price to be paid in the flush season, was referred to the Food Policy Committee of the War Cabinet. But even before Ministers came to discuss it, two things combined to convince the Ministry of Food that a substantial further concession should be made to producers: first the exceptionally severe weather, and, secondly the blow that specialists in particular would receive from the decision to reduce the value of the poultry ration coupon from April onwards by half, i.e., to one sixth of pre-war supplies. It was agreed at the Food Policy Committee, on 27th February, that not only should the price reduction originally proposed for 24th March not take place, but that a previous one, scheduled for 10th March, should be postponed until 'after Easter'.

This decision, like the one over bacon-pig prices in the spring of 1940,² was taken purely *ad misericordiam*, without reference to the season or the economic function of prices that vary with it. When news of it reached officials in the Commodity Division they at once pointed out that a reduction of price in May, when laying begins to fall off, would be difficult to defend to the trade, for all that it really represented a concession by the Ministry. Specialist poultry-keepers were already up in arms about the previous reductions in price from the seasonal peak, and accusing the Departments of being 'out of touch with the realities of the poultry industry', even before the latest cut in feeding-stuffs supplies was announced; it was going to be extremely difficult to 'put over', in such an atmosphere, the scheme for obligatory sales to packing-stations on which the Ministry was working. Towards the end of March, however, the Treasury intervened urgently; having adopted a policy of price stabilisation, it was anxious that something be done quickly about one of the impediments to that policy—egg prices.³ Above all, it was ready to concede a subsidy on eggs in return for effective control. The Ministry of Food thereupon conceived the idea that—as an official put it later, in the course of explaining to the Minister why, by an oversight, he had not been told about a change in the price policy he had been defending—'we might be able to "sell" the "after-Easter" drop in price for the concurrence/support of the Agricultural Departments in an improved

¹ S.R. & O. (1941) No. 374. Compliance with this Order cannot but have been wholly voluntary.

² Vol. I, p. 91.

³ The other impediment was, of course, fish prices. See pp. 19-21 above.

scheme of distribution. . . .’ The latter did agree to the general principle that producers, other than the very small ones, should forgo their right to sell to whom they pleased.

The decision to introduce a scheme of control based on a subsidy, so as to make it more profitable, within the law, for a producer to sell to a packing station than direct to the consumer, finally resolved the conflict of views within the Ministry on the matter of price. The supporters of a rigorous and (as they would have said) realistic live-stock policy, forcibly adjusted to the prospective supply of feeding-stuffs, had hankered after a ‘really unprofitable and deterrent price for eggs . . . if only we could face up to the issue of compensating specialist producers whom we want to force out of business’. The price of eggs, they argued, was already too high for the safety of milk production. A dissenting voice was raised in Eggs Division against the merits of this argument; ‘no dairy farmer in his right mind is likely to stint his cows of their *production ration* in favour of poultry no matter what the price of eggs within any reasonable bounds’. By doing so he would be largely throwing away the expensive *maintenance ration* which had to be fed in any case. If the fear of diversion were groundless, it followed that egg prices ought to be sufficiently high to encourage the greatest use of waste food for feeding poultry. As the Minister himself put it, ‘We do want eggs and chickens as well as wheat. And they pick up at least a good part of their living!’

Whatever the merits of the policy of discouragement by price, it was never (as its supporters admitted) politically attractive. But now it was administratively out of the question. The control scheme had no hope of working at all unless it included a price, particularly in the winter months, that producers’ representatives would accept. The prices approved by the Treasury, £1 6s. 8d. and £1 14s. 2d. a long hundred¹ in summer and winter respectively, appear to have been considered generous by all, apart from the ‘specialist’ minority among producers.

It remained to work out many of the details—against time, for the Treasury wanted the scheme ready by the 1st July. On the commodity side, plans were fairly well advanced, having been in active preparation since February, but there were numerous points to be agreed with the Agricultural Departments and the producers; plans for retail distribution were as yet rudimentary. In its original form, the scheme would have required an egg producer owning 25 birds² or more to register with a packing-station of his own choice and to

¹ i.e., 120 eggs. These figures were for ‘B’ grade (medium sized) eggs. ‘A’ and ‘C’ would be 2s. 6d. a long hundred up or down respectively.

² Not hens (or ducks) merely, as appears to have been generally supposed. Eggs Division actually proposed (without success) to amend the Order to specify **male birds** also, after the Tavistock Bench early in 1944 had decided, in an isolated judgment, that they were not covered.

send all his eggs to that station; a packer would be required to accept all eggs by count, so as to simplify the proposed linking of feeding-stuffs supplies to egg deliveries. To ensure that packing-stations had sufficient financial stability to meet their commitments to producers they were to be required to deposit with the Ministry a bond equal to two weeks' purchases of eggs. The output of packing-stations would be purchased by the Ministry or its agents; the No. 1 distributors of imported eggs were to be grouped for this purpose, thus utilising an existing organisation that could resell all eggs on behalf of the Ministry to the trade in the ten areas into which the country had been divided for the purposes of the imported eggs control scheme, and providing machinery whereby imported and home-produced eggs could be brought into a common system of allocation. (Incidentally, it also provided some compensation to the importers for loss of business.)¹

The basis of allocation was to be registration of consumers with retailers, which entailed registration right up the line—of retailers, wholesalers, and packer-wholesalers. Packers would be required to make a weekly return of eggs handled to the Port Egg Agent, which, together with returns of imported eggs arriving, would enable an allocation to be made; the scheme, it was claimed, would 'make it possible to distribute eggs on any basis that may be decided by the Government . . . to control the quantities of eggs issued to the Fighting Services and to catering establishments and to guarantee supplies to any special classes of the community who need eggs most'.²

For the ordinary consumer, however, there could be no such guarantee, though the retailer would be required 'to satisfy his registered customers in rotation, or otherwise in accordance with the allocations he receives'. There was not, in short, to be an egg *ration*—a fact that caused the Minister himself doubts; 'this proposal', he wrote, 'involves the restriction of the right of the consumer to find goods where he can, without any compensating undertaking to meet his needs'. (At the same time, he put on record his doubts whether

¹ The original scheme had been amended to allow egg collectors ('higglers') to continue operations as 'licensed dealers', obliged to resell the eggs to a packing-station, from whom they might claim a 'service charge' fixed at 5d. a long hundred. They were also allowed to make a transport charge to the seller, whereas packers had to collect free of charge within ten miles of their premises, their margin being calculated to allow approximately 10d. a long hundred to cover these costs.

Over the years this arrangement led to difficulties for the licensed buyers, who naturally found producers unwilling to pay transport charges within 10 miles of a packing-station. Some of them surrendered their licences and became simply agents of the packers, at an agreed remuneration that might legally exceed that fixed by the Ministry; others simply arranged with the packers to receive extra payment, e.g., by way of bonus. Since, in certain districts, packing-stations were without transport and relied entirely on the dealers, the Ministry decided, in 1945, to make the fixed charge of 5d. a minimum; the maximum was fixed at 10d. (S.R. & O. (1945) No. 645).

² Thus, to take only two examples, air-crews on active service could be guaranteed their fried eggs for breakfast, and extra supplies could be sent to bombed towns.

'we shall get the eggs and beat the black market'.) But further consideration, at Lord Woolton's express request, confirmed that the best that could be done was to allocate one egg per ordinary customer as supplies became available. Arrangements for 'priorities', as requested by the Special Diets Advisory Committee, would be made as soon as the scheme was in working order. Accordingly, consumers were asked, on 6th June, to register with retailers, using one of the 'spare' counterfoils in the ration book; the Ministry would have preferred to wait until the general re-registration following on the issue of new ration books, but the needs of the Cost-of-Living Index overrode administrative convenience.

III

Meantime the trade had been duly brought into consultation. There was no reason to expect opposition from the distributors, who would naturally welcome any scheme that promised to give them more eggs to handle; the Ministry therefore decided to see the producer interests first. At a meeting at Crewe on 29th May they showed themselves more tractable than the Ministry had expected; a plea was made (and accepted) that existing producer-retailers should be allowed to continue their retail trade, provided they obtained a minimum number of registrations;¹ it was agreed that some link between feeding-stuffs supplied and deliveries of eggs to the packing-station was sound, although the particular scheme before the meeting was condemned as unworkable; a simplified price arrangement, giving two fixed prices only, one for summer and one for winter, was accepted, though a higher summer price was asked for. Finally, and most important, the meeting accepted, on the suggestion of a trade delegate, that the scheme should apply to producers with more than 12 birds, instead of 24, as in the original draft. On the following day a representative meeting of both producer and distributor interests endorsed these views; the only matter left open was that of distributive margins, which the Ministry undertook to reconsider.

In the light of later events it appears that those present on 29th May—who included representatives of the Agricultural Departments—must have been less than completely clear about the Ministry of Food's intentions. The majority seem to have assumed that the obligation on poultry-keepers with more than a specified number of birds to sell to the packing-station applied merely to those eggs that they chose to sell, i.e., that there was nothing to prevent a man from

¹ They would, however, be allowed to supply only eggs that had been through the packing-station, i.e., that were not necessarily from their own hens.

retaining what eggs he required for his own household. This assumption was a common-sense one, for no one supposed that, no matter what the law, he could be prevented from doing so. But the Ministry, though it admitted this, argued that to recognise the right officially would 'open a door leading to a greater loss of eggs than its tacit recognition'; accordingly, only those owning 12 birds or less were asked to refrain from registering with a retailer to obtain controlled supplies. However, under pressure from the Agricultural Departments, it offered to insert in the Order a provision allowing an owner of more than twelve birds to apply to the Food Office for a licence to retain a certain number of his own eggs; the suggested number being one per week per resident member of the household.

This concession—described as 'purely a face saving device'—was put forward on Friday the thirteenth of June, at Colwyn Bay. Meanwhile, the announcement of the scheme had released a torrent of criticism in the Press, directed at the 12-bird dividing line. On the 12th, Lord Beaverbrook, the Minister of State, attacked it in a paper for the Food Policy Committee, beginning with the arresting sentence, 'Small poultry-owners are under the harrow'. On the 14th, the *Daily Dispatch* and the *Daily Sketch* printed confident reports that the scheme was to be abandoned. That same day, the Prime Minister, following an interview with the Ministers of Food and Agriculture, wrote them a 'personal minute' as follows:¹

'I was very glad to hear from you that the twelve hens scheme would be abandoned in favour of "No official food for more than twelve hens unless you come into the public pool". "Public chicken food for public eggs".'

Presumably this was after the issue of a press notice, dated 14th June also, in which the scheme was defended and the 'concession' to producers announced.

However, the Minister of Food had never, as it seems, been convinced of the wisdom of setting the exemption limit so low (he had expressed doubts about a 15-20 bird limit as far back as February) but had been anxious to make a link between feeding-stuffs and deliveries of eggs to packing-stations. At the Food Policy Committee, on 17th June, he accepted the principle that the line be drawn at the 50-bird level, i.e., that separating commercial producers, drawing their feedingstuffs through County War Agricultural Committees, from those drawing them through the Small Poultry Keepers' Council. No restriction was to be placed on the right of a producer to retain eggs for his own consumption. In vain officials pointed out that the link between public chicken-food and public eggs might be

¹ Reprinted in Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. III, p. 688.

impossible to make, and that freedom for the 'small' poultry-keeper to sell unstamped eggs would endanger the enforcement of the Order¹ on the larger; even though they convinced the Minister, he could not carry his colleagues with him.

Ministry of Food officials² were unanimous in attributing this last-minute reverse to the 'disgraceful press agitation' which they believed would have been stilled at once by the announcement of the higher producers' price coupled with a subsidy—an announcement that had been delayed till the last moment, to prevent advance hoarding of eggs by producers. Their inquest on the crisis never got beyond the point of admitting that their tactics, particularly their assessment of public opinion, had been faulty: 'a second best scheme which can be steered safely into the harbour is better than a perfect scheme which will be wrecked entirely or seriously damaged'.

There was, in fact, a point of principle at stake, clearly expressed by a Ministry of Agriculture official on the same day as the Prime Minister intervened. The proposal to compel small poultry keepers to sell all their eggs to a packing-station (he wrote) changed the object of the scheme 'from an equitable distribution of eggs on the market to a requisitioning of home-produced eggs'. The Solicitor-General was reported to be doubtful whether a Defence Regulation for this purpose would be *intra vires*; one may be certain that there would be many, not all tainted with sinister interest, who would regard it as an outrage. There was a great difference between saying 'if you sell eggs, you must sell them to the Ministry' and 'if you keep hens, you must not eat their eggs without Food Office permission'. That difference the Ministry of Food was slow to grasp; even its 12-bird dividing line was based purely on the difficulty of collecting eggs from the 'backyarders': 'we are not', wrote a Ministry official on 13th June, 'treating the smaller man favourably because he merits any special consideration but simply because the task of getting our hands on him is beyond our capacity'. Had Lord Beaverbrook seen that remark, he might have felt it justified what he had written the day before, namely, that 'the principle on which the policy [of the egg scheme] is based is one of discouraging individual enterprise and resourcefulness, and of promoting limitation and restriction'.

In short, zeal to repress the black market, that repository of 'individual enterprise and resourcefulness', had led the Ministry to take up a position that was morally as well as politically vulnerable, and that was made more exposed by the 12-bird dividing line. The withdrawal of Ministers, in face of the Press move against this flank, could not be halted at the point from which the mistaken move had

¹ The revised arrangements were embodied in S.R. & O. (1941) No. 888.

² The Orders Committee went on record that the amended Order would prevent any equitable distribution of eggs and would render impracticable the introduction of a rationing scheme.

started. The successful introduction of a scheme in Northern Ireland under which poultry-keepers could legally keep as many of their own eggs as they liked,¹ but must without exception sell them only to the Minister of Food or his agents, demonstrates by contrast the weakness of the British scheme; though transport difficulties would probably have prevented a 'no exemption' scheme in Great Britain. Initially, indeed, large areas in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, had to be excluded altogether from control, for want of both transport and packing-stations.

IV

It was a gloomy and despondent Ministry, therefore, that set about the task of retrieving what it could from the wreckage, amid a chorus of disapproval from the distributive trade. One provision not in the original plan was written into the revised Order; the exempted poultry-keepers were forbidden to sell to caterers or to anyone buying for resale.² An unstamped egg in the hands of any trader or caterer would thus provide *prima facie* evidence that an offence had been committed; though hopes that such evidence would be found did not run high. The exclusion from the scheme in England and Wales alone, of some 11½ million birds, compared with the 2½ millions originally contemplated, appeared as a serious blow to the Ministry's hopes of maintaining a 'reasonable' allocation of eggs to the general public (though not so serious as its own Economics Division's plans for adjusting the poultry population to the computed supply of feeding-stuffs would have been). The paper loss of, perhaps, one-fifth of the total quantity of home-produced eggs was itself not negligible; but more important was the opening of wide opportunities for evasion by those poultry-keepers who were still included. An attempt by the Commodity Division to retain one safeguard by forbidding producer-retailers with less than 50 birds, who held registrations for eggs, to sell eggs from their own hens by retail, was held by higher authority to be contrary to the Ministerial decision; it would certainly have evoked derisive comment in the Press. The result, however, was that stamped and unstamped eggs could legally be sold in the same shop under certain circumstances.

The troubles of the scheme in its first few weeks, however, were of

¹ This was described by an official of the Northern Ireland Government as 'making a virtue out of necessity. It would be impossible to do otherwise, because by no administrative means can you ensure that a producer adheres to any ration requirement. All he needs to do is crack a few eggs and he is past you'.

² This prohibition was extended to manufacturers by S.R. & O. (1941) No. 1049, which revoked and re-enacted the provisions of the earlier Order with some other additions.

another order. Consumers, as ever, were dilatory in registering for eggs, with the result that allocations to retailers had to be re-cast; when the general re-registration came along, with the issue of ration books in July, there were many complaints from those who, having changed their retailers for other foods, found themselves, as a circular letter to Divisional Food Officers put it, 'unfortunately placed with the retailer to whom they are tied for eggs', and they had to be allowed to change their egg retailer also. There was some difficulty with packing-stations which did not all at first understand that they could relieve pressure on their storage space by forwarding eggs to Ministry depots. The scheme had been launched before the Ministry company, National Egg Distributors Association Limited (NEDAL) was in being, so that the first three allocations were carried out by the Port Egg Agents under the former imported eggs scheme, and for some months after the company was set up these Agents and the four Area Egg Officers for the home-produced article continued to operate as separate groups, with different areas, reporting only to Headquarters. A combined organisation, in which, however, the predominance of the former importers aroused a certain amount of feeling, was brought into being by October 1941.¹

Seven Area Egg Offices,² later increased to eight, were set up for England and Wales, two for Scotland, under the supervision of a Chief Egg Officer in Edinburgh. Part of the Area Officers' increased staff were specifically appointed to deal with the important matters of transport and egg-boxes, either of which might call for an adjustment of allocations. Headquarters were still responsible for decisions on, for example, whether eggs accumulated in an Area should be used for a new allocation there or transferred elsewhere to equalise distribution. Thereafter the Area Egg Officer was responsible for seeing that such instructions were carried out by NEDAL, and for such general matters as inspection of packers, investigation of complaints, supervision of collecting and reconditioning depots, testing and re-packing of imported supplies, and liaison with Divisional Enforcement Officers.

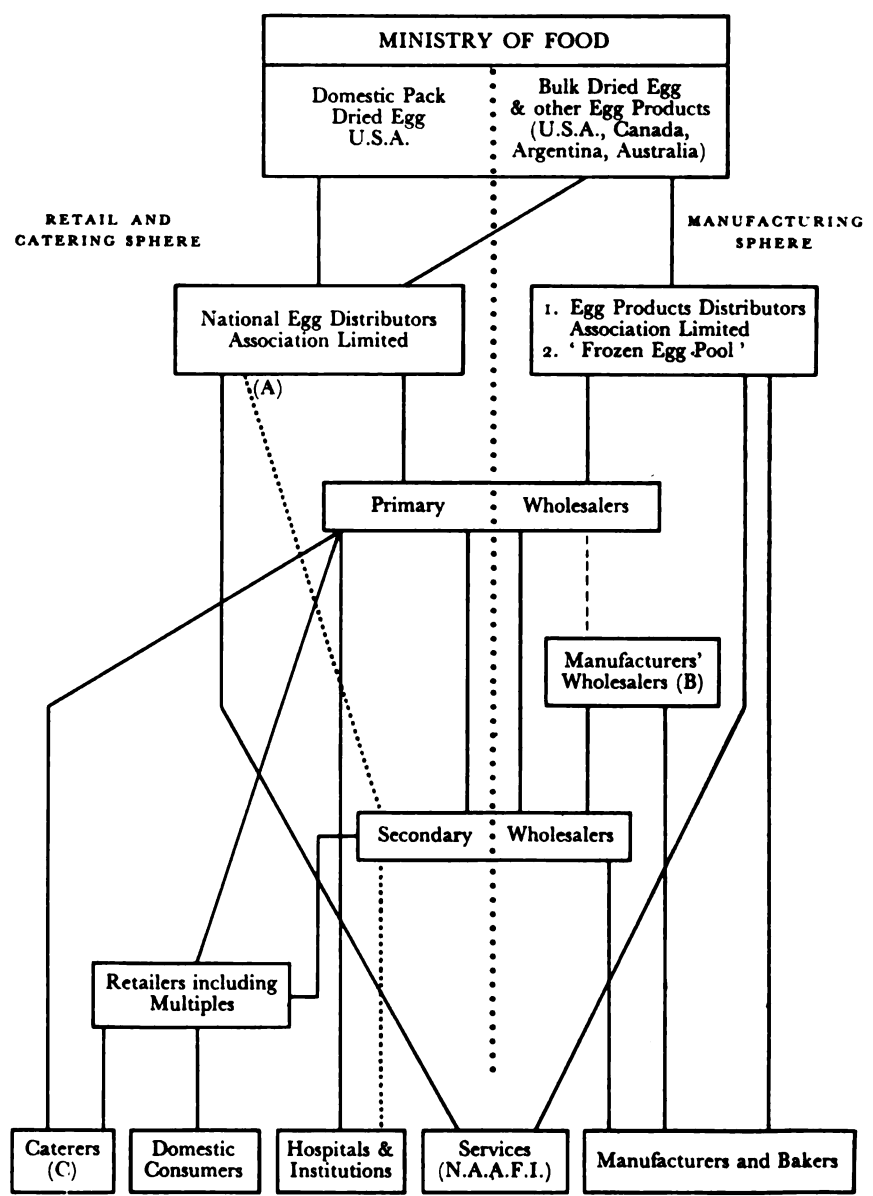
None of these initial imperfections, however, was responsible for the odium that fell upon the scheme in its first few weeks; that was due to pure ill-luck. As was to be expected, no substantial quantity of home-produced eggs was received by packing stations during the first week, and the bulk of the first allocation consisted of Canadian and American eggs that had been held in readiness for the start of the scheme. The American eggs bore no distinguishing mark—moreover, some of them, unknown to the Ministry, were cold-stored

¹ See 'flow chart' facing p. 65.

² In London, Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool, Birmingham, Newcastle, Leeds, and later Nottingham. All these towns were, of course, the centre of a Food Division.

eggs from the previous December that had been shipped to the United Kingdom without being candled and repacked. Their deterioration was now completed by a heat-wave. As, under the new price structure, imported eggs were sold at the same price as home-produced, and as some of the doubtful eggs reached consumers who had hitherto been accustomed to English 'new laid', the distribution scheme became irretrievably associated, in the public mind, with eggs whose badness was commonly put down to the holding-up of home-produced supplies in packing-stations. In vain the Ministry pointed out that even in peace time a certain number of eggs go bad in hot weather, that retailers were, or should be, in a position to replace bad eggs, that the figures of eggs passing through packing-stations indicated that there could be no hold-up, and that a small percentage loss was a reasonable price to pay for fairer distribution. As there was no labour to candle and repack the remaining North American shipments it was decided to stop distributing these against allocations and dispose of them outside the scheme as cooking eggs at a reduced price. There proved to be no difficulty in thus dealing with them, but the loss to controlled distribution of almost two eggs per head of the population, at a time when home production was beginning to fall, was unfortunate.

FIGURE III
Imported Egg Products under Control (1942)



- (A) 'This link confined to the 'hospital trade'.
- (B) These wholesalers collected egg products direct from Ministry Warehouses, the primary wholesaler acting merely as an agent.
- (C) Caterers were not allowed eggs 'in shell'.

CHAPTER VI

Developments in Control up to the end of the War in Europe

I

FOR THE remaining months of 1941 the distribution scheme continued in disfavour which found its way to the highest quarters. Even the priority arrangements for invalids and children,¹ which could be introduced now that general distribution had begun to work more smoothly, did little to redeem it in the eyes of the public. The scarcity of eggs was attributed entirely to faulty administration without allowance for the fact that the low level of home production was the result of a considered policy of feeding-stuffs priorities.² The 'Eggs versus Feeding-stuffs' controversy, extensively ventilated about this time in the Commons and in the correspondence columns of the press,³ owed its inception to the Ministry's misfortunes with the American eggs and to the agitations of specialist producers. It could, however, be no more than an academic issue: the advantages of shipping, even in unrefrigerated space, were on the side of the finished product and anyway the two types of cargo were not interchangeable.

Imports of eggs in shell *were* forced to give way, though not in favour of feeding-stuffs. Owing to the lack of fast well-ventilated ships American arrivals were so rare that the Ministry feared for the future of the distribution scheme; 'in winter we could not allocate one egg per month [per head] without shipments from U.S.A.'. However, as the Food Mission in Washington pointed out, a preference for eggs over other cargo was difficult to defend at a time of acute shipping shortage; the space they would occupy could be filled with $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 times the quantity of concentrated foods such as dried eggs and powdered milk. It was now that the research made since 1940 into the possibilities of *dried egg* began to justify the foresight of those who had set it afoot.

¹ See below, p. 96 *seq.*

² Even by Mr. Churchill, who wrote to Lord Woolton on 6th December: 'Amid your many successes in your difficult field, the egg distribution scheme seems to be an exception. I hear complaints from many sides, and the scarcity of eggs is palpable'. Churchill, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 753.

³ See, e.g., the letters to the *Daily Telegraph* by W. R. Morris Hammond, a specialist poultry farmer (22.9.41) and Sir Leonard Lyle, M.P. (2.10.41).

84 FOODS MAINLY HOME-PRODUCED: EGGS

Dried egg was no novelty in the United Kingdom; but the Chinese product imported before the war required soaking for as long as twelve hours before use, and the Ministry of Food had early instigated a search for a better process. Working on fresh English eggs the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research evolved a technique of *spray* drying which produced an article easily reconstituted and suitable, unlike its predecessor, for use in the home. The coming of Lend/Lease made it possible to obtain dried egg from the United States, and when the control scheme was introduced it offered a solution to the problem of replacing shell eggs for caterers and manufacturers. The successful efforts made by the Ministry to persuade the bakery trade to take up dried egg were particularly necessary now that stocks of frozen egg from China could no longer be replaced. The chief problems to be dealt with launching the novelty were to determine a price for a Lend/Lease product that had no pre-war history, and to group together traders in egg products no longer imported, so that they might obtain a compensating share in distribution; for a time two separate bodies drew supplies from the Ministry for the manufacturing trade, namely, the dried egg distributors' organisation and the 'Frozen Egg Pool' whose members received dried egg to supplement deficiencies in their allocations of frozen egg. The anomaly was removed in August 1943, when the Egg Products Distribution Association was set up. Dried egg for the *catering trade* was distributed by NEDAL from the first, as in this trade there was no difficulty of pre-war usage.¹

Now that the shell egg position demanded an extension of distribution for home use, it was necessary to ask production plants in the United States to increase their output and to insist on a high and uniform standard of quality. In February 1942 the Scientific Adviser visited the United States to discuss the drying specification, the main object of which must be to stress the maximum degree of hygiene in the preparation of the pulp. (Unfortunately the British specification, which would have minimised the danger of bacteria, was not adopted.) Samples of supplies arriving in the United Kingdom were carefully tested with a 'flavour score' test worked out by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research so as to determine the most reliable manufacturers. Arrangements with the United States concerning quality and packing became a matter of even greater urgency when eggs in shell had to be eliminated entirely from the February loadings, and when the import programme for 1942 was revised in March to exclude any further shipments except from Eire. The Ministry had aimed at beginning the distribution of dried egg at the end of March, in a special 'domestic pack' holding five ounces of powder, nominally equal to twelve eggs, which was to be put up

¹ See 'flow chart' facing p. 83.

in the United States: but packing difficulties there¹ were such that for the first allocation the Ministry had to undertake the repacking of bulk supplies, already in Great Britain, into tins originally intended for dried milk. By putting out the work among many packers it managed to get enough into the shops to start the first allocation by 24th June. Since the supply of eggs at its seasonal peak had permitted the record number of nine consumer allocations in April and May, the delay in the issue of dried egg was no disadvantage.

The working-out of a basis for retail distribution, as the best means of meeting an uncertain demand, was a matter for some discussion within the Ministry. Eggs Division, anxious to use the existing arrangements for distribution according to egg registrations through NEDAL, pleaded successfully that the first allocation should be made in this way for convenience' sake. Although Rationing Division agreed to this it was reluctant to make any decision affecting subsequent allocations, and hankered for some time after a distribution on 'points'. It was the sale of 'cooking quality' dried egg to the general public free of restriction (as one means of getting rid of the embarrassingly large stocks of second quality accumulating in the country) that finally defeated this project; distribution therefore continued through the same channels as shell eggs. As for the price of dried egg, this was arrived at by deducting a little from that of its nominal shell equivalent,² and so for the 5 oz. package, reckoned to contain the equivalent of a dozen eggs, the housewife was to pay 1s. 9d. or 1½d. an egg. A considerable publicity campaign accompanied the launching on the market of this ingenious and timely product, which eventually enabled the Ministry to claim that the total national consumption of 'egg solids' exceeded that before the war.

II

Dried egg, however, was no answer, as the shipping of shell eggs would have been, to the immediate problem of shortage in the winter of 1941-42. The time was not ripe for the Ministry, in defending itself against the Prime Minister's criticism in December,³ to press for reinstatement of the lower exemption limit for the small poultry-keeper and for a practical application of the principle of exchange of

¹ U.S. manufacturers' contracts, protective cases for shipment, and a technical difficulty concerning 'flowability' in packing were all factors in the delay.

² Experiments in the Ministry's Research Kitchen confirmed the scientists' views about the amount of reconstituted egg that could be got out of a packet of dried egg; but a hurried housewife, inexperienced in using it, could hardly be expected to get such results. The Ministry's Catering Division considered that two eggs equalled, practically speaking, three nominal dried eggs.

³ p. 82, above.

eggs for feeding-stuffs; the Minister had to be content to offer regrets and faint hopes:

‘The scheme can only distribute the eggs that it can obtain, and the scarcity of eggs has nothing to do with the scheme . . .

When the scheme was introduced I stated publicly that it would be difficult to work, and it has two weak points:

- (i) the exemption of 370,000 small producers who may dispose of their eggs as they wish: you will remember that only under pressure did I agree to the exemption of producers with as many as 50 hens.
- (ii) The lack of a satisfactory link between the issue of feeding-stuffs and the production of an appropriate number of eggs at the packing-stations. You yourself suggested making this link, but—no doubt for thoroughly practical reasons—neither the Agricultural Departments nor the industry support it.

Even on its present basis, I think the scheme will, in future, secure more satisfactory results. The Americans are now learning how to stock eggs for export, and we shall probably receive less bad ones from that country; the packing stations are getting over their teething troubles and their output has increased by 20 per cent. in the past fortnight:¹ public demand for eggs will be eased by the import of considerable quantities of dried eggs for domestic cooking purposes.

You will appreciate that it is really impossible nationally to control small articles of home production that have previously been sold—in large and small quantities—direct to the consumer. I have taken the view that the political, rather than the nutritional, factor was the important one: we had to convince the townspeople that we were doing everything possible to secure that they got a reasonable share of the available supply of eggs, and the distribution scheme has, at any rate, stopped queues for eggs in the towns.

The birds will be laying in greater number in two months’ time and we shall then hear less about eggs’.

Two months later, however, the shipping position and the decrease in feeding-stuffs that would result from the adoption of high-extraction flour combined to reinforce the case for tightening up the scheme. On administrative grounds alone the case was strong, for it was estimated that, after making allowance for exemptions, only about two-thirds or less of the eggs that should come to packing-stations

¹ Significant only as the recovery from the seasonal fall. The Prime Minister’s rejoinder should be noted: ‘The fact that 370,000 small producers have enough gumption to keep chickens is a matter for congratulation; under this head the only complaint I have heard is that this practice is not sufficiently encouraged. After all, the backyard fowls use up a lot of scrap, and so save cereals. . . .’ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 757–8.

were doing so.¹ So large a black market appeared to menace the very existence of the scheme. Eggs Division therefore put forward four proposals to avert its breakdown, viz.:

- (1) The lowering of the exemption limit from fifty birds to twenty;
- (2) The halving of the number of hens for which a domestic poultry-keeper might obtain 'feeding-stuffs rations', i.e., from twelve to six;
- (3) A bonus, over and above the normal ration, of feeding-stuffs to producers in return for deliveries of eggs to packing stations;
- (4) A grant of higher producers' prices.

The atmosphere appeared to be more favourable to the first of these than it had been nine months earlier; the tone of a debate in the House of Lords, on 11th March, was encouraging. (Moreover, the Division had dropped, indeed might almost be said to have forgotten, the obnoxious proposal to seize *all* the producer's eggs.) The achievement of Northern Ireland, for all that it was favoured by geography, was usefully held up to Whitehall as an example. The Ministry of Agriculture readily agreed that poultry-keepers with more than *twenty-five* birds (the number originally agreed between Departments the previous year) should be brought within the scheme. It also suggested that the domestic poultry-keeper's household ought to forgo its right to rationed eggs.

The proposals for curbing the domestic poultry-keepers, apples of the Prime Minister's eye, had difficulties whose solution—also the suggestion of the Ministry of Agriculture—was simple yet ingenious. A limitation of rationed feed to that for six hens, reasonable for the normal household, might bear heavily on the large household whose kitchen waste would maintain more than that number. To prohibit members of a poultry-keeper's household from obtaining rationed eggs was objectionable inasmuch as they had no legal right to obtain eggs from the poultry-keeper and might, therefore, be cut off from eggs altogether. Both these points were met by issuing one hen's ration of 'balancer-meal' against each egg counterfoil surrendered to the Food Office. No attempt was made to limit the number of hens that might be kept, within the limit of twenty-five at which a keeper became 'commercial', though it was agreed that keepers should be warned not to try and feed more poultry than could be given a diet properly balanced between household scraps and the official ration.

¹ The calculations were at once complex and indefinite. There were estimated to be 62 million poultry in Great Britain; 47 million 'commercial' and 15 million 'domestic'. The produce of the latter, with perhaps 4 million of the former ('under fifties') was exempt. It remained to estimate (a) how many of the others were hens in lay (b) what average egg production might be expected from each. Taking two-thirds of the total, say 28 millions, for (a), and 100 eggs a year for (b), the Ministry ought to have got twice as many eggs as it did.

(This was desirable not merely because it was likely to produce most eggs per bird, but also because it reduced the danger that hens might be fed on, for instance, sound bread and potatoes—what the Ministry of Food dubbed ‘induced waste’.) As commercial keepers might transfer their egg counterfoils to domestic keepers and so swell the demand for balancer meal, it was decided to face the legal objections and prohibit them also from buying eggs in a shop.¹

Great care, this time, was taken with publicity. The Domestic Poultry Keepers’ Council, which had not been consulted at all about the 1941 scheme, was given the opportunity to consider the new one well in advance; it had, indeed, already agreed to the principle of reducing the number of birds for which rations were allowed. The Ministry of Agriculture compiled a clear and persuasive leaflet or ‘Child’s Guide’ on the new scheme, for distribution to domestic poultry-keepers. Most important, the hurry of the previous year, occasioned by the stabilisation policy, was this time avoided; the new Order,² though dated 1st August, was not timed to come into operation until 3rd September. In the event, the changes passed off quietly. Though the passage of some fifteen months had no doubt injured the public to more stringent control measures, it seems likely that a scheme in this form would have been acceptable from the beginning.

III

A further simplification of the pricing system, as it affected producer and packer, had been effected in the spring of 1942, following on the Government’s decision to recompense farmers, to the extent of £20 million for the rise in wages that had been awarded in November 1941. Discussions with producers on the allocation of the share allotted to eggs (10d. a long hundred averaged over a year) had revealed their preference for a flat annual price, i.e., without seasonal variation; the Ministry of Food for its part wanted to save manpower in the packing-stations by paying for the eggs by simple count, instead of by grade. Both these suggestions were agreed on without difficulty or delay, though the producers’ representatives, mainly specialists, were emphatic that the price to which the Ministry was prepared to go—30s. 10d. a long hundred, or 3s. 1d. a dozen—was inadequate, and

¹ The domestic poultry-keeper was not, however, debarred from obtaining dried egg.

² S.R. & O. (1942) No. 1562. The delay turned out to be fortunate, for by an oversight in drafting, catering establishments had been debarred from obtaining eggs on behalf of their residents, the only exception to the general prohibition of sale by a controlled retailer to a caterer. An amending Order (S.R. & O. (1942) No. 1801) had therefore to be made, to come into force simultaneously with the main Order.

bombarded it with figures to show that 40s. was a reasonable minimum. These figures do not seem to have been seriously disputed; but, whatever Eggs Division may have thought, the Ministry as a whole and the Agricultural Departments were at one in standing firm on the award as it stood. Specialist poultry-breeders could not, they held, given the feeding-stuffs shortage and livestock policy generally, be given the status of marginal producers whose output must be stimulated, if need be, by the grant of higher prices to all producers; the general farmer, on whom the country must rely even more than in normal times for home-produced eggs, was, with his lower costs both for feed and overheads, doing well enough at the existing prices. Intelligible though this attitude may seem to the outsider, one can well understand that the specialists found it disappointing and even bewildering.¹

After some months of operating the distribution scheme, Eggs Division found that the packing trade was ripe for *concentration*. In June 1941, the existence of as many as 617 packing stations to absorb the greater quantity of eggs the Ministry then hoped to obtain had seemed an advantage. But as production declined it became apparent that there were many redundant stations and much waste of transport. The petrol demands of packers, often in order to collect in each other's territory, aroused complaints from the Ministry of War Transport; there was also a number of unsatisfactory stations consisting of little more than a shed to house the grading machine. Packers, in some cases critical of the number of licences granted, were themselves anxious that the Ministry should tackle the problem; and from a meeting held in November 1941 at their request, they went away to set up area committees and formulate schemes for the Ministry's approval. Except in one or two areas, however, no satisfactory scheme was forthcoming; for more was needed than mere adjustments of producer registrations from one packer to another. A costings report that won for packers in 1942 an increase of 9d. in their margin (hitherto 1s. 6d. a long hundred) bore out the Division's evidence of redundancy. A suggestion from the London Area Egg Officer provided the ultimate solution to the problem of closing down redundant packers, who were to be compensated from a levy (of 9d. a box) paid into a central pool by packers still operating; this compensation, administered by the packers' own organisation, NEPAL,² ultimately affected some 230 packers, whose licences were suspended by the Ministry. Remaining stations were allotted a zone in which to collect; an interesting feature of the scheme of transfer of producer registrations was that, thanks to the goodwill of the trade,

¹ At the same time, on purely Cost-of-Living-Index grounds, the retail price was reduced by 6d., i.e., to 2s. a dozen.

² National Egg Packers Association Limited (not to be confused with NEDAL).

it could be carried out and maintained on the slenderest of legal authority.¹

By the end of the third year of war both the differential price structure and the distribution scheme were therefore established in a way that might be expected to produce more satisfactory results. The fact that it did not was a reflection not on the new measures, but on the lateness of their application. More poultry flocks were now to be included at a time when the packing industry, already in course of concentration, would find it difficult to cope with extra rounds. The 25-bird restriction and the considerable simplification of a still complicated scheme of rations for domestic poultry-keepers were more valuable for the amount of feeding-stuffs saved than for any material difference they made in the supplies of eggs coming into packing-stations. Not even the twenty per cent. increase that had been cautiously estimated to result from the lowering of the limit was actually realised, though the discouraging returns from packing stations may partly be blamed on reduced feeding-stuffs rations. Additional priority demands during the coming winter of 1942-43 meant that six-to-seven weeks' supply would be needed for a single allocation; traders appealed to the Ministry to announce to the public the actual number, in order, of the allocation available, and the time it would take to distribute to all shops.

Dried egg, the only practical answer to the supply problem, was now causing some anxiety. Suspicion of its bacterial content, in spite of the care taken in testing arrivals, made its withdrawal from consumption even a possibility at one time. On the supply side, a situation of semi-shortage (the second allocation could not be made until October 1942, four months after the first) was succeeded by a glut the more embarrassing because it coincided with the seasonal flush of fresh eggs; stocks piled up, and it became necessary to add weight to the continual and enthusiastic efforts of Public Relations Division² in 'selling' dried egg, by reducing the price by 6d. a packet (to 1s. 3d.) on 27th June 1943. That the previous price had been too high is shown by the considerable rise in sales that followed this reduction. In September, when allocations became four- instead of eight-weekly, the proportion out of each allocation sold was naturally not maintained. During the winter months sales were higher, but not high enough to absorb, during the lowest period of shell egg production, more than

¹ The problem of re-distributing business was, of course, much greater in some areas than others; in Lancashire 49 stations out of 79 were closed. Article 1 (2) of S.R. & O. (1942) No. 275, empowering the Minister to direct producers to packing stations other than those with which they were registered, was the only means by which the arrangements could claim to be legalised. The compensation fee had no statutory basis.

² Opportunity was taken, for instance in November 1942, to rub in the 'ship-saving' value of dried egg; 'it was clearly far better for the war effort', the Press was told, 'to import 80,000 tons of dried egg than the 2,100,000 tons of feeding-stuffs required to produce their equivalent in shell eggs'. *Ministry of Food Bulletin*, 10th November 1942.

a quarter of the double allocation then allowed. (The *single* allocation was one packet for non-priority consumers, and two packets for priority consumers, in each four-weekly rationing period; for priority consumers the double allocation was indeed generous.) Some housewives simply 'did not need it all'.¹ So long as there was plenty of dried egg, the announced 'ration' of it had no relation either to the amount put out by NEDAL or the number of packages the consumer could actually buy; but Eggs Division preferred to maintain the semblance of restriction, fearing that 'de-rationing' might lead to a fall in demand.

Once it was realised that the lowering of the exemption limit was not going to bring many more eggs into packing-stations, renewed efforts to this end were made in other directions. The one course likely to yield results—a really generous rise in the official price—was still ruled out, all the more because the cereals position was so anxious in the winter of 1942–43. At a time when it was proposing to take barley and oats for bread, the Ministry of Food could not countenance anything that might encourage the feeding of more grain to poultry. (There was perhaps a flaw in its reasoning, for the existence of a large black market, the alternative to a higher controlled price, was no less effective a stimulus to the misuse of cereals.) Nevertheless, the constant prodding of the Prime Minister,² who refused to believe that some home-grown grain could not be found for hens, obliged Departments, even while dilution of bread was actually going on, to explore once again the possibilities of a bonus allocation of feeding-stuffs in return for egg deliveries. A detailed plan, by which poultry-keepers would be able to get a ton of feeding-stuffs for each ton of eggs delivered to the packing-stations, was worked out during the summer of 1943. Official opinion about it, outside the Eggs Division, was, however, lukewarm; uncertainty whether it would achieve its object was mixed with doubts about the possibility of sustaining the extra poultry if they were bred, and about

¹ Thus in a survey carried out for the Ministry by the British Market Research Bureau Ltd., in July 1944, 34 per cent. of some 256 housewives approached bought less than their entitlement. 24 per cent. 'had some stock in reserve'. The *Pure Dried Egg Consumer Survey*, also carried on for the Ministry, was designed to provide 'a continuous check on the progress' of dried-egg distribution; but its carefully drawn statistics had such a wide margin of error (admittedly so, since for the first allocation 'the survey estimates over the whole period . . . exceeded potential sales by 5 per cent.') that it could have value in recording general tendencies and preferences only.

² Mr. Churchill's minutes to the Minister of Agriculture (12th January 1943—'Please make me a plan to have more eggs', 28th February—'I wish I could persuade you to overcome the difficulties instead of merely entrenching yourself behind them', and 22nd March—'Much of the little poultry which is still kept in the country is fed on bread, which is still unrationed. . . . I should have thought that it would be better to make a further contribution to feeding-stuffs for the poultry than to keep them going with the most expensive form of food, namely, that which has already been prepared for human consumption') will be found in Churchill, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, pp. 826–7, 830–1, 836–7. At this time the Lord President's Committee was discussing the possibility that rations for pigs and poultry might have to be *reduced*.

United States reactions to a proposal to use more cereals for hens. In the end the scheme was shelved; the only additional cereals that could be found were an estimated 60,000 tons of barley, expected to be released by the decision, in November 1943, to end the dilution of flour.¹ This was about half what would have been required, in a year, for the ton-for-ton scheme, and even so some of it was claimed for pig-rearing: what could be spared for poultry was allocated for the breeding of extra chicks.

IV

The carrot being unavailable, it only remained to thicken the stick of Enforcement, so far as public opinion and shortage of manpower would permit. As early as July 1942 the suggestion had been made, in the course of a special 'Interdepartmental Conference on Maximising Sales off Farms', that the Ministry of Food's Area Egg Officers should be given access to the quarterly census returns of livestock on farms collected by the County War Agricultural Executive Committees. This would enable them to compare the number of poultry on any holding with that of the eggs it sent to the packing-station, and thus provide *prima facie* evidence for enforcement officers' inquiries. Producers were obliged, under the Ministry of Food's Control Order of 1942, to make such a return to packing stations, but the provision was widely ignored, even after the Ministry caused a printed form of return to be prepared, as the form itself put it, 'to help you make this return'. The most strenuous efforts failed to secure a better response than sixty per cent. of producers, and in some areas the figure was forty per cent. or less.² It took, however, till February 1944 to persuade the Ministry of Agriculture to allow access to the County Committees' returns. The decisive argument used by Eggs Division appears to have been that if a producer were prosecuted for failing to comply with the Ministry of Food's Order, he would raise the damaging, though in law insufficient, defence that he had made a similar return to the Ministry of Agriculture; in which case 'our prosecuting solicitor would of course have no option but to say that these returns are not available to the Ministry of Food'. Logically, agreement to make them available was followed by the dropping of the requirement to make returns to the packer.

¹ For this decision, and the general caution about the cereals position at this time, see Vol. I, pp. 269, 272-3.

² A packer at Earlston (Berwickshire) reported in October 1942 that out of 1294 producers on his books, 16 had submitted returns on the required date. A packer in Devonshire, at the same time, received one return out of 735. (This was before the Ministry began its 'drive' to secure returns.)

Certain loose provisions in the Control Orders—sometimes due to hasty drafting, sometimes to the ever-present difficulty of finding watertight legal wording—were found to make their enforcement harder. One loophole, glaring but easy to close, was revealed in February 1944, when a large department store, prosecuted for using eggs from its own flock of over 25 birds in its restaurant, successfully pleaded that cooked eggs served as a meal were specifically excepted in the very Order¹ under which the case had been brought. This, however, was an isolated example of ingenuity. Much more serious was the abuse arising out of the exemption of large areas in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland from the Control Orders. Want of transport facilities would have made the regular collection, and still more its corollary the regular supply, of eggs in these remote districts onerous, if not also absurd; and the exemption was therefore well founded.

The areas, listed in the Third Schedule to the various Eggs Orders, in which the Orders did not apply, had originally included the whole of the Orkney and Shetland Islands; but the Ministry caused packing-stations to be set up at Kirkwall and Lerwick, and the Mainlands of Orkney and Shetland were thereupon brought into the scheme, in January 1942. By mid-1943, the congregation of large numbers of Servicemen in the Islands, particularly the Orkneys, had produced a situation in which there was plenty of opportunity for the movement of eggs into uncontrolled, though legal, channels. Not merely were eggs taken home in quantity by troops going on leave, or bought and posted to relatives from the uncontrolled areas; they were also brought from uncontrolled areas to the Mainland of Orkney and posted there, and they were said to move from the uncontrolled Northern Islands to the uncontrolled Southern Islands, where most of the troops were stationed, *through the controlled area*. One naval drifter sailing daily to the island of Shapansay was dubbed the 'Egg Express'. In the Shetlands, army lorries were said to be 'systematically' collecting eggs, and a 'fine display' of small-size egg-boxes was to be seen for sale 'all over Lerwick'. Residents in the uncontrolled areas complained that they could not get eggs at all except at black-market prices.

Finding a remedy to this situation, without putting the '25-and-under' producer in the uncontrolled areas in a worse position than his fellow in the controlled areas, was difficult. The prohibition of the *delivery* of eggs from an uncontrolled to a controlled area (other than to a licensed buyer or packer) had proved ineffective; but the Ministry's Orders Committee, in June 1943, objected to a proposal to prohibit *movement* instead as too sweeping, forbidding, as it would

¹ S.R. & O. (1942) No. 1562, Articles 3 (a), 12 (a). Cf. Article 7 (2) of S.R. & O. (1944) No. 502.

have, a person from buying a few eggs in an uncontrolled area to take home. The Committee's suggestion that, instead, price control should be applied in the uncontrolled areas was rejected by Eggs Division as impracticable; there could not be a subsidised and unsubsidised egg price side by side. Eventually, in April 1944, the movement of eggs from an uncontrolled to a controlled area was so prohibited, but a saving clause was added, providing that it should be a successful defence for a person accused of transporting eggs illegally to prove, *inter alia*, that they had been acquired from a flock of 25 birds or less, and, moreover, that the price paid had not been more than the maximum retail price in the controlled area. The large-scale transactions that had been going on in Orkney and Shetland, and to a less extent in Argyllshire, were thus put unequivocally outside the law.

Even worse, because more general, was the exploitation of the clauses in the Control Orders relating to the sale of eggs for hatching. Such sales were legal, provided (a) the buyer gave the seller a written declaration that the eggs were being bought for that purpose (b) each egg was indelibly stamped 'H' in red (c) the seller kept records specifying the names of buyers, the quantity of eggs sold, and the date of the transaction. But these provisions soon proved difficult to enforce, and what was apparently an all but unprecedented trade—the sale by auction of hatching eggs—grew up, described as 'in effect a legalised black market . . . the operators of which are in a privileged position. They can obtain supplies legally and provided they obtain the declaration . . . they are unconcerned with the use to which the eggs are ultimately put. . . . A large number of the declarations have been proved to contain false names and addresses and no further action was possible'.

The control of hatching eggs was properly one for the Ministry of Agriculture, and discussions between the Departments had been initiated by Eggs Division in December 1942. In the middle of 1943 the Ministry of Agriculture had proposed to make an Order covering both hatching eggs and stock poultry (another prolific source of black-market dealings) that would have prohibited the sale of hatching eggs by auction or for re-sale (i.e., to a dealer), and in November of that year the proposed order had been unanimously agreed to by the representatives of producers. However, in mid-March 1944, apparently for want of staff, the Ministry of Agriculture told the Ministry of Food that it could not proceed with the Order. It so happened that a 'consolidated' Control Order for eggs, including the clauses for dealing with the Orkney and Shetland 'ramp', was all but ready for signature, and all that Eggs Division could do at short notice was to restore the provisions for hatching eggs that would otherwise have been deleted, with the addition that the buyer should

give his National Registration number. By this time, of course, the position had got considerably worse, and was arousing comment in the Press and from local authorities. The Town Clerk at Maidstone, for instance, wrote that on 28th March 1944 no fewer than 17,000 eggs were sold 'for hatching' at Maidstone market. Elsewhere, an auctioneer's clerk was said to have admitted that many eggs sold by his firm came from farmers who had no cockerels and that the eggs were therefore infertile, adding that they had received complaints on this score from a few people who had really been buying the eggs for hatching. Dealings in eggs for resale amounting to 4 and 6 thousand dozen eggs, over seven months, were unearched by investigations in Lincolnshire; the ruling retail price for such eggs appears to have been 8d. each, or four times the controlled price. In July 1944, therefore, the prohibitions originally included in the abortive Ministry of Agriculture Order were enacted by way of amendment to the Ministry of Food's own Order.¹

V

At the instance of the Ministry's Enforcement Division, there had been inserted in the consolidated Order of April 1944 two further obligations on egg retailers. They must in future keep accounts of their purchases, showing dates, quantities, categories, and descriptions, and the name and address of the vendor; and they might not buy eggs except from the single supplier—packing-station, wholesaler, or secondary wholesaler—nominated by them to the Food Office. This tying of a retailer to a single supplier had, in fact, formed part of the control scheme from the beginning; but hitherto its sanction had been applied merely to the wholesaler, who might, by the terms of his licence, only sell eggs to retailers who had nominated him. However, a Court had ruled, in the summer of 1943, that as the Order did not make it an offence for the retailer to buy from another wholesaler, the latter had not committed an offence by selling. It is difficult to see, in the light of the retailer-supplier tie now explicitly imposed, what purpose the new obligation to keep accounts served, other than that of creating an extra offence with which a retailer suspected of black-marketing could be charged. Such a one was not likely to provide evidence against himself by recording transactions that were *ipso facto* illegal. And it still remained open to him, if caught red-handed in the possession of unstamped eggs, to argue that these had been bought not in the way of business, but for private

¹ S.R. & O. (1944) No. 874, amending the principal Order, S.R. & O. (1944) No. 502.

use from a producer with less than 26 birds. In July 1944, this loophole was quietly closed by a further amendment to the Order, so drafted as to put the onus of proof on a defendant. In effect, it became an offence for anyone not a poultry-keeper to be in possession of unstamped eggs, unless he could show that they were lawfully acquired.¹

These new provisions went much against the grain of political opinion² in the fourth year of war; indeed one may doubt whether the last would have been accepted by higher authority had it not been disguised as a mere clarification of the existing law. The new Minister of Food, Colonel (now Lord) Llewellyn, was much concerned lest the Ministry's Orders should be open to attack as merely vexatious; and the Eggs Order as consolidated in April 1944 was patently vulnerable. As the official brief admitted, 'Even the Explanatory Note at the end invites the Question "Is it really necessary to go to these meticulous lengths?"' Indeed, the Order was commended to the Minister largely as a *pis aller*:

'... The fact is', he was told, 'that the Ministry has been placed in an impossible position as regards the control of eggs. We proposed originally to exempt from control the eggs produced by not more than 12 hens. The less responsible Press immediately printed cartoons of "Betty the 13th hen" having its neck wrung. This criticism was supported in high places and the late Minister, to placate opposition, increased the 12 to 25 [*sic*]. This made such a large hole in the bucket that effective control over home-produced eggs is impossible. . . .

'The Order is, therefore, bound to be complicated, but egg control is, I believe, essential (i) so as to enable us to provide eggs at a reasonable price to invalids, etc., (ii) to prevent the price going through the ceiling, which would seriously affect the Cost-of-Living Index figure.

'In spite, therefore, of the fact that the Order appears to be open to criticism, I recommend that it be approved'.

As a recital of historical facts, this minute left something to be desired; reasons have already been given³ for the view that the opposition to the original control scheme had more substance than Ministry officials would admit. Lord Woolton had been nearer the mark when he wrote in December 1941, apropos of one of the Treasury's appeals for help with the Cost-of-Living Index: 'I brought the eggs scheme in in a half-baked state solely on account of Treasury pressure and we are still suffering for it'. One may well doubt whether the Ministry could have found means, in an ever-growing stringency of labour, materials, and transport, to operate a scheme

¹ S.R. & O. (1944) No. 874, already cited, Art. I (b).

² Cf. the difficulties over food standards legislation, a little earlier. Vol. I, p. 317.

³ Above, p. 78.

for collecting the eggs of so many small poultry-keepers, or whether the eggs such keepers would have had to spare, outside the flush season, would have been sufficiently numerous to warrant the effort.

From 1945 onwards the Ministry's Enforcement Division was to launch a series of 'Egg Drives', as they were called, designed not so much to catch offenders as to promote observance of the law. Their results make it clear that the prohibition of hatching-egg auctions had scotched the organised black-market, leaving only a chronic tendency to petty irregularities.

'The drive [of 1945] has revealed', it was reported, 'that there is little organised black-marketing in home-produced eggs, but that a large number of producers have been disposing of eggs . . . in an illegal manner. The recipients of these eggs have, however, usually been friends, relatives or neighbours of the producers, or persons calling at their farms. It seems likely', the report added, putting its finger on a source of future weakness, 'that the latter type of offence will probably expand in view of the increase in petrol rations. . . .'

For all that the enforcement drives produced a substantial, and in the case of individual poultry-keepers after an Inspector's visit, often sensational, rise in deliveries of eggs to the packing stations, they could not alter by much the proportion coming under control. Only a greatly increased supply of feeding-stuffs—or of imported eggs—could do that. The decision to cut to the bone the rations allowed for hens on specialist holdings is readily defensible on general grounds of livestock policy; but its consequences for the control of eggs are without parallel for any other important food. Not merely were supplies almost savagely reduced, but they became more than ever dependent, not on an industry organised to serve a market as the specialist minority had been, but on a sideline, the traditional perquisite of farmers' wives, that could often hardly be dignified with the name of commercial enterprise. The country market, useful in normal times as an outlet for surplus eggs and a source of pin-money, was made into an engine of control just at the time when, thanks to the general food shortage, these functions were less than ever in demand. Egg control, from the countryman's point of view, was intrusive in a way that control of wheat, meat, or milk was not; its weakness went deeper than the caution of politicians, or the hostility of the Press.

VI

The insufficiency and irregularity of supplies, which precluded the application of full rationing to eggs, made the administration of the

promised *priority* scheme difficult. It could not be launched along with the rest of egg control in July 1941, partly because this would have further complicated what was already hasty and experimental, partly because arrangements for dealing with invalids had not yet been worked out. Its eventual introduction in November followed hard upon that of a more formal system of distribution to retailers, based on permits issued by local Food Offices. These showed the number of eggs the retailer was entitled to receive per allocation, priority consumers, i.e., children under six, expectant and nursing¹ mothers and certain classes of invalids,² counting as four ordinary consumers. The multiplier of four had been chosen in the belief that allocations, even in the winter, would not fall below one every fortnight, so that priority consumers would receive eggs at the rate of two a week. The Ministry had gained the impression, in its deliberations with the Special Diets Advisory Committee, that priorities were a matter of sentiment rather than nutrition; as a circular letter to doctors put it, 'while the food value of an egg is small, the psychological effect of including an egg in the diet of a patient, whose treatment confines him to a limited number of monotonous dishes, far outweighs its nutritive value'.

Officials were, therefore, rather taken aback to find, when reviewing the scheme in August 1942, that ten months' experience had led the medical advisers to conclude that a more regular priority supply was wanted. True, the interval between allocations had been at times at least four weeks, and, as the Advisory Committee pointed out, if a case of peptic ulcer only received one egg a week, the concession to invalids served no useful purpose. The Committee suggested that priority eggs should never fall below three per head per week; but this, given the existing list of priority consumers, would have bankrupted egg control completely. 'There are simply not enough eggs in winter to provide even three a week for under-fives, nursing and expectant mothers and invalids, even if no one else ever has an egg at all'. Had the Committee (asked officials) forgotten that dried egg was now on the market?

A solution was sought by withdrawing priority from children under five (holding ration book R.B.2) and substituting a double allowance

¹ Some misunderstanding arose between officials and their expert advisers on what was meant by 'nursing' mother. This was revealed (and cleared up) in the autumn of 1942, when it became apparent that the experts had not intended to limit priority eggs to those mothers who could literally be so described. Administratively this was important because the Ministry was enabled to dispense with a medical certificate for mothers with children under twelve months old. (Doctors had already protested that it was superfluous, since the child's ration book was sufficient proof of its existence.)

² There was some public confusion at the outset about the invalids' priority, given on submission of a medical certificate in a prescribed form that disguised the complaint from which the patient was suffering under a class number (I, II, etc.). The explanatory leaflets for doctors were sent out too late to reach them by 17th November, the day on which the scheme started, and both Headquarters and local offices of the Ministry were inundated with enquiries and complaints.

of dried egg; this reduction in the number of priority consumers enabled the Ministry to concede to the remainder a nominal allowance of three eggs a week. Two factors—one that might perhaps have been expected, the other not—combined to compel an early amendment of this plan. Dried egg, on account of the *salmonella* bacillus, was discovered to be dangerous for young children, and the medical advisers therefore asked for a restoration of priority eggs for those under two years old. On the administrative side, the working of the priority scheme provoked many complaints from the public and the trade, for the three-eggs-a-week concession had taken the form, in practice, of a multiplier of twelve times instead of four applied to each allocation; this was, however, not disclosed beyond the local food office. When, therefore, eggs were scarce, priority consumers complained that they got too many too seldom, and the spectacle of these quantities being taken home might evoke comment from the unprivileged; when eggs were plentiful, many priority consumers could not take up their allocations, and the disposal of eggs left on the retailers' hands was an invidious task at best.

The former difficulty proved the more tractable, thanks to a brilliant suggestion from the medical side. Infants under six months required no eggs at all; the 'dangerous age' for dried eggs might be said to end at eighteen months. If the priority entitlement to eggs ran for a year after the child was six months old, instead of from birth, no one except the mother, who could quite well make do with dried egg, would be any the worse, and there would be no extra demand for eggs. Indeed, the opportunity was taken, a little later, to give the expectant mother a double dried egg allowance also, in place of her priority 'in shell'.¹ As for the distribution problem, the Ministry's Rationing and Eggs Divisions each propounded solutions unacceptable to the other. The former would have liked to fix non-priority allocations rigidly, within each eight-weekly permit period,² and give any surplus as a bonus to priorities—a proposal rejected because of the difficulties that might arise in the flush season. The latter wished to confine priority consumers to a limited number of retailers, and clung to the idea for some little time despite the conclusive arguments of Rationing Division against it:

'... It is dragooning the public into certain specified shops and that is a thing the Minister shrinks from entirely and always. . . . There are several obvious objections—mother would be required to get her eggs from a different shop from the rest of the family.

¹ The new arrangement for children came into force on 7th March 1943; that for expectant mothers on 25th July, with the new ration book. See below, p. 651, for the changed régime for expectant mothers introduced on the latter date.

² An explanation of permit procedure generally will be found in the section on Rationing, pp. 547-551.

Certainly the retailer evacuated would dislike it, and he would dislike it even more if the whole family was taken off too. Again, people have medical certificates and therefore priority for a matter of only a few weeks. We cannot fiddle about with their registrations so nimbly as this would necessitate.'

Eventually a plan was hammered out by which the essential principle of egg distribution—an *allocation* at intervals determined by the varying supply position, instead of a *ration* perhaps varying in quantity, at regular intervals—was preserved, but only for non-priority consumers. For priority consumers there was henceforth to be, in effect, a ration of three eggs per head per week; the Commodity Division undertaking to arrange for deliveries at least fortnightly. The form of the retailer's permit was amended to show priority and non-priority eggs separately. After two years of experiment, the machinery of controlled distribution—of quasi-rationing, one might say—had reached finality.

* * * * *

Control of eggs was an ungrateful task—the most so, perhaps, of any the Ministry undertook. When Mr. Churchill pointed to the palpable scarcity of eggs as its principal weakness, his criticism was, for all that it did not recognise that the scarcity was the result of the Government's own deliberate policy, correct in diagnosing the reason for its unpopularity. No scheme of distribution, however well managed, could arouse public enthusiasm if all it had to distribute was thirty eggs per non-priority head per year; dried egg, notwithstanding all its virtues (which were to win belated public recognition when the end of Lend/Lease cut off supplies) was a replacement of limited usefulness, needing care in preparation, and deficient in aerating qualities. For all that, dried egg, and perhaps petrol rationing, may well have saved the control scheme from breakdown, the one by relieving the pressure of urban demand, the other by limiting to some extent the field for sales outside the scheme. After the war, despite the resumption of imports of eggs 'in shell', the difficulties of control did not diminish.

It is difficult to see how the scheme, as a scheme, could have been improved upon. Even the criticism most commonly heard—that the Ministry eggs were not only few but stale—in so far as it was firmly based, reflected conditions that could not be helped; the decimation of specialist flocks on the one hand, the impossibility of advance allocation on the other. Every effort was made to avoid delays in the packing-stations, and the problem was serious only in the season of scarcity; no egg, however, that has to pass through several stages of distribution can possibly be as fresh as one direct from a specialist

holding. Those from general farms may have lost their first freshness before they reach the packer. Moreover, want of transport for collection was a serious handicap in war-time.

Nor, quite apart from the justifications offered to Colonel Llewellyn in 1944—the needs of the priority consumer and of the Cost-of-Living Index—does it seem likely that the effort to control eggs could have been avoided. No Minister of Food in 1941 could have washed his hands of a shortage that had led to such injustices between town and country. Whether the policy that had produced the shortage, readily defended though it can be on broad grounds of principle, might not have been modified from its full rigour, had control of egg distribution been accepted as an inevitable result of it, is a question easier to ask than to answer. A more generous allowance of feeding-stuffs to specialist breeders would probably have yielded proportionately more eggs to packing stations, but the weight of opinion, as Mr. Churchill found, was overwhelmingly against any revision of priorities. At all events, no concession could have done more than ease the Eggs Division's worst anxieties. In a time of general food shortage, something must come low on the list; there are few things more embarrassing to a Controller than the food that does not quite disappear. As someone ruefully remarked after the war, 'we never had any trouble with bananas'.

ANNEX: EGG-BOXES UNDER CONTROL

The Ministry of Food's egg-box scheme merits special mention, not only as an essential part of the control of eggs, but also as an example of the general problem of food containers that grew ever more acute with war-time shortages of their raw material. Distribution of eggs depends absolutely upon a sufficiency, even at the height of the season, of boxes of adequate quality. From the first it was realised that an inducement must be provided for traders to return boxes; this was incorporated in the distribution scheme for imported eggs introduced in the autumn of 1940.¹ A charge of two shillings was levied on each box, and half-a-crown refunded on its return, complete with fittings, in sound condition. Depots were set up in each Port Area to receive these boxes, and a member of the wholesale egg trade became the Ministry's box supervisor. Boxes not returned yielded the Ministry a sizeable profit that went in aid of the 'balancing payment'; nevertheless, in this first winter of control the tendency was for boxes to accumulate, and though some storage difficulties were encountered as a result, the stock was a useful asset with which to start the full distribution scheme, in the summer of 1941.

Under full control the box scheme became more complicated, with, at first, a smaller charge for those used for home-produced eggs.

¹ See p. 69.

(These boxes were returnable by retailers only at the wholesaler's option—a source of grievance to the former.) These differential charges, coupled with a system of marks on boxes that rendered ready identification difficult, caused some confusion; dilapidated boxes issued by packing-stations got into the pool, and there was no adequate safeguard against refunds on 'home-produced' boxes being successfully claimed at the 'imported' rate. In April 1942, after lengthy negotiations with the trade, a revised comprehensive scheme was brought into operation which began at the first stage of distribution, the packing-station. Packing-stations would charge NEDAL, the Ministry-sponsored first-hand distributing company, three shillings a box, refunding half-a-crown upon its ultimate return; or less if it were not complete and in good condition; the charge to wholesalers and retailers was fixed at 2s. 3d. In order to economise transport, and storage space at the egg-box depots, traders were encouraged to return boxes direct to the packer, who for his part had a strong financial incentive to recover them. (Packing-stations' profits on the stocks of boxes held by them at the start of the scheme evoked some comment from Costings Division.)

At the beginning of 1943, however, the scheme needed further amendment, for a kind of Gresham's Law appeared to be in operation by which poor-quality boxes drove out good. (The temptation to dispose privately of any box that would fetch more than the half-crown refund (less carriage) was obviously strong.) The charge on boxes was therefore raised (to 4s. 6d. on sales to wholesalers, 5s. to retailers); the supplier, be he wholesaler or packer-wholesaler, was required to collect empties and return them to the box depot. The scale of credits was now fixed on boxes and fittings separately, i.e., in the form in which the supplier was now required to hand them over to the depot, and was such as to give him a gross return of 1s. on each exchange of a complete set (box with fittings).¹ The retailer no longer received any bonus over and above the return of his deposit.

Eggs Division strove unremittingly to impress upon packers and distributors the importance of the Box Scheme; and the railway companies were persuaded to give returned empties the same priority as foodstuffs. The substitution of rail for road haulage wherever possible, and the requirements of a controlled scheme of distribution, both made necessary the raising of the somewhat casual, not to say crude, standards of packing that prevailed in the home-produced trade before the war. In this, as in other respects, the greater orderliness that control brought to the egg trade may turn out to be lasting.

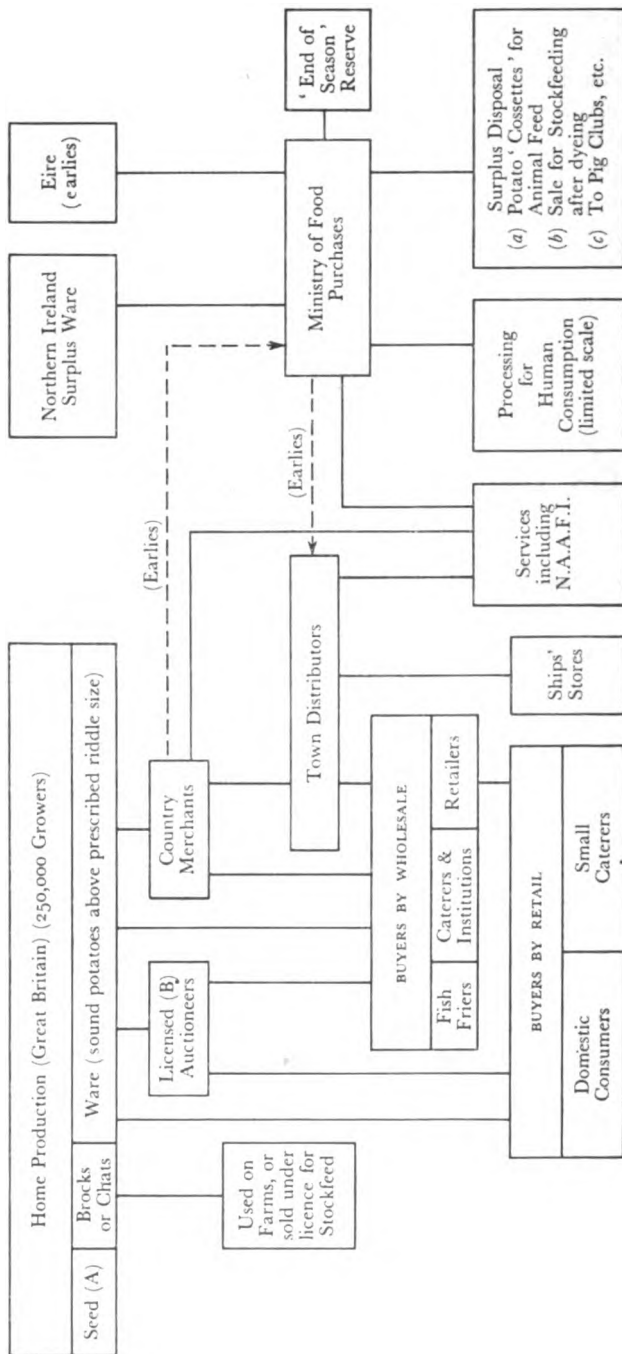
¹ It had been found that about one-third of the fittings became egg-stained and so attractive to vermin. Hence credit would in future be given only for clean and sound fittings. The gross return to the supplier of 1s. per set was diminished accordingly.

A:

Foods mainly Home-produced

Part III: Potatoes

FIGURE IV
Potatoes (1942)



(A) The arrangements for seed potatoes were separate, but similar in pattern to those for ware.
 (B) A diminishing band. In 1950, auctioneers' licences ceased to be issued.

CHAPTER VII

The Pre-war Plans and the Establishment of Control

I

'As a producer of problems for Food Controllers, the potato has no rival in the vegetable or the animal world. With average crops it yields a much higher food value per acre than any cereal, and is therefore attractive to administrators who have just learned about calories. But the advantage is diminished by the greater cost of production and the labour involved. Still more is it affected by the highly speculative nature of the crop, and the difficulty of making good a shortage by importation or of finding markets for a surplus. Before the War the yield might vary from $4\frac{1}{2}$ to $6\frac{1}{2}$ tons per acre; the total output of the United Kingdom [i.e., including all Ireland] might range from five to seven and a half million tons. Practically the whole of this must be consumed at home within the year; the bulk of the potato in relation to its value keeps export and import within limits; its perishability added to its bulk prevents long storage. Thus follows a great variation of price according to the size of the crop; with the potato we are back in the period before international trade; its price rises and falls precipitously, as did that of wheat in the Middle Ages.'

THUS BEVERIDGE¹ introduces his account, a *locus classicus* for obligatory reading by all would-be controllers, of the 'course of economic instruction' entered upon by the first Ministry of Food, when it tried to deal with potatoes. The potato queues of 1916-17, the result of simple price control applied to a short crop, had, aided and abetted by the Food (War) Committee of the Royal Society, persuaded the Government that, as Mr. Prothero said in February 1918, 'We could not have too many potatoes'.² Experience had already shown that the Exchequer might have to pay too heavy a price to get potatoes grown. In February 1917 the Prime Minister had promised growers a guaranteed price of £6 a ton; it certainly produced the potatoes, but a bountiful crop made nonsense of the attempt to give this price by merely prohibiting sales below it, and the War Cabinet, after considering various schemes of subsidy, decided on abolishing the minimum price. The Government undertook

¹ *op. cit.*, pp. 153-4.

² Quoted by Beveridge, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

to pay to the grower the difference between £6 and either the average price realised by him in any given month, or a 'base price' fixed, in self-defence, by the Food Controller—whichever was the greater. The cost was about £1.1 millions. For 1918, the bolder but in the event less expensive course was taken of purchasing, at prices laid down in advance, the whole of the main crop, and organising distribution within twenty-two 'zones'. The Ministry of Food successfully disposed of surplus potatoes on the Continent, and made a comparatively small loss on its trading account. There was, however, considerable heart-burning among farmers about the application of the guarantee to potatoes found to be blighted in the clamp. The Food Controller declined to pay for those at the price of sound potatoes, merely because the grower contended that they were sound when clamped; indeed, he claimed that the price for ware¹ potatoes had been fixed with due allowance for the incidence of blight in that year's crop. Only where the farmer could show that after increasing his potato acreage he had, through no fault of his own, encountered actual loss, did the Ministry of Food undertake to compensate him—at an eventual cost of £180,000.

There were those at the time who doubted the wisdom of this policy.

'The truth was'—wrote Coller afterwards—'that we [the Ministry of Food] rather resented the craze for planting potatoes: it was extremely unlikely that the comparative famine of last season [1916] would recur, and everything pointed to the glut which actually occurred. If we had realised that the result of this glut would be to denude our profits to the extent of some six millions, our resentment would have been more acute, although it would have been difficult to express it at a time when five potato-less days in public eating places were prescribed by Statutory Order. . . .'²

and, again, a little later on:

'the Food Production Department were engaged in devising costly methods for the utilisation of the surplus crop. There was to be farina; potatoes were to be dried; they were to be utilised by bakers in making bread; they were to be manufactured into potato flour. The schemes so ingeniously evolved deserved a better fate than that which ultimately befell them.'³

The prevailing view, however, enshrined in the First Report of the Wheat Commission in 1921, echoed by Beveridge in 1928, was that

¹ 'Ware' potatoes are those deemed fit for human consumption, as contrasted with 'seed', and 'brock' or 'chat' (for animal feeding, etc.).

² Coller, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

the expenditure was worth while as 'an insurance premium against the risk of cereal shortage' in 1919.¹ The Commission believed that 'substantial economies' would have been achieved through the incorporation of potatoes in dough for breadmaking, and that they would 'have formed a notable feature in the Nation's breadstuffs'. There was almost regret, one feels, that the Armistice should have interrupted progress towards this goal, which had much preoccupied the Ministry of Food during the first half of 1918.

In October 1917 the War Cabinet had sanctioned the use of part of the bread subsidy to encourage the use of potatoes by bakers, and the Ministry launched a scheme for supplying them through Food Control Committees at the subsidised price of £4 a ton. Recipes were prepared by the Food Economy Section and issued to the trade; priority arrangements were made for potato-peeling, steaming, and mashing machines to be supplied. But—as an otherwise sanguine memorandum for the War Cabinet admitted—'it has not been practicable to make the use of a definite percentage of potatoes compulsory, owing to difficulties in obtaining the necessary machinery, labour, storage and accommodation etc.' (A circular to Divisional Commissioners four days later, on 19th January 1918, was more candid; in the first four weeks of the scheme only 1,111 tons of potatoes had been applied for, and Commissioners were asked to find out why.) As late as June only 100 out of some 1,900 Food Control Committees had been persuaded to make the admixture compulsory. The advocates of the scheme clearly still had an uphill task in front of them.²

It seems certain, moreover, that the paper economies had themselves been set too high. The figure of 12½ per cent. which was initially set as a *maximum* (afterwards hopefully removed) for the weight of cooked mashed potatoes that might be added to the dough, would have meant a saving of only about 3 per cent. of flour, the rest going to replace the other ingredient—water.³ A 'substantial' economy—say of 10 per cent.—would have meant using stupendous quantities of potatoes in the bakehouses, even supposing it to have been technically possible. The use of potato flour was another matter; but supplies of this could not be produced in quantity overnight, as the second Ministry of Food was to discover.

In short, the belief that an easy way lay to hand, by which a large surplus of potatoes could readily be used up in the loaf, to the advantage of cereals supplies, was an illusion. The scepticism of

¹ Royal Commission on Wheat Supplies: *First Report* (1921), §38.

² *Ibid.* The Commission say 'no fewer than 100' Food Control Committees. They may have been in ignorance of the small proportion this represented; but it is odd to find Beveridge (*loc. cit.*) repeating their statement without comment.

³ Mashed potatoes are roughly 80 per cent. water; flour, 14 per cent. I am indebted to Dr. T. Moran of the St. Albans Cereals Research Station for this information.

Coller, writing in 1925, was insufficient to dispel it, and it lingered vaguely on to influence the plans of 1936 and after. One cannot go so far as to say that it prevented the Food (Defence Plans) Department from considering what is really the capital question of war-time potato policy—how many do we need?—but it may have been influential in helping to thrust the whole potato problem into the background until comparatively late in the period of planning. When the Chairman of the Potato Marketing Board, in April 1938, asked the Department for guidance on war-time production policy, he was referred to the Ministry of Agriculture with an alacrity that went beyond the requirements of protocol, and that suggests that little thought had been given to the implications, for the future Food Controller, of a policy of increasing the potato acreage. As late as the summer of 1939, when plans for a thoroughgoing control of potato distribution had been all but completed, the production programme for the first year of the ploughing-up campaign was still based on a calculation, not of requirements, but of possibilities, that had been made in the Ministry of Agriculture at the end of 1936, on the basis of the 25 per cent. cut in food imports that had been postulated at that time. For other foods, such as cereals, where any increase in home production could be taken up by reducing imports, this approach to the problem was safe enough; for potatoes it offered an embarrassing prospect of surplus. Nevertheless the Food (Defence Plans) Department agreed, with Treasury sanction, that the Ministry of Agriculture should go forward on this basis, i.e., for an increase of one-third over the pre-war acreage as an 'insurance against a shortage of other foods'.¹

This decision was, of course, taken without reference to any thorough analysis of the prospective food situation—such an analysis was not made until the spring of 1940—nor even any calculation of the degree of insurance the increase in acreage would provide. There might have been more hesitation about it, had the Department realised that, other things being equal, the extra potatoes would represent an addition of only about one per cent. of the total food supply in calories. On the other hand, the possibility that Channel Islands supplies might be cut off had barely been mentioned, nor the other more important merit of potatoes in war-time, their value as a source of the anti-scorbutic Vitamin C (ascorbic acid).

Indeed, the main economic problems of potatoes in war-time—supplies, prices, and disposal—were, in the months before war broke out, being dragged along at the tail of an elaborate scheme for the distribution of potatoes through a network of Government-controlled depots. The reason for such a scheme was the apprehension that air

¹ The original proposal of 1936 had been justified *inter alia* by the statement that 'potatoes can, if necessary, be incorporated in the loaf'.

raids would at once dislocate normal distribution.¹ The suggestion that depots would be necessary had been put by officials to Captain Mollett, Chairman of the Potato Marketing Board, as early as November 1936,² but matters considered more urgent had prevented its being followed up until the spring of 1938, when an anxious enquiry from Captain Mollett caused discussions to be resumed. The Food (Defence Plans) Department invited him to draw up a scheme of control in outline, and during that summer the outline began to be filled in, in consultation with the National Federation of Fruit and Potato Merchants.

The Munich crisis naturally hastened its completion. Captain Mollett and Mr. C. H. Lewis, a leading member of the Federation, were temporarily appointed Director- and Deputy Director-designate of Potatoes, and together they worked out a comprehensive and detailed plan, which was stated to be ready for the London area, the most urgent, in October 1938. In November, following on the official inquest on the state of war preparations,³ the Potato Marketing Board was formally asked, and agreed, to allow its staff to continue working on the control scheme; and by mid-April 1939 Captain Mollett and Mr. Lewis were reporting that preparations for the physical creation of potato control were complete. Depots had been selected and inspected all over the country; in consultation with the railway companies, ten Divisional Offices, based on the Potato Marketing Board lay-out, had been chosen and their staffs earmarked; Area Committees had been set up for each of the 29 Areas in Great Britain; arrangements made for the requisition of potato sacks and their subsequent management; a procedure for the loading and despatch of potatoes by road or rail laid down. Financial and accounting arrangements had been made; the special requirements of the Forces and NAAFI provided for; negotiations entered into for supplies from Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands.

All in all, the scheme had an impressive ring, and the Department viewed it 'with great admiration'. There still remained, however, certain questions to be settled before it could be put into force at the word 'go'. The most important of these was the price structure for potatoes under control. Leaving aside the question of the guaranteed market for an increased acreage, there was need to construct a schedule of prices at which the Food Controller would buy the different varieties, subdivided by area and soil; provision had also to

¹ Mr. C. H. Lewis comments (November 1953): '... our verbal instructions were very precise. We were to imagine and plan for the worst; the main cities were isolated; some, if not all, of the main line bridges were out of action... our plan was supposed to be based on the extreme and could be modified to suit the actual conditions'.

² In an interview on the 23rd, four days before the Food (Defence Plans) Department was formally established. All the officials present duly became members of the Department and in effect spoke for it.

³ See Vol. I, p. 43.

be made for distributive costs under the depot scheme. It was difficult to compute a satisfactory figure for the latter, for costs of normal distribution could not be applied to an arrangement geographically and functionally so novel. The future of the Potato Marketing Board itself had to be arranged in agreement with the Board and the Agricultural Departments; in principle the Board's functions would be taken over by the Ministry of Food 'for the duration', but the precise forms by which this should be done, and their timing, had to be worked out. Provisions for the control of 'brock' or 'chat' potatoes, i.e., those not suitable for human consumption or for seed, and for seed potatoes and manufactured potatoes had to be drawn up. Work on a comprehensive control Order began in May 1939, but so intractable did the work of drafting prove that on 23rd August it was suspended in favour of a provisional Order controlling prices merely, to hold the position until full control was ready. The Food (Defence Plans) Department was, it should be added, publicly committed to the plan by a Press Notice issued in May; and on the eve of war the nucleus of the future Potato Division of the Ministry of Food moved to St. John's College, Oxford, where it shared quarters with the control of fish distribution.

II

When war broke out prompt measures were taken, for potatoes as for other foods, to prevent a speculative rise of prices. The first 'provisional' prices Order was delayed for a few days by last-minute amendments, intended to bring the price-schedule previously agreed upon into line with current market prices. It came out on 9th September, and meanwhile these prices were displayed as 'voluntary' maxima at the principal markets. Within a week a new Order proved to be necessary, replacing the single retail price for all potatoes by separate prices for Grade A and Grade B varieties. (The former Order had prescribed separate prices only at the growers' and wholesale stages, with the result that retailers were asked to handle the better-class potatoes at a lower margin.) At the same time the former five price-zones into which Great Britain had been divided were transformed into six by the creation of a separate zone covering the South of England, with slightly higher growers' and wholesale prices. There was still trouble, however, in Lancashire, which was divided between two zones. Complaints came from wholesalers in Liverpool, and also in Accrington, Colne, and district, that the lower price they might charge, compared with those in Manchester and the surrounding towns, meant that

they could not afford to handle Lincolnshire potatoes, because the cost of carriage was too high. Fish-friers in Colne objected to being forced, because of this, to use wasteful Lancashire potatoes instead of Lincolnshire silt-grown potatoes for which they would willingly pay a higher price. Some of these and similar grievances were removed by a third Order in October, which extended the boundaries of the higher-priced zone further into Lancashire; for Liverpool, on account of its geographical isolation, a solution on these lines would not work.¹

These troubles never for one moment approached a hold-up of distribution, such as an ill-conceived price Order can bring about; there were plenty of potatoes everywhere, if not of the particular kind or quality that people would prefer. But they were not calculated to rouse enthusiasm in the trade for the full control that was promised, and to which the staff at Oxford were busy putting the final touches. When Captain Mollett, on 24th September, put forward for approval the introduction of the scheme not later than mid-October, he found his civil service colleagues less than lukewarm about it. The collapse of the fish scheme had made them wary of any system of distribution revolving round newly-created depots; the very fact that they attributed that collapse, not to inherent weakness but to the want of a strong enough Headquarters staff, made them wonder whether the staff of 'Potato Section', too, might not be overwhelmed as Mr. Bennett had been. One revolutionary feature of the potato scheme, the segregation of wholesale merchants into two groups, one of which might only collect potatoes from growers, the other distribute them from depots to retailers, in particular gave officials pause. They had always recognised that it would 'need careful handling'; already in August Mr. A. V. Alexander had objected to it as cutting right across Co-operative Society practice. Could it, they asked themselves, be justified in circumstances so unlike those for which it had been designed? Moreover, they were becoming aware that, inevitably since the scheme had been prepared with such speed, the net of consultation had not been cast as wide as was customary. The larger growers and merchants were no doubt satisfied with it; the smaller men, for that very reason, suspicious. The smallholders of Bedfordshire approached the Parliamentary Secretary (their Member of Parliament), to ask for representation on the Ministry's newly established advisory committee; the National Farmers' Union asked that it should be consulted before the scheme was brought into operation. By mid-October the Minister was said to be 'bombarded with objections'.

In vain it was argued on the other side that full control was necessary

¹ The three Orders were S.R. & O. (1939) Nos. 1149, 1200, 1489. A fourth Provisional Prices Order, introducing further sub-classifications, was made in January 1940 (S.R. & O. (1940) No. 111).

in order to ensure the guaranteed prices and orderly disposal of surplus that would be required if more potatoes were to be grown; that there was a danger of potatoes that might be required for seed being sold as ware; that proper provision ought to be made at once against end-of-season shortage; and that delay would demoralise the industry, which had been 'keyed-up for an early move'. These arguments, though they had force, could not, officials thought, justify changing the whole system of potato distribution. Some other scheme for guaranteeing prices for the 1940 crop would need to be worked out; the scheme already prepared for controlling seed potatoes might need to be introduced in some modified form, but that was all. In the atmosphere of October 1939, much weaker arguments than these would have been decisive. On the 27th, the House of Commons was told that there was no present intention of introducing the scheme; the Ministry would 'continue with a minimum of interference with ordinary channels of distribution and trade practices'.

III

The Ministry had now hastily to retrieve the baby that had been thrown out with the bath-water. Growers had been, in effect though not in form, deprived of the insurance provided by the Marketing Board's operations, for which the Government purchase incidental to the depot scheme would have been a substitute. The prices they were getting in November 1939 were everywhere well below the maxima prescribed in the provisional prices Orders. Restriction of marketing by control of the riddle, on pre-war lines, would need to be very drastic, since that expedient had been in abeyance for three months, and 'would be open to ill-informed public criticism' as a policy of deliberate food restriction in time of war. Yet, unless growers received a return for their whole crop at least as good as was customary, they would not merely be unwilling, but unable, to incur the costs of the heavier sowing that was required: 'the 1939 crop must be able to finance that of 1940'. Potato Section's census of growers' stocks indicated a prospective surplus of the order of 200,000 tons or more. Small wonder that the Potato Marketing Board should call a meeting without consulting its Chairman (Captain Mollett) and demand guaranteed prices for both 1939 and 1940 crops, and that the Ministry of Agriculture should urge that an early announcement be made of the Government's intentions.¹ Captain Mollett, as Director of Potato Supplies, therefore drew up a plan whose essential

¹ The Parliamentary Secretary had told Mr. Boothby, M.P., on 7th November: 'It is hoped that it will be possible to make a statement shortly'. *Official Report*, col. 1434.

feature was the creation of a fund for the purchase of surplus stocks out of a tonnage levy payable to the Ministry by 'first buyers' from producers. This was calculated to reduce Ministry interference with the trade to a minimum; the first buyer alone would require to be licensed and to make a return of his purchases. Many of the wholesalers concerned were already on the books of the Potato Marketing Board; the difficulties were to lie with such sales (some ten per cent.) as were not made through wholesalers. The problems of determining the respective type of licence and rate of levy were to take longer to solve than the month that it was at first hoped would be sufficient to get the scheme ready.

Parliament's recent interest in potatoes had attracted the attention of high authority; the Parliamentary Secretary himself considered this scheme at an unwontedly early stage and authorised Potato Section to discuss it, and also a modified version of the pre-war seed plan, with the trade. The Ministry did not propose to lay itself open a second time to the charge of non-consultation. Growers were not readily convinced that the fixed prices now promised were sufficient guarantee of security without more definite arrangements for the purchase of the surplus; wholesalers were concerned that there should be strict scrutiny of the issue of licences to retailers for direct trade with growers; retailers, however, had encouragingly conceded that they should pay a higher levy on direct sales than would be paid by the wholesaler provided that satisfactory trading margins could be determined. With these reservations, the trade was prepared to fall in with the scheme. What exactly should be done about the prospective surplus was not, for the moment, discussed; some undertaking had to be given, however, before the Parliamentary Christmas recess, and Mr. W. S. Morrison's statement in the House on 13th December was deliberately couched in 'rather general terms'.¹ The insurance fund (it said) would be used to ensure to farmers a reasonable return for any surplus crop remaining at the end of the [1939-40] season. As for the 1940 crop,

'In the event of a surplus, whether resulting from an expansion of acreage, or exceptional yields, the Ministry of Food will make the necessary arrangements for ensuring that growers will be enabled to obtain a remunerative return on their potato crop as a whole.'

Minimum, as well as maximum, growers' prices for the remainder of the 1939 season were the most tangible part of the guarantee; but the new price structure that was prepared accordingly, starting as it did from minimum prices approximately 5s. higher than the existing

¹ It is given in full in Annex I, p. 168, below.

maxima,¹ and also embodying the levy on sales, threatened to bear hardly on the poor; some paring of the retail margins made it possible to maintain the existing prices per lb,² but an increase in the price for 7 lb. lots was likely to affect the Cost-of-Living figure by about a quarter of a point. The Treasury preferred this to the alternative—a permanent subsidy for potatoes that would, moreover, require special machinery to administer, for the Ministry of Food did not trade in potatoes and therefore could not simply incur a loss. Increased consumption had, indeed, according to the December census returns, caused the prospective surplus to shrink; it was now put at less than 60,000 tons and might even—the Director of Potatoes said—disappear altogether. But this prospect—surprising only to the novice in potato statistics—though it provided reassurance that the potato fund would be self-supporting, did not lessen the urgency of getting the new arrangements working during January.

The building up of a new and elaborate price structure, though an enormous legal and administrative task to accomplish, in the face of some trade dissatisfaction, in such a short time, was a straightforward one; the awkward questions of policy centred on the precise nature of the guarantee offered on 13th December. There was a tendency in the Ministry of Agriculture and elsewhere to read into its ambiguities a promise that the Ministry of Food would purchase any potatoes for which growers could not find a market, supplementing any deficit in the levy fund from the Exchequer; and there was a general impression that it would do so at a price not less than the minima to be prescribed. The Ministry of Food refused, greatly to the disappointment of the Ministry of Agriculture, to accept any such responsibility or to make definite proposals then and there about compensation. In announcing the introduction of control it endeavoured to make its position clearer:

‘... the Minister’s assurance . . . of a reasonable return to growers for any surplus crop . . . does not imply that the Insurance Fund will be used to guarantee the payment of the prescribed minimum prices for sales of surplus stocks’.³

IV

The two Orders that provided the machinery of control came into force on 8th February 1940; the Ministry of Food prescribed the vast

¹ The *wholesale* margin was based on the mean between growers’ minimum and maximum prices (the minimum plus 10s.)—a source of dissatisfaction on the grounds that there could be no profit if the growers’ maxima were reached.

² It was alleged to be impossible to attack the wholesale margins, which now took careful account of delivery costs as they differed over the country. It was not to be expected, however, that retailers would welcome the cuts which were now made on smaller lots, for the consumers’ benefit. Further increases were ultimately allowed on sales of a stone and half-a-stone.

³ Ministry of Food Press Notice 249 (10th February 1940).

new schedules of growers' maximum and minimum prices variety by variety, wholesale and retail prices and licensing provisions for the sale of ware potatoes;¹ for seed potatoes the effect of the schedule was to fix prices to growers within a five-shilling range, and to fix a maximum wholesale margin; a Treasury Charges Order instituted a levy of 5s., 6s. or 7s. 6d. a ton for ware, and 2s. 6d. a ton for seed.² The price provisions had not been operating for long, however, before it was necessary to give the promised reconsideration to the uneasy structure of distributive margins, and the damage done by severe frosts in February provided growers also with a good case for increased prices. The schedules now offered to the trade proved generally acceptable, though growers had to be content with a half-promise that a further seasonal increase might be granted; as the chairman at a preliminary discussion had said, 'if the consumers should be eliminated there would be excellent prospects of settling all their differences'; consumers now had to pay about a farthing a pound more, a situation reluctantly accepted as inevitable by officials whose minds were more intensely occupied at the moment with the problem of getting a larger potato crop grown in 1940.³

The remainder of the 1939 crop produced few difficulties; a further increase in growers' prices was not in the end considered to be justified, though in May some minor adjustments to the schedule were made, which did not affect wholesale or retail prices.⁴

The 'Potato Fund' was more than adequate to deal with the tiny surplus of 5,280 tons,⁵ which was purchased for disposal to processing factories and owners of livestock; in spite of paying growers, after all, the current minimum prices, and in spite of the failure of some growers to send in their returns, the Fund had over £175,000 in hand at 31st July 1940. This considerable balance, accumulated at the expense of the Cost-of-Living figure, passed over automatically for use in handling the 1940 crop. It is possible that more old potatoes might have been 'surplus' if the full expectations of imports had been realised; until shipments had to be suspended owing to the military situation, Channel Island potatoes came forward in good time under the auspices of a marketing scheme which showed the value of the long established contact between Potato Section and the island authorities. As it was, a slight relaxation of the riddle restrictions on

¹ S.R. & O. (1940) No. 192.

² Payable by wholesale merchants, grower-salesmen, retailers, and seed merchants respectively (S.R. & O. (1940) No. 203).

³ The subsequent Order was S.R. & O. 1940, No. 402, dated 18th March, publicised with the defence that 'a rise in retail prices is normal at this time of the year'.

⁴ A reduction in minimum prices of Kerr's Pink and Redskin in northern and eastern counties was tempered by a concession for potatoes grown on skirtland soils. (S.R. & O. (1940) No. 799, dated 25th May.)

⁵ *Official Report*, 1.8.40, cols. 1425-6 (answer to Sir Adrian Baillie, M.P.).

the old crop was the only measure necessary to meet a temporary stringency.¹

The control scheme had been in operation for a few months only, and its limitations were not yet revealed. At any rate it had restored order in the potato trade when the regulating powers of the Potato Marketing Board and the impending regimentation of the depot scheme were both withdrawn. The latter may have been unjustly discredited, in the eyes of officials, by its superficial resemblance to the fish scheme. Beyond the fact that they both relied on depots, there was little in common between them; the potato scheme, unlike its neighbour, was based on complete familiarity and substantial agreement with the trade. Had disaster of the type expected come, there was reason to suppose that the minority objections, that weighed so much in October 1939, would not have seriously impeded the scheme's functioning. The absence of disaster not only meant its postponement, while the further consultations there had not been time for were pursued; it produced a lasting aversion towards interfering with trade channels more than was absolutely necessary. In five years of war potato control was never to attain the proportions of 1918.

¹ The tonnage received from Jersey in 1940 was 34,800 as compared with a six years average of 62,397 tons. (Total imports of earlies in the previous year had been about 130,000 tons.)

CHAPTER VIII

The 1940 Crop

I

THE MINISTER'S promises about the 1940 crop provided no great incentive for growers, still uncertain of the implications of the 1939 'guarantee', to increase their sowings of potatoes. The assurances of December were offset by the announcement in February that the minimum price would not necessarily be paid for surplus potatoes, and by dissatisfaction with the prices the 1939 crop was fetching. The Agricultural Departments were not, just then, pressing farmers hard on potatoes; but in March the shipping situation directed attention to the failure of planting to live up to expectations. It seemed likely that some 120,000 more acres would be planted in 1940, as against the 150,000 acres programmed for; moreover a smaller than normal yield was expected not only on account of wireworm in the newly-broken grasslands, but also, with less justification, merely because there had been a succession of good crops. The Interdepartmental Committee on Food Prices, considering on 21st March the question of prices for the 1940 crop, pointed out that only three or four weeks remained in which to influence supplies in the second year of war. Though the Committee made a tentative examination of the increase already apparent in costs of production, which should form the basis of growers' prices for the 1940 crop, it did not recommend announcing any basic minimum at the moment; encouragement should, it thought, rather take the form of an announcement reassuring growers about the fate of any surplus.

A few days later there was produced, apropos of the investigation into import programmes set afoot by the War Cabinet on 1st March,¹ the first detailed analysis of the ends and limitations of a policy of growing more potatoes. The aim of this inquiry, conducted jointly by senior officials from the Treasury, the Agricultural Departments, and the Ministry of Food, was to discover what contribution increased potato production might make towards saving imports of cereals, and its emphasis was on the manufacture of a surplus into human food; but it dealt with the question of price inducement also. Assurances of too high a remuneration to growers would be likely, it was thought, to prevent farmers from making every effort to find their own market. No new price offer would be justified at this stage in the season; 'it

¹ Vol. I, p. 74.

would now need a very sharp change in the expectation of profit from potato growing to increase the potato acreage substantially', and the distortion of price relations between the various crops might have serious political consequences. Unlike their colleagues of the Prices Committee, these officials dwelt more on the prospect of surplus than the possibility of shortage. Even if this should be no more than 250,000 tons (a figure based on a yield of only six tons an acre, as against the average of 6.7 tons) a more extensive factory programme than that already being inaugurated for the current surplus would be necessary. However, this had been foreseen; the Ministry of Food had already arranged to finance the construction of four further factories—making a total of six¹—that should manufacture potato meal for animal feeding. These would absorb 100,000 tons over a year. In addition, sugar-beet factories could be adapted for the same purpose during the off-season, and this would absorb—it was said—another 200,000 tons. (A little later, there was talk of using a further 60,000 tons in the making of farina, to replace lost supplies from Holland.)

What of the mixture of potato flour in the loaf, which had been the main objective of the inquiry in the first place? The special factories to be built, though not the sugar-beet factories, could, it was said, be used to make potato flour; but this was objected to on the ground that there would be a double loss of feeding-stuffs—the meal itself, and the wheat offals that would not be produced in consequence of potato flour being substituted for wheat flour. The objection was of very limited validity, because it assumed, first, that no alternative measure of conservation, such as increasing the extraction rate, would be employed in place of 'dilution', and, secondly, that the amount of potato flour would be substantial enough to matter. Perhaps because of the haste with which the report was drawn up, there had been confusion between the extent to which the use of potato flour was technically feasible—two per cent.—and the extent to which it could, eventually, be made available; the latter, on the assumption that 100,000 tons of potatoes could be processed, would be not more than 25,000 tons annually, or say one-half of one per cent. of wheat-flour supplies. Even so, the inquiry poured salutary cold water on the more extravagant hopes—of a five or even ten per cent. dilution—that had been pinned on potatoes, and much effort would have been saved later if its general conclusion—that an increased potato acreage could not guarantee any definite, calculable saving in tonnage—had not been allowed to drop out of sight.

The immediate outcome of these discussions was a further effort at reassurance, which was not well received by farmers; they were

¹ i.e., together with the one pre-war factory, set up at the instance of the Potato Marketing Board, and one previously arranged for by the Ministry of Food.

(it was reported to the Ministry of Food) hoping that the problem of the 1940 surplus might be dealt with by way of acreage payment. This method would not discriminate between deserving and undeserving cases, and the Ministry would have preferred to continue more or less on the 1939 basis, i.e., to pay a minimum price for potatoes removed from the market during the season, and something less for any surplus remaining at the end of it. (As yet it had not been decided that the 'Potato Fund' would in fact settle growers' surplus claims for 1939-40 at the minimum price.) By June, however, when authority was given to enter into formal negotiations about the main-crop prices for 1940, growers were clearly, as an official remarked, 'on a good bargaining wicket'.

For this change the war situation was, of course, responsible. It was difficult to remain cool about the potato supply with the enemy at the gates; the Ministry of Food was hard put to it during the summer to repel helpful suggestions that would have disorganised the trade completely in the interests of national safety. There was a proposal that the potatoes grown in the Wash area—more than a quarter of the whole main-crop—should be given the monopoly of the market in August and September, lest they be lost through enemy action. Some such course was favoured by the Division, but higher authority, including the Minister himself, doubted whether the risk justified the disturbance to normal trade channels, and it was not pursued. Dr. Redcliffe N. Salaman lent the weight of his unrivalled authority to a suggestion that the digging of new potatoes be prohibited until they were more or less mature, thus increasing the total supply by as much as 300,000 tons. The Division replied that this would create a present shortage in order to form a surplus that would have to be fed to livestock nine months later; nevertheless, the suggestion bore fruit in an Order prohibiting the lifting of *main-crop* potatoes before 1st August, except under licence from the County War Agricultural Executive Committee. This was the first small step towards the policy, later to be adopted, of regulated disposal of the crop throughout the season.

These ideas reflect a more general notion, namely, that the potato crop was in some especial way an insurance against national starvation. The Scientific Food Committee had specified a large quantity of potatoes—one pound per head per day—as part of the 'basal diet' proposals. 'Apart from bread, the potato is the most important single foodstuff in the basic diet for supplying energy; it is also the principal source of vitamin C available to the poorest class of consumer at a reasonable price'. The lack of precision in this statement was calculated to mislead, so far as energy was concerned; even a pound of potatoes a day, twice the average pre-war consumption, would provide only about 250 calories, as against 850 from the 12 oz. of bread

that had also been specified. Moreover, to furnish that amount of potatoes, even supposing people would be willing to eat them, was in the short run quite impossible.¹ The contribution of potatoes to vitamin-C supplies was far more substantial; even before the war they accounted for one-fifth of the total intake, and with supplies of citrus fruit cut off would obviously become much more important. Even so, the uncertainty of the crop would have made it very dangerous, in emergency, to bank on potatoes as a safeguard against scurvy.

When, that is to say, the scientists argued that 'the possibility of a surplus should not . . . be allowed to restrict the acreage planted which should be regarded as an insurance premium for greater security', and advocated that at least a further 200,000 acres should be planted in 1941, the sceptic would have been entitled to ask whether the premium, in relation to the certainty of cover, was not perhaps a little high. When they added that the Government should give remunerative prices 'combined with a complete and simply worded guarantee' that it would take over the surplus, he might well recall Beveridge's remark about a similar guarantee in 1917—'It is the business of civil servants to translate into complicated prose the simple raptures of their masters'.²

II

In such an atmosphere, it is perhaps odd that the Ministry of Food should have managed to retain the levy in its control arrangements for the main-crop of 1940. (New potatoes had been allowed a free market within a maximum prices framework agreed with the trade.)³ Its advantages were obvious, the more so since the levy fund continued to prosper and evasion was negligible; failing a Government decision to purchase the entire crop, farmers regarded the fund as at least some security against loss. While the fund might not cover the purchase of a large surplus, it would take a considerable burden from the Exchequer. The smooth working of present arrangements made it likely, too, that merchants would continue to accept a measure they had at first disliked. Against the levy had to be set the effect on consumer prices and 'the inconsistency of imposing a special tax

¹ And all but impossible in the long run. The scientists reckoned that the 7.7 million tons of ware that would be required could be got from 1.5 million acres; but this assumed that the proportion sold as ware would not diminish as acreage increased. On the basis of the quantities so sold in 1943 and 1944 it looks as if the required acreage would be more like 2 millions.

² *op. cit.*, p. 154.

³ S.R. & O. (1940) No. 637.

upon a commodity the consumption of which it is desired to increase'. Scruples on this point, however, were overcome by the financial advantages; the alternative was, after all, some form of subsidy to growers, the mere suggestion of which could be taken no further at the moment. So the Ministry successfully convinced itself that the small fraction¹ of a penny per lb. that the levy meant for retail prices was not likely to prejudice any propaganda for increased consumption.

It was necessary, therefore, to strike a price bargain that should give growers some encouragement to increase production in 1941, and yet not affect the cost of a staple food much more seriously than the levy had already done. The Interdepartmental Committee on Food Prices, anxious to redress an existing scale of priorities for home produce that put potatoes at the bottom of the list, recommended in August 1940 an increase for the 1941 crop of 15s. a ton, considerably more than the measured increase in costs.² By coincidence rather than design this corresponded to the figure that finally emerged from the Ministry of Food's argument with growers' representatives about the 1940 main-crop price.

The original offer to farmers at the time of the general price settlement had been of a 20 per cent. increase on 1939 prices in 1940, to be followed by a further 10 per cent. increase in 1941. The schedules for the early crop in August and September (later known as the 'bridge period', i.e., between old and new potatoes) had been accepted as an interim measure, representing no increase on prices at the end of the 1939 season, but operating in support of the ban on the early lifting of main-crop varieties. Growers therefore looked for a more generous offer for the main crop, and, as had been expected, criticised as inadequate the Ministry's offer of a minimum price based on £5 per ton in the cheapest English area and £4 10s. in the north of Scotland; they claimed a further 10s. but were met halfway with an increase of 5s. on *minimum* prices only, which made the total average increase 15s. a ton. When this arrangement was finally approved the Ministry considered that it had come well out of the negotiations.

In fact, however, growers were to do very well out of the 1940 crop, for three reasons. In the first place, not only was the price offered at the beginning of the season one that allowed for an increase in costs of about 30 per cent., but the Ministry had, at the request of the growers, committed itself to four seasonal increases in a published range of prices which covered the period until the following June. Secondly, the price to be guaranteed to growers for any potatoes that

¹ 1/37th; but the existence of the levy charge gave rise to other claims by traders that tended to raise prices.

² Vol. I, p. 90. Even this increased price would not bring potatoes into parity with other crops, but the provision of a virtually guaranteed market was felt to offset some of this disadvantage.

could not be marketed by the end of the season was now to be the season's *average* minimum price and not, as was at first decided, the lowest price, that of October. A third measure of reassurance, which the Ministry had seen fit to offer at the beginning of negotiations in order to create a favourable atmosphere, was an undertaking to pay the minimum price ruling at the time of delivery for any potatoes required for the factories, the needs of which, it was thought, would remove most of the surplus during the course of the season. In stressing the benefit of a growers' market that the factory programme would provide, the Ministry as yet gave little weight to the need for forming a deliberate policy of preserving long-keeping varieties and accumulating an end-of-season reserve. The possibility of a poorer yield, which had been allowed for in the price offered, and the fact that stop-gap supplies of new potatoes from abroad would not be coming in next spring were, for the time being, subordinated to the opposite and greater fear of leaving a surplus in the hands of indignant growers.

III

Comparatively few changes in the control scheme itself were made to deal with the 1940 crop. The technical details of price structure and margins remained the same, except that the difference between growers' maximum and minimum prices was now halved; a return to the distinctions of soil classification from the simpler schedule operative in August and September was made in the main-crop control Order;¹ and a clause was inserted to ensure that the wholesaler's minimum price should not be less than the grower's minimum price for the same class of potatoes. Wholesale margins, which the Ministry's Director of Costings thought too high, remained untouched for the season pending further investigations. (To obtain information concerning a merchant's trade in potatoes, as distinct from his trade in fruit and vegetables, was difficult even if the merchant were prepared to co-operate; and to apply an average based on such costings data to a margin that was to allow for 'the extreme case' of long haulage was no less so.) The opportunity of the new Orders was also taken to strengthen the licensing provisions in small ways. Growers would now require to be licensed as grower-salesmen if they wished to dispose, by way of occasional sale, of more than one ton during the season, and the holder of a licence to buy direct from growers, apt to be confused with any retailer licensed by the Food Control Committee, was now distinguished by the description 'licensed potato buyer'.

¹ S.R. & O. (1940) Nos. 1384, 1739, and 1928.

The higher prices now prescribed drew from one quarter a protest to which the Ministry gave a sympathetic hearing. Fish-friers, a far from inconsiderable group of potato users, claimed that the attempt to pass the increase on to the consumer, as the rest of the trade was able to do, was reducing their turnover. The Ministry, not yet ready to encourage potato consumption by a general subsidy, felt that this was a case in which a special grant could be justified. To pay fish-friers the difference between an agreed economic price and actual market prices would not be very expensive in subsidy, though it might be awkward to administer. Out of many suggested schemes one found favour by which the Ministry in effect decided every month on its own rate of payment. The fish-friers, some 24,000 in all, were invited to register¹ and return particulars of their purchases each month, and in cases where the average market price in the area, as computed by Area Potato Supervisors, exceeded 7s. 9d. a cwt. the Ministry would pay the difference. This subsidy to a special class of trade is interesting as the first instance of intervention by the Exchequer in potato prices, but in spite of Lord Woolton's explicit interest in a more general cheapening of potatoes it remained the only move for several months.

The November 1940 census of growers' stocks revealed that the crop yield, so far from being poor, was well above average. The prospect of a surplus of more than 450,000 tons at the end of the season, and pressure from the Ministry of Agriculture, convinced Potato Division that the factory programme must be supplemented by other measures to remove supplies from the current market. In the Division's view, a surplus of this size could not be absorbed by any probable increase in human consumption; the Ministry would have to buy in quantity for resale as stock-feed at a lower price.² This would create the anomaly that while the only outward sign of the Government's wish to increase the human consumption of potatoes and so save imported foods was a steadily rising price, potatoes would be subsidised as a food for animals. As a matter of expediency, however, the decision was finally approved on a month-to-month basis, though the scientists, watching the position jealously after the tacit rejection of the Basal Diet, had not been slow to attack the proposal, and to urge instead that a greater increase in human consumption be sought.

The practical arguments in favour of a 'vigorous policy of gradual disposal' (as the Director of Potatoes put it) were, however, overwhelming. The alternative, a temporary increase in the size of the ware riddle, following pre-war practice, would have had the further

¹ Ministry of Food Press Notice 649 announced the scheme, which was to start from 1st December, and to last till 30th June. In fact, the general subsidy was to make the scheme redundant before then.

² Such potatoes were dyed, in order to prevent them finding their way back into the ware market.

advantage of increasing the quantity of seed for the coming season, but was likely to affect the growers' 'remunerative return' and disorganise the market. The growers could make an impressive case against the postponement of purchase for livestock until nearer the end of the season. They had not the labour to move the whole surplus from the farms in the spring; its transport had far better be spread out over the season, particularly under air raid conditions; if potatoes were to be used to feed cattle they would be wanted before the beginning of the grazing season. That certain varieties were even then (it was said) deteriorating in the clamps and that all varieties would lose weight and require hand-picking if left after March, were incidental considerations. At the end of the season when there would be less demand for livestock feeding and potatoes were unsuitable for manufacture, the Ministry's loss on stocks purchased under the guarantee would be far greater. Nevertheless, the position needed to be, and was, carefully watched; up to the end of December a quota of 85,000 tons was allocated among the various areas, for January, 70,000 tons, and so on for each month as occasion required. The December stocks census, in fact, showed an apparent reduction in the surplus that was greater than had been expected, and local officers were advised that 'the situation calls for restraint and patience' in dealing with growers anxious to dispose of their stocks quickly. Actually, in the three months from mid-November to mid-February, less than 50,000 tons of potatoes were sold for cattle-feed under the scheme.

During January and February 1941 the possibilities of encouraging people to eat more potatoes were thoroughly canvassed at the Inter-departmental Committee on Food Prices. Opinions were divided on whether a slight reduction of price—1d. per 7 lb.—by way of subsidy would do the trick. The Director of Potatoes was convinced that it would not; moreover, as prices were generally below the maximum there was no guarantee that a subsidy would not simply go into the pockets of the trade. Arguments on the other side were pretty tenuous, the chief one being that the pre-war Bishop Auckland experiment, when potatoes were sold to the unemployed at half-price for a short time, had resulted in a 70 per cent. increase in consumption. It was therefore suggested that a rebate of 3d. per 7 lb. might be given to the poor, on the lines of the National Milk Scheme—a rather late example of the type of special provision fashionable in the early months of 1940, and one which was to founder on the administrative objections of the Ministry's Milk Division which would have had to handle it. Other suggestions were a special publicity campaign, for which the Treasury agreed to earmark £25,000;¹ the addition of cooked mashed

¹ The campaign was a small (and not conspicuously successful) affair in comparison with what was to come; it marks, however, the first appearance of the attractive gnome 'Potato Pete', who was to enliven the Ministry's publicity for several years.

potatoes to the loaf, which was dropped as technically objectionable; the greater use of potatoes in emergency and communal feeding; and the encouragement of caterers to serve larger helpings of potatoes in place of bread. More important, the Prices Committee endorsed a suggestion, originally made by Potato Division's Trade Adviser in December, that the Ministry should buy at least 100,000 tons of good-keeping potatoes for an end-of-season reserve, to help bridge the gap until the new crop should be available.

The Committee also, against the advice of the Division, recommended that the seasonal rise in prices, due in March, be cancelled by abolishing the levy; but a modified form of this proposal, intended to preserve the different treatment of sales through the wholesale trade and sales direct, was turned down by the Treasury, and it was not until after the Budget speech in April that the levy was turned into a subsidy, in the interests of the Cost-of-Living Index.

The proposed 'end-of-season' reserve, however, threatened to become a fiasco. Although the February 1941 stocks census put the surplus as high as 200,000 tons, the Ministry of Food found growers unwilling to sell best quality potatoes at less than the maximum price. This did not prevent their representatives from complaining to the Ministry of Agriculture that they could not find a market; they were said to be reluctant to plant the extra acreage that the Government had asked for, in spite of previous assurances. The Ministry of Agriculture therefore proposed an extension of the previous guarantee. Let the Ministry of Food undertake to buy any potatoes the growers cared to offer before the end of April 1941 at the minimum price appropriate to the season, on condition that growers undertook to sell any potatoes the Ministry might require at the same price. On 4th March, the Minister of Agriculture announced this new decision 'to relieve the farmer of the risk of being unable to find a market for his ware potatoes'. Had the concession been balanced by a genuine *quid pro quo*, the Ministry of Food stood to save a considerable sum, representing the difference between maximum and minimum prices, on the 'end of-season' reserve.¹ But the National Farmers' Union, with whom the bargain had been agreed, could not bind its members, and the precaution the Potato Division had taken of getting Treasury authority to pay up to the maximum after all, proved all too justified. (In the end, some 180,000 tons were secured.) The Division thereupon resolved that as experience had shown that growers always claimed a right to the maximum price, there should in future be fixed growers' prices.

¹ This would have been partly set-off by the fact that surplus potatoes remaining at the end of the season would have commanded only the maximum *mid-season* price.

IV

The subsidy of 10s. a ton, agreed on immediately after the 1941 Budget, was by no means the last expedient necessary to peg the price of the 1940 crop. New potatoes were likely to weight the potato index figure too heavily on the first of July, in spite of feverish plans for adjustments in other commodities; a suggestion that the Ministry of Food should buy up the early crop and sell it at a loss was dropped in favour of action to cheapen the final selling price of the old potatoes that remained. If it might be assumed that there were $4\frac{1}{2}$ times as many old potatoes as new on sale on 1st July, and the index figure for potatoes were calculated anew on this basis,¹ a maximum price of 8d. per 7 lb. by means of a subsidy on old potatoes would bring down the Ministry of Labour average price quotation to the 11d. required by the Interdepartmental Committee on Prices. The final outcome of discussions carried on through May and concluded at the beginning of June was a ratio of 5 to 1 for old and new, and a subsidised price for old potatoes of $6\frac{1}{2}$ d. for 7 lb., so as to give an average price quotation of $9\frac{1}{2}$ d. for 7 lb. on the 1st July—at a probable cost to the Exchequer of £762,000 for one month's subsidy. This would be the cost of reimbursing 'first buyers' for payments at the rate of 85s. a ton to growers. An alternative plan put forward by the Ministry's Economics Division was, taken at its face value, cheaper: to take over the remainder of the crop and employ the wholesale trade on commission as distributive agents, instead of allowing normal trade to continue and paying the subsidy through the existing levy machinery. Potato Division felt that such a departure would cause confusion and waste, and would be incalculable in cost; 'the condition of the remaining crop in mid-June is very unstable, and any attempt to collect the thousands of odd lots scattered throughout the United Kingdom and ensure distribution, without deprivation of any section of consumers, would be a speculation of an extreme type'. Moreover, the distributive trade, on whom the liability for the heavier subsidy would temporarily fall, was prepared to accept these arrangements,² for they enabled merchants to keep their old customers.

¹ Some justification for this manipulation could be found in the loss of Channel Islands new potatoes.

² Representatives of the wholesale and retail trade were asked for their views on 13th May. It is not surprising that they were somewhat bewildered as to the purpose of the scheme; they were given the politic answer that 'it was the aim of the Government that the crop should be fully consumed and that consumers should not be faced with the necessity of paying higher prices. It was, in fact, the policy of the Government to keep prices at a low level'.

Some reduction of the margin for transport allowed for in wholesale prices (sufficient in previous schedules to cover the cost of the longest haul, up to 35s.) had been in the minds of Economics Division for some time, and had even entered into Potato Division's proposals for the control of the 1941 crop. Now that the heavy subsidy was proposed as a 'heroic temporary measure' the need for every possible economy in distributive margins brought about the hasty introduction of a smaller transport allowance on the old crop; with provision for no more than 20s. a ton for transport charges (as the alleged generosity of wholesale margins was still a matter of controversy) there was more likelihood that the benefits of subsidy would be passed on to the consumer. In order that outlying areas¹ should not suffer because it was now unprofitable for the trade to supply them, the Ministry proposed to offer them potatoes from its reserves carried at its own expense. Thus, at the tail-end of the season, two important innovations crept into the structure of control to provide for special circumstances.

As arrangements had been made both to dispose of the surplus and to acquire a reserve it was not to be expected that the Ministry would encounter end-of-season difficulties. But there was a very unlucky combination of weather, a dry cold spring followed by heat and drought; the Ministry's reserve² was smaller than had been intended, and a part of it would not keep in the hot weather and had to be prematurely sold for stock-feed; the new crop of earlies was three weeks late. (Whether a rigorous policy of quality reservation *throughout the season* might have made for a better keeping reserve is problematical.³) The Ministry rebutted accusations that the shortage was due to its having sold potatoes for stock-feed, stating firmly that the trouble did not arise from lack of foresight or control; if any old potatoes had been left, said a note to the Prime Minister, 'they would have been sprouting in the clamps or melting in the bags'. In the meantime, the movement of the early crop was speeded up and equalised as far as possible. (A cornering of the market in earlies had taken place which in later years the Ministry set out to prevent by monopolising purchase from the main producing areas for the first few weeks of the season, and using the trade as agents for planned distribution.)

That there should be queues for potatoes in some districts, purely because of the weather, was perhaps unfortunate for morale after

¹ i.e., the South-West and South Wales, regions most distant from the main supplying area of Lincolnshire; and districts on the fringe of other scheduled areas.

² Reserve purchases of various types amounted to 180,000 tons, of which 105,000 were long-keeping potatoes. Stocks on 8th June were estimated at 250,000 tons (as compared with 38,000 tons in the previous year).

³ In succeeding years the purchase of long-keeping varieties for the reserve was initiated in November and December; but it is doubtful whether even the best keepers could have survived the heat of late June 1941.

the worst winter of the war for food supplies; material importance it had little, as there was no shortage of bread. But it was to have a lasting effect on the form of potato control. Growers for the following year's crop whose first crops had missed the early market were to ask for some remuneration other than price; and the fear of a few weeks' potato famine was to cause the Ministry in future to accumulate *early in the season* a reserve that was never less than twice as much as it had been in 1940-41.

CHAPTER IX

The 1941 Crop

I

PLANS FOR DEALING with the 1941 crop were necessarily under way long before the embarrassments of June and July were upon the Ministry of Food. The extra 200,000 acres budgeted for (and, in the event, exceeded) would, other things being equal, mean a surplus of unprecedented size, calling for heroic measures; the adoption of price stabilisation, with its corollary, a subsidy on potatoes, likewise caused heart-searching about the existing method of control. The fact, hitherto meritorious, that, thanks to general plenty and competition between traders, the retail price of potatoes was often below the maximum might become obnoxious if it threatened the accuracy of price forecasts, or obscured the result of applying a subsidy.¹ The opportunities for long and wasteful haulage of potatoes, offered by over-generous wholesale margins, aroused criticism at a time when transport economy was in the air. There were those in the Ministry therefore who hankered, though doubtfully, after a full-blooded scheme of Government purchase, such as had lately been recommended for carrots and onions. In May it was agreed between them and the more cautious Potato Division to explore two possible ways of reform that would not entail full control: a reduction in transport allowances, accompanied by a Ministry scheme for sending potatoes to areas remote from their source of supply, and an acreage subsidy that should be paid direct to growers, rather than a tonnage subsidy that must make use of merchants.

The first of these two proposals had to be hurried through on the *old* crop, as part of the Cost-of-Living Index manipulations, and hence became accepted policy for the future. The second was likewise accepted more readily than it might have been, because of the exceptional weather that summer; the lateness of the new season caused growers of early potatoes to lose, not only some of their crop, but their normal market opportunities in June and July, and a deputation from the National Farmers' Union asked for compensation. It could not be given by an increase of prices later in the season, for this would benefit those growers least who had lost most; and, moreover, would completely upset the careful arrangements made

¹ Cf. the trouble caused (Vol. I, p. 189) by the failure of the flour trade to pass on the whole of a permitted increase in price to the consumer.

for the 'bridge period', and the nice adjustment of the index, for whose sake the Treasury would now concede almost anything.

'It is a pity', wrote an observer within the Ministry, 'that this important point of principle should have to be decided in a hurry merely in order to deal with a temporary shortage of potatoes arising from special causes'. The *pros* and *cons* of an acreage subsidy were indeed various. At this stage in war-time potato production, when the increased acreage that the Government desired had mainly to be obtained piecemeal from new growers and from relatively inferior land, an acreage subsidy would offer not only an inducement to all growers but a compensation to marginal producers for a slow return on outlay. That there would be less inducement to good husbandry and a smaller proportionate remuneration to the established growers who produced a better crop per acre was an unfortunate but inevitable corollary. Though a small tonnage subsidy in addition would be necessary later on in the season to balance the proposed seasonal increases in growers' prices, the fact that less subsidy would have to be paid indirectly, through the goodwill of wholesalers, was an advantage. Potato Division claimed that the acreage subsidy would be easier to administer (rightly, as it involved a single payment, based on the June acreage returns, instead of a monthly one), but the existence of two types of subsidy, if the tonnage subsidy had to be retained in part, would make for more office work; moreover, an effective check on some 200,000 growers' claims was not considered possible. The disadvantage that a smaller return on tonnage might encourage a farmer to feed his potatoes to his stock instead of selling them was recognised, especially for Northern Ireland, where feeding to stock already accounted for about half of the crop;¹ any growth of this tendency in Great Britain was not yet regarded as serious. On the other hand, the fact that growers would get a cash advance early in the crop year would discourage the tendency to market supplies as early in the season as possible, and encourage the holding of long-keeping varieties. If the subsidy were extended to all potatoes, it would enable lower prices to be fixed for seed, and thus bring down the cost of producing the 1942 crop.

Although the Agricultural Departments were not enthusiastic about the new proposal, they were willing to abide by growers' views; the latter unanimously welcomed it (though some Scottish representatives afterwards had second thoughts, too late to affect the issue). Accordingly a reference to the acreage subsidy was included in a comprehensive statement of potato policy by a Government spokesman (the Duke of Norfolk) in the Lords on 6th August.²

¹ For this reason it was felt that to pay Northern Ireland farmers at the same rate could not be justified, but the Department of Agriculture successfully pleaded for the same conditions.

² Annex III. p. 170 below.

'The amount', said the Duke of Norfolk, 'has still to be decided'. As the acreage payment was to come out of growers' prices, the whole question of their remuneration, and of the desired level of retail prices, was bound up with it. A payment of £10 an acre—the mean, ultimately agreed upon, between the £5 suggested by the Treasury and the £15 asked for by Potato Division—was calculated to cost nearly £11 million, and even so would require a tonnage subsidy of some £2 million in addition if the retail price were to be kept at or below 8d. per 7 lb. It is not surprising that the Treasury should, notwithstanding the importunity of the Director of Potato Supplies, have taken some three weeks to reach its decision, both on the acreage payment and the nominal price against which it should be set-off. As to the latter, both the Agricultural Departments and the Treasury were convinced that an extra 10s. a ton would be sufficient inasmuch as growers had received so much more for the 1940 crop than the 20 per cent. originally promised; but the Ministry of Food was authorised to concede 15s., the sum it would have preferred, if the course of negotiations with the growers should make this necessary. That the extra 5s. would need to be offered was perhaps a foregone conclusion; growers maintained that the 1940 prices only should have been the basis for the addition of increased costs, and that a poor yield and an increase in blight was indicated; the English growers, in the hope of gaining by delays, even urged that prices should be fixed for another 'bridge period', until December only instead of May. Even the final offer of 5s. more did not satisfy them; but as the Ministry made a tentative promise¹ to consider the position if the gloomy forecast of yield should be justified, there was no further opposition.

II

The fact that the new prices were fixed, instead of maxima and minima, excited no comment from the trade so far as ware potatoes were concerned, though Scottish growers, who had last season fallen under the suspicion of sharp practice—passing off inferior seed at maximum prices—objected to the application of the principle to seed potatoes as well. Growers were once again to have the option of selling their potatoes to the Ministry before a certain date, finally fixed as 31st March;² but this year it was proposed to take powers to *direct*

¹ The National Farmers' Union did in fact attempt the following March to put forward a case for a retrospective increase in prices because of the abnormal degree of waste but, as there was no general complaint by growers, did not press it.

² The Ministry of Food would have preferred to make the end of February the closing date, in order to get its plans formulated early, but the wishes of the growers, supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, prevailed.

growers to sell stocks to the Ministry if the quantities offered voluntarily were insufficient for the end of season reserve. A further measure of caution was the prohibition in the new control Order of sales of ware potatoes for livestock feeding—not that such a prohibition could be effectively policed. A more important step, on paper, towards orderly marketing and the conservation of supplies was the accentuation of the normal seasonal rise in price. In comparison with the same month of the previous year October showed an increase of 5s. only, May, an increase of 20s.;¹ the prices proposed (but not yet announced) for June and July showed increases of 30s. and 35s. respectively. This generous allowance to cover deterioration during the last three months of the season would, it was hoped, tend to counteract growers' understandable reluctance to hold their crops over. These seasonal changes were made less apparent, however, by reductions on account of the acreage payment,² rising gradually from the middle of October to a full 30s. a ton; and growers had as yet no definite statement of the Ministry's intentions in June and July 1942.

The draft Order embodying the final price schedules nearly foundered at the Orders Committee on the vexed question of wholesale margins. It was proposed to maintain last year's margin of 35s. a ton (made up of 5s. for the country merchant, 10s. for bags, and 20s. for the town distributor) with the addition of the reduced allowance for transport costs that had operated at the close of the previous season. At that time much concern had been expressed that 'the disturbing problem arising from the inclusion in the merchants' margin of a fixed allowance to cover varying carriage charges had not yet been solved', and Potato Division had agreed to a reduction of 15s., in spite of its conviction that competition would have continued to prevent any excessive profits. But the Margins Committee still had suspicions about the size of wholesalers' margins, which naturally were not allayed by the fact that the attempts made by the Director of Costings to obtain figures from potato merchants had met with obstruction. Although the Division asserted that the margins were reasonable and that any attempt to reduce them 'would lead to a dislocation of the trade with disastrous political results'³ the question

¹ S.R. & O. (1941) No. 1532 (Main Crop Control Order No. 2; No. 1, fixing prices for the 'bridge period', was No. 1060).

² This balancing reduction in price led to a peculiar difficulty in the administration of the payment. Certain merchants had bought potatoes by the acre under contract, before the announcement of the payment, and stood to lose by the subsequent provision of lower tonnage prices. In these cases, about 100 altogether, the Treasury had to agree reluctantly to a double payment, for all growers had been automatically paid on acreage planted, and even where they had sold their crop in this way it was not considered practicable to recover any payment.

³ 'The framework of the wholesale price schedules is admittedly anomalous and inconsistent with general price policy governing food commodities, but this has been recognised from the start and its anomalous features were fully discussed and argued before the Orders Committee a year ago.'

was referred to higher authority. The introduction of the new price schedules was, however, urgent, and so the proposed margins were allowed to stand pending a fuller use of the Ministry's powers¹ to obtain accurate costings figures.

To the advantage of the wholesale trade also was a survival from the levy scheme that required the renewal of the Treasury Charges Order. The payment of additional levies by grower-salesmen, and retailers who bought direct from growers, had been a kind of restriction on 'double margins', and though the general levy was abolished the National Potatoes Advisory Council (including the retailers' representatives) was in favour of continuing the differential payments. Described as 'a means of preserving existing marginal relativities', this payment should logically have been collected all the year round; but in practice it came for convenience' sake to be confined to main-crop potatoes. During its first season so much extra work was entailed in collecting an inconsiderable amount from some 14,000 traders that the Treasury sanctioned a precedent of abandoning collection for the early crop months; at other times the payment was collected on the same form on which the tonnage subsidy was claimed, and by deduction there was no actual cash transaction. The interest of this survival lies less in any profit derived from it² than in the fact that it remained, in spite of occasional suggestions that it should be abolished, a permanent feature of the war-time potato price structure; a rare example of the application in practice of the Ministry's oft-reported objection to double margins in principle.

The need to give full protection to growers at one end of the distributive chain, and to the Cost-of-Living Index at the other, had greatly increased the administrative burdens on potato control. There were others, such as the need to make provision, now that rail transport was so difficult, for carrying the customary heavy load of seed potatoes from Scotland by sea, which entailed a freight subsidy to meet the greater carriage costs. The final plans for the 1941 season, involving as they did so many different types of unsatisfactory³ financial transaction, might well lead the Ministry's Internal Audit Division to ask, as its Economics Division had in the spring, whether it would not be better for the Ministry to take over the whole crop

¹ Under the Food (Inspection of Undertakings) Order, S.R. & O. (1941) No. 378.

² It was estimated that the levy would bring some £20,000 into Potato Division's account each year. Though never collected for any full year, it brought in, for example, £14,000 for the first seven months.

³ Because they depended on returns made by the interested party, which the Division had not the staff to check adequately. 'The present system on which the Exchequer is paying out large amounts in different forms of subsidy without a proper check on the amount claimed is unbusiness-like and unsatisfactory and may lead to a major scandal', wrote a senior official in September 1941. Complete Ministry purchase, however, would not obviate the necessity for a comprehensive check on merchants' returns. The difficulties of obtaining additional staff in Oxford are noted below.

and use the distributive trade as its agents. Obviously no change could be made at this late stage; but the question was to be reopened, after some bitter experience, in the following summer and at other times in the future when the organisation of potato control was under discussion.

III

The 1941 increase in acreage provided the largest crop grown in the United Kingdom since the two peak years of 1918 and 1919; stock census estimates were markedly higher than those that had caused the fear of a surplus in the previous year. Although there was every indication that the increase of approximately 10 per cent.¹ in domestic consumption each year was continuing, and although it was necessary, on account of disease, to make an allowance in estimation of as much as 18 per cent. (as compared with the average of 10 per cent.)² for waste, there still appeared to be enough to meet greater seed requirements for the even larger acreage of 1942 and to provide a residue for stock-feed. The provision of supplies for stock-feed was, however, handled with extreme caution; the importunities of Animal Feeding Stuffs Division to obtain the release of more potatoes for processing had sometimes to be resisted; in fact, Potato Division claimed in April 1942 that 'we have not sold for processing or stock-feed a single potato fit for human consumption since the beginning of the season'. So, too, the 1941 season was not one in which there were many new developments in potato processing; there had been little progress in obtaining the extra drying plant—factories it was hoped to set up in Northern Ireland were not yet completed.

¹ In August, with reference to the 1940 crop, the Duke of Norfolk had said: 'The measure of the increase in potato consumption is difficult to estimate, but it may safely be set down at not less than 400,000 tons during the past year. This is not a very great increase relatively to the normal annual consumption of about 3,750,000 tons, including that of Northern Ireland. . . .' Cf. the consumption figures in use at the time:

1939-40	3,600,000 tons
1940-41	4,100,000 tons
1941-42	4,700,000 tons

Consumption figures, however, at this primitive stage in statistical interpretation were merely inferences drawn from the *disappearance* of growers' stock with no corrective check on sales returns. This corrective factor, when applied retrospectively to the period during which subsidy claims were made, brought down the 1941 crop consumption figure; see below, p. 148, n. 4.

² An allowance of 18% was made after the December census as 'an outside figure so as to provide for the worst eventuality' now that Potato Division was aware of the prevalence of blight. A very generous allowance was made for wastage, as the tendency of stocks to lose weight in the clamps was likely to be greater in a season of blight. The Minister himself was considerably alarmed by the prospect of danger to potato supplies, which he discussed with Captain Mollett; he subsequently asked to be briefed on the position every month.

Experiments on the use of potato flour for bread¹ hung fire, although in theory plans were being made for such dilution if it should be required. For all that the Duke of Norfolk had said in August: '... it will rest largely with the consumer whether the alternative is to be potatoes or bread. It is the Government's duty to persuade the consumer that it is both in his own and in the national interest that the choice should be potatoes', there was no new publicity campaign; it was decided to take no active steps to encourage consumption until the supply position was clearer. Disease promised to be so extensive that the supply position hardly became clear at all; and official endeavours were directed instead towards eking out a bountiful but blighted crop till the end of the season.

Suspensions of disease among the crop also made it difficult to carry out the plans for the early purchase of an adequate reserve, for until the disease should have developed it was impossible to decide which particular stocks would keep. Not till well on in the New Year did the Ministry begin its attempt to obtain the desired 350,000 tons. 'After a short and abortive period of buying on voluntary lines' Potato Division had to seek further powers of compulsion in order to make its purchases. The first step taken was to prohibit the sale of certain varieties grown on the best soils except under licence,² interpreted vigorously to give the Ministry power to requisition the best-keeping varieties where it thought fit. Not only had these restrictions to be extended, but further assistance was needed later on in the form of transport restrictions by which the Division might prevent the dissipation of potatoes from the heavy producing areas and allow only those potatoes which were not keeping well to move into the main consuming areas.³ (In effect, the consuming area was cut off from its main source of supply, and depended on the assistance from the Ministry, discussed below.) The request for approval of these restrictions led to further sparring between Potato Division and the Ministry's Orders Committee, which was deeply concerned at the slow progress in accumulating the reserve, and in this as in some other cases interpreted rather broadly its function of criticising legislative proposals brought before it. The Committee had already declared

¹ The Duke of Norfolk's statement of 6th August had been sanguine about potato flour: 'Plant capable of being turned to this purpose already exists in Great Britain, and arrangements are now being made to set up additional plant in Northern Ireland. These factories will probably be ready by the end of the year. Provision will then have been made for a total output of 80,000 tons of potato flour annually, the equivalent of a 2 per cent. admixture with wheat flour for bread. . . .' For the further history of this *ignis fatuus*, see Vol. I, pp. 263-265.

² S.R. & O. (1952) No. 204, in force from 9th February.

³ S.R. & O. (1942) No. 457, which came into force on 16th March, extended the prohibition of sale, except under licence, to all potatoes of certain varieties grown in certain Scottish counties; No. 538, coming into force on 26th March, included those grown in certain English counties. No. 653 (Direction under the Food Transport Order) prohibited movement *into* specified areas except by permit, and came into force on 8th April.

that 'the various proposals submitted to them from time to time would be unlikely to achieve the objects they were designed to produce'. Yet wholesale requisitioning, proposed as an alternative to a series of contracts with growers, would not save time, as Potato Division pointed out. It was imperative that the potatoes bought for the reserve should be good keepers, and this could not be determined without careful inspection—necessarily a lengthy process in a season when disease was general. Requisitioning as a general measure would involve the Ministry in the purchase of inferior stocks; a farmer's labour, moreover, could not be requisitioned, whereas a contract could include the necessary labour provisions. But to *threaten* requisitioning in cases where a grower was reluctant to make a contract was an expedient of which the Division had actually availed itself on occasion. 'If any further measures were necessary', it asserted emphatically, 'we could not recommend the adoption of those recommended by Orders Committee'.

Though practical considerations supported the Division's policy, its defence against criticism of the constant need for further amendments was a little thin: 'for the Committee to say that if they are now necessary they should have been introduced at an earlier date is merely to say what can be said of most amending regulations in the Ministry and elsewhere'. It is true that the varying conditions of any crop year call for a certain readiness to improvise; but so much time has to be taken up in securing further legislation that it is an advantage to have the fullest powers ready for use in the first instance. (A distinction must be made here between the need to obtain further powers, and the application of those powers in the form of Directions which must be suited to the particular circumstances of the moment.) There was justification in the complaint that 'the Orders Committee have displayed a lively interest in these intricate operations, but do not appear to have appreciated their technical character. . . .' It was perhaps unduly difficult to convince the Committee that the several amendments gave Potato Division the actual power to requisition without the embarrassment of the word, that it had been wise in 'feeling its way over difficult ground'; but the Committee's quarrel with the *timing* of these operations might well have been fully justified if the weather had been bad, or blight had spread.

IV

In February and March rumours were current that potatoes were about to be rationed. They had little support from any official discussions, in which potatoes were a subsidiary part of the problem of

restricting flour consumption; but they brought about a considerable increase in buying for a short time. (They were attributed to a forecast by a newspaper astrologer.) Supply estimates at the beginning of March were indeed such as to argue against a mooted reduction in price to assist the Food Index figure; 'a cut in prices', it was stated, 'may upset the balance and cause temporary shortage, which in turn might necessitate rationing'. Potato Division was confident, nevertheless, that there was 'no present prospect of a shortage calling for rationing'; this had been put forward as an additional reason for requisitioning by the Orders Committee, who talked of the immediate preparation of a plan to avoid a temporary potato famine. Potato Division, however, was not to be rushed into this—and certainly not by way of immediate requisitioning. Instead it arranged to increase supplies from Northern Ireland.¹ The arrangements by which merchants were compelled to accept the poorer keepers for immediate consumption were not popular with the wholesale trade, many of whom deliberately ordered short in the hope of forcing the Ministry to abandon the scheme. But the Division continued resolutely to acquire a reserve, and by the beginning of May was not far short of its aim.

All these measures, embarked on at short notice, meant 'the sudden and unforeseeable onset of an enormous volume of new trading work'. The final prohibition of transport between areas left the Ministry the sole supplier of London, Birmingham, and other markets, and the purveyor of some 35,000 tons a week—a big undertaking, but, as the senior official responsible justified it,

'the only sure and effective way to achieve our policy was for the Potato Division to assume control of trading operations on a large scale and this accordingly was done . . . the net result was that the Potato Division had to buy and sell more than one million tons of potatoes throughout the season with an area organisation provided to deal with about half that volume of trade'.

Staff dispositions that year had been intended to cover the orderly and gradual progress of surplus disposal, any offers under the Ministerial guarantee, the new element of a large end-of-season reserve,² and also the purchase of first early varieties of the 1942 crop in certain areas. The consequences of the decision to engage in

¹ The flow of Northern Ireland supplies had been difficult to adjust that season, as during the early part of the season there had been little demand in Great Britain for its plentiful and sound potatoes. Now, when these potatoes were badly needed, transport congestion (on account of the arrival of American troops) hindered shipments. An officer of Potato Division visited Northern Ireland, however, and was able to arrange for an increase of shipments from 7,000 to 11,000 tons a week.

² Some concern had been shown early in the season about their adequacy even for these commitments.

large-scale trading with no more than the machinery to hand were almost disastrous in busy local offices such as that in the Eastern Area, and above all in the Payment Section at headquarters where arrears mounted up alarmingly; the manpower position in Oxford was such that Establishment could not immediately provide the increased number of clerks agreed on. The Ministry found itself 'forced into the position of having to pay first and check afterwards'; matters were put right as soon as possible, and growers and merchants pacified,¹ as staff became available; the destruction of some of the financial records by fire in January 1943 was another unfortunate setback; and the real solution, the installation of machine accounting equipment in a new office at Marston, near Oxford, could not be reached until April 1943.²

At the height of this anxiety discussions on the form of control for the 1942 crop were taking place in Potato Division, and one remedy suggested was the decentralisation of financial work into the divisional offices; the centralised system had had a lengthy trial, it was felt, and had 'proved to be inelastic, unwieldy and incapable of coping with the fluctuations inseparable from potato control and potato marketing'. However, the technical disadvantages of splitting up the work were finally agreed to outweigh the advantages; the future proportions of Ministry trading, though in fact they were by no means to diminish, were as yet indefinite; and one of the disadvantages of the acquisition of the staff so much needed at headquarters during that summer, namely, that the volume of work might not be sufficient to keep them fully employed in less busy seasons of the year, would apply even more to area staffs. All that could be done was to alter the organisation at headquarters to cope with arrears and such trading as the Ministry's obligations demanded. The Division affirmed that it did not intend to devitalise the trade³ by taking over its functions of selection and purchase unless absolutely necessary; in practice, however, it was each season to hold that some arrangements of the kind were called for, so as to ensure that at least a proportion of the better keepers might be distributed at the Ministry's discretion.

V

Unfortunately the very zeal with which the reserve had been accumulated was to add to the Ministry's difficulties, so different was

¹ The Ministry met representatives of claimants at Peterborough on 13th June 1942, and gave an assurance that claims would be quickly dealt with.

² The floor of the Clarendon Hotel, where Potato Finance was previously housed, was not strong enough to take the weight. All these difficulties—staff, accommodation, loss of records—left the Division with such a legacy of arrears that as late as July 1946 some few thousand claims still needed investigation.

³ Traders protested that while the Ministry directed distribution their own experienced staffs had to be kept on with nothing to do.

the position at the end of the season from that of the previous year. By the third week in June it became apparent that at least 50,000 tons would not be required for human consumption; the new crop, the distribution of which the Ministry was itself to direct for a few weeks, showed certain signs of being a heavy one and available early, while supplies of old potatoes were being taken up more and more slowly—a tendency no doubt increased by the indifferent quality of the potatoes that had appeared on the market in recent months as a result of Potato Division's conservation policy. The fact that growers apparently held considerable stocks that they had not sold to the Ministry complicated arrangements to get rid of the reserve (and constituted an argument in favour of taking over the whole crop after a certain date). Two beet factories were quickly reopened for potato drying, and permission was obtained to sell for stock-feed at the bargain price of £1 a ton; these emergency measures disposed of about 60,000 tons, but out of the end-of-season reserve approximately 20,000 tons remained that had gone too far to be cleared in this way.

The outcry raised by the Lincolnshire growers, in whose area most of this waste was concentrated, fed the suspicions entertained in many quarters about abnormal waste in the 1941 crop. Misleading figures about it were produced by the Minister of Agriculture at a meeting of the Lord President's Committee and had an embarrassing effect on that committee's decision concerning bread dilution; at about the same time the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in a letter to the Minister of Food, commented on the fact that out of a total crop of the order of eight million tons rather less than five had been eaten as human food. The Minister of Agriculture's statement that 760,000 tons of potatoes had rotted on farms because there was no adequate machinery for marketing them, took no account of his own Department's allowance for shrinkage, nor of blight that had made so large a proportion unavoidably unfit for market. A distinction ought to have been drawn between such waste and that created by the deliberate policy, well-intentioned but unlucky, of retaining a reserve that turned out to be too large by two to three days supply; it was indeed the use of special marketing machinery, not the want of it, that increased the incidence of waste in a bad year. The gap between total production and human consumption, about which the Chancellor was concerned, owed some of its size to the same cause, and the remainder to the larger amounts used for seed and fed to stock; that the proportion of potatoes used neither for human consumption nor seed had increased greatly in this year in particular could not be denied, though it could in part be explained by unavoidably abnormal waste.

During this crop year, potato control had acquired certain salient features that were to become lasting. The acreage payment, most

profitable to small and marginal growers, provided encouragement to increase production as a supposed insurance against famine. The precedent was set of directing marketing in times of difficulty by a number of restrictions of special application rather than by any grandiose requisitioning scheme. The principle of getting the poorer keepers sold first became an important part of every succeeding year's control plans; and though Potato Finance almost went under with the first sudden plunge into large-scale trading, the Division did not hesitate to take on itself for the future, in addition to any particular purchases made from time to time for special purposes, the bulk of the potato supply trade in the later months of the season. The inquests and recriminations that accompanied the final clearance of the year's crop were the result of misfortune rather than negligence or lack of powers; yet they are noteworthy because in consequence potato 'control' was brought into the limelight, and certain questions of policy were given a re-examination that might have proved salutary. Was the Ministry of Agriculture right in its conviction that the Ministry of Food was asking for more potatoes to be grown than it could handle, even to provide for reserve demands? How could the still greater abundance of the 1942 crop be best used in order that the Minister of Food might give to his colleagues a more convincing justification of his potato policy? Although human consumption of potatoes seemed to be steadily increasing, a crop so subject to disease could not, the Ministry now realised, be safely regarded as a 'buffer food' comparable to bread; what therefore were to be the implications of the present end-of-season fiasco for the still larger acreage contemplated in 1943? The extent to which these difficult and much-discussed problems were capable of satisfactory solution will appear in the account of subsequent crops.

CHAPTER X

The 1942 Crop

I

THE 1942 season was to see few important changes in the now complicated mechanism of crop control. To 'reduce the unknown quantity [of the 1941 crop] held by private owners', growers were warned that they should clear their stocks by 30th April, 'after which date the Ministry will be responsible for supplying the needs of the public in old potatoes' (the end of *March* was the last day on which growers could sell to the Ministry under the guarantee). The system of allowing freedom of movement only within various zones, imposed under the Food Transport Order, was to stay; it provided a flexible means of saving transport, being capable of temporary adjustment by general licence and special permit,¹ and as it forced traders to turn first to the perhaps less attractive production of their own zone, made waste less likely.

The resulting economy in the distances potatoes had to travel enabled Potato Division at last to overcome its qualms about the reduction of wholesale margins; the season of occasional scarcity, just ended, had, moreover, revealed that competition could no longer be regarded as a guarantee that the whole subsidy would be passed on to the consumer. For the 'bridge period' and thereafter the gross margin was lowered from 55s. to 40s.; the wholesaler could also claim as much as 7s. 6d. for delivering his potatoes to the retailer, a charge which came partly out of an adjusted retail margin and unfortunately had the ultimate effect of keeping it higher than costs, in later years, were thought to justify. With the exception of efforts made by opposing branches of the trade to juggle with this transport allowance, and of an unsuccessful attempt to get the retail margin whittled down, the 1942 schedules remained the basis of prices for the rest of the war. Growers also obtained their last price increase until 1945, namely the 5s. that had been promised in the spring to cover the latest wage award; the incline in prices towards the end of the season to offset wastage was made slightly steeper by transferring 5s. from the November price to the April price. An innovation that, however, was only to last one year was the elimination of the soil distinction from the wholesale price, growers being allowed their

¹ e.g., a general licence permitting the transport of potatoes from the Eastern counties into certain areas was revoked on 8th November, but permission to send certain classes of potatoes was granted by licence from Area Supervisors.

premium for potatoes grown on the better soils by means of a differential subsidy; the tonnage subsidy could now be based on the one lower wholesale price, with some saving to the Exchequer. But not only was the differential payment, as may be imagined, troublesome to administer;¹ its existence had also the effect of encouraging sales of the better sorts of potato and leaving the 'blacklands' and others as a drug on the market. This encouragement had to be partly corrected by a more rigid application of the transport restrictions and by directions prohibiting sales in certain areas—measures which were also valuable in protecting the end-of-season reserve.² A measure out of line with the established policy of getting rid of poorer quality potatoes first was relatively unimportant in a year of plenty; but it was fortunate that the differential subsidy was abandoned (chiefly for administrative reasons)³ before the stringencies of the 1943 season. A heavier tonnage subsidy had also to be paid this season as a consequence of the September decision, to be discussed later, to reduce the average retail price of maincrop potatoes to 1d. a lb.

This year, however, the main interest lies not in how Potato Division solved its own problems but in how it was called upon to help solve those of the Ministry as a whole. Consonant with the increasing stringency of shipping and the more elaborate efforts being made to devise an exact allocation of national resources were attempts to plan potato utilisation to the best advantage. Acreage was still on the increase; a further 150,000 acres had been scheduled in the cropping programme for 1942, and the Ministry of Food would have liked even more. Potatoes were once again beginning to attract attention as a possible diluent in flour; but if direct consumption continued to increase at the rate indicated by Potato Division's figures for 1941 and previous crop years, a yield of slightly more than average would be necessary to meet demand. Moreover, as was pointed out in March 1942, should the yield be plentiful 'the most effective method of utilising an increased supply of potatoes would be to persuade the public to consume them in their natural form, rather than to convert potatoes into potato flour as a diluent to bread'.

Through a series of misunderstandings, however, the Lord President's Committee was allowed to believe, for several months, that the addition of as much as two per cent. of potato flour to

¹ Roughly one form in five had to be returned to its sender for correction; the amount of checking the small staff of investigating accountants could carry out was small, and there were implications that a substantial number of wrong claims had been made.

² Hence, e.g., S.R. & O. (1942) No. 2307, confining sales of limestone and warp soil potatoes in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire to the Ministry from 9th November. A month later a similar restriction was imposed on Grade A potatoes grown in Lancashire and Cheshire, which was relevant to the end-of-season reserve only. Reservation of the better quality potatoes had such a noticeable effect on the market that at a press conference on 27th November the Ministry had to contradict a rumour that such potatoes were being shipped to Russia!

³ See below, p. 154.

'national flour' was an imminent practical possibility. (So ineffectively were Ministers briefed on the facts that from one meeting, on the agenda for which potato flour had not even been mentioned, emerged a decision inviting the Minister of Food to make arrangements 'forthwith' for adding it to the loaf—and this in June.) There were in fact two insuperable obstacles to the use of potato flour on any worth-while scale. One, which became apparent to reluctant Ministers in the autumn, was the absence of processing plant; the product of the beet-sugar factories, in which great hopes had been placed, turned out to be unsuitable. The second was the impossibility of guaranteeing that a sufficiency of potatoes would be available for processing without robbing the normal market; the Ministry could not very well ration potatoes in order to put them into the loaf.

The series of equivocations into which, for want of a clear formulation of the facts within his Department, the Minister of Food was driven during the Lord President's Committee discussions naturally made him insistent that every effort be made to avoid waste, which ought not, he told officials in July, to be too readily accepted as in the normal course of nature: 'I cannot believe that this is a view that a country that may be faced with starvation ought to take'. Again in October, after he had had to offer sceptical colleagues potato cassettes for animal feeding instead of potato flour for the loaf, Lord Woolton asked for an assurance that the potato crop was being used to full advantage:

'It is an alternative to the cereal crop as a form of food, and I think it is true to say that we have never, up to now, been forced during wartime to recognise it as such. We have made all the provision that was necessary to secure supplies, but not by any means all that is necessary to secure their controlled and beneficial use. . . .'

Re-examination of the problem within the Ministry, though exhaustive, threw up comparatively little that represented a sizeable contribution to it. The trouble lay in the unpredictable nature of any surplus, both in quantity and quality. Suggestions for the setting-up of further processing plant had an academic ring when the programme already agreed on was so far behind schedule. In any event economic operation of factories depended on a regular supply of potatoes; an allowance for processing requirements was, in fact, included in calculations of the reserve required for the end of the season 1942-43. The series of elaborate schemes for using potatoes in a variety of manufactured products from beer to breakfast foods might or might not have proved workable in practice; their impact on supplies could not have been other than negligible, and their pursuit over many months argues more for the Ministry's ingenuity than its sense of proportion.

More important was the resolve taken at this time to improve the statistical methods by which the supply available throughout the season was measured; anything that lessened the Ministry's uncertainties on this score was a help to rational disposal. A suggestion that the end-of-season reserve, the existence of which had added to waste in the summer of 1942, be limited was more controversial. It was correctly pointed out that any deficiency in the new potato crop would only equal half-a-week's supply of flour; the decision, notwithstanding, to acquire a stock of old potatoes sufficient to last into the middle of July¹ was based on quasi-political grounds. 'The question'—wrote an official—'is largely a choice of outcry. Are we to be blamed for not keeping a reserve, or for the waste which necessarily attends the keeping of a reserve?' The Minister's anxieties on the score of such waste were allayed by the assurance—which was only a half-truth—that shrinkage in potato clamps was a natural process, similar to that which, when performed in factories, was known as dehydration.² But the 'vigorous policy of gradual disposal' for stock-feed throughout the season, which had caused so much outcry from the scientists in 1940-41, was reaffirmed as an anti-waste measure.

There remained the obvious course, undertaken almost of necessity in the face of the glut of new potatoes that summer, yet vulnerable, like every other way of dealing with them, to changing fortune: an advertising campaign.

II

It was not to be expected that the campaign, embarked on as early as the middle of July,³ would be able to assist Potato Division so far as to dispose entirely of the glut. A suggestion made by the Minister of Labour that prices should be reduced was not acted upon.⁴

¹ The Treasury declined, however, to sanction a project, costing £4,400, to put 10,000 tons of potatoes in gas stores normally used for apples; pointing out that this quantity would not represent even a day's requirements.

² Nobody appears to have pointed out that potatoes in clamps not only lose water, but also (a) undergo starch oxidation, which reduces their nutritive value, (b) lose Vitamin C, (c) are liable to develop disease. Storage is in fact a necessary evil, resulting from eating habits that make the potato a daily item of food throughout the year.

³ Both Lord Woolton and Mr. Hudson mentioned potatoes in public speeches; a demonstration of potato dishes was given for the Press on 29th July, and a 'Food Fact' appearing during the week beginning 2nd August featured new potatoes: 'Enjoy them while you can—new potatoes here for only a few more weeks—a pre-war delicacy at a pre-war price. . . . Thanks to fair weather, farmers' foresight and the subsidy, we have a record potato crop'.

⁴ Producers would have regarded anything less than the promised prices as a breach of faith, and the principle of subsidising new potatoes had not yet been conceded. Retail prices during the 'bridge period', however, were brought down by a special subsidy.

Growers of earlys were clamouring to be able to clear their land for following crops; and merchants, aggrieved at the long-delayed reduction in their margins, were not a keen sales force in handling the abundant supplies. The Ministry had therefore to make arrangements to relieve the pressure by purchase and re-sale for stock-feed, or for storage for seed or processing later; one beet-sugar factory was opened ahead of the beet 'campaign' for a special three weeks' run.¹ Sales for human consumption, so far as could be ascertained from growers' returns, nevertheless showed an encouraging rise compared with last season. Public Relations Division had been quick off the mark with its potato publicity; all sections of the Division were concentrating on giving potatoes what they called 'the whole works'; demonstrations had been held for the catering trade, and a special grant of £50,000 had been made to advertise to the general public the merits of the potato. An expedient that fitted in conveniently with the 'Eat More Potatoes and Less Bread' campaign was a reduction in the price of potatoes and a rise in that of bread, undertaken to get a Cost-of-Living Index sum right. Though the potato, with a range of distributive margin that was still so wide, was a not altogether desirable choice for an even larger subsidy, rarely had any change of this sort been so much in harmony with general policy.²

Throughout the autumn the campaign increased considerably in scale. Like its less outstanding forerunner, the carrot campaign, it combined an attempt to interest seller as well as buyer. The caterer was urged to give bread only when it was demanded, and to increase the size of his helpings of potatoes; the fish frier was given some tangible encouragement in an increased allowance of fats in spite of shortage, and with the external help of the Potato Publicity Bureau the retailer was encouraged to increase his sales with some apparent success. Some new ideas included a competition for the best recipe provided by a housewife in the different Food Advice regions; potatoes ranked with dried egg and cheese as the ingredients prescribed in the 'Victory dish' campaign for caterers; for a time Ministry of Food notepaper bore the slogan (in red capitals), 'Eat Potatoes instead of Bread', and at the elaborate 'Potato Pete's Fair', held at Christmas-time on a bombed site in Oxford Street, London, visitors were given potato stamps to be 'cashed' later, by an arrangement with the trade association, at their local retail shop.

The tone of publicity ranged from the breezy frivolity of Potato Pete to the sober exhortations of 'the Potato Plan' advertisements, which attempted the task of explaining to the public why they should eat potatoes instead of bread; a sterner presentation of this truth, a

¹ The Ministry purchased 21,000 tons during August, of which 19,000 tons were sold as stock-feed and nearly 2,000 tons processed.

² See Vol. I, p. 189. Potato Division had to stagger the resultant change in retail and wholesale prices so as to avoid a barrage of claims for compensation.

photograph of torpedoed sailors clinging to an upturned boat, with the caption 'Your bread costs lives—eat potatoes instead' was evolved to meet the Minister's wish for a more urgent note in advertising, but apparently went a little too far for publication.¹ The personal note by which the Minister gave weight to the campaign was very real; he was willing to do more than to be photographed enjoying innumerable helpings of potato soup; letters asking for the co-operation of editors and of local catering trade associations went out over his signature; he interviewed the advertising specialists engaged on the campaign, asking about their difficulties and fixing for them an ambitious target, he even wrote his own copy—'The Potato Plan—an Explanation and an Appeal'; and he it was who urged the importance of giving Public Relations Division some indication of consumption movements every week as a guide to publicity, which was made possible by the employment of a team of thirteen women inspectors reporting to Potato Division.

Potatoes were not altogether promising ware for publicity, even though undertaken by the agents who had handled the pre-war 'Eat More Fruit' campaign. A report on two surveys carried out to estimate the success of 'the Potato Plan' mentions the difficulty of combating 'an innate conservatism about ways of serving staple foods, a feeling among many that they are already having to eat as many potatoes as they can stomach and among a minority, though a significant one, a disbelief in the nutritional value and harmlessness of the potato'. The increase in 'disappearance' of more than 15 per cent. indicated by the census returns appeared to be a success beyond all expectations and the Ministry had some justification, in the maintenance of a high increase, for the self-congratulation in which it indulged later.² But it was impossible to say, as Potato Division pointed out to Public Relations, how far the increase in human consumption was due to publicity; or to say, as Public Relations wished to do to justify its earlier arguments to the Treasury, that the money spent on the largest publicity campaign yet launched had saved the taxpayer anything in effecting a transfer of potatoes to human food from the expensive outlet of stockfeeding: 'if used for human consumption, potatoes attract tonnage subsidy and if processed or fed to stock a monetary loss is involved approximating to the same amount'.

The saving of money, however, was incidental to the main purpose of the campaign, to save shipping. There was much setting-off of

¹ It was in any event calculated to mislead the public; for ships not required for wheat would have still had to face risks with some other cargo, possibly a more dangerous one.

² At a Press Conference, on 19th October 1943, when the general increase in consumption was given as 12 per cent. on the previous year, and more than 50 per cent. on pre-war average consumption.

potato consumption figures against those for flour. In March 1943 the Economic Section of the War Cabinet Offices pointed out: 'Despite the slogan "Eat potatoes *instead* of bread" the increase in potato consumption has been accompanied by a slight increase in flour consumption (2,000 tons per week or about 2 per cent.)' That increase, however, was mainly due to special Service demands, and later figures for the period October 1942 to March 1943, making a deduction for this fact, showed an increase of 12,000 tons per week for potatoes to be compared with a *decrease* of 3,000 tons for flour in comparison with the same period of the previous year. As the 'calorific conversion ratio' of 85 per cent. extraction flour to potatoes was now put by the Medical Research Council at 1 : 5.61 it might be claimed that, for the winter concerned at any rate, some part of the desired effect had been achieved. Such comparisons are too simple to be of much value, since they take into account neither changes in the supply of other foods, nor possible fluctuations in the population's food requirements, nor yet the weaknesses in potato statistics. The best testimony, perhaps, to the success of the 1942 campaign as far as potatoes alone were concerned was the fact that its slogans survived in the public mind to be repeated against the Ministry in 1944-45,¹ when potatoes were scarce. The effect of a successful publicity campaign does not easily wear off.

III

The same variability in supply, on paper at least, had been apparent even during a year in which confidence had seemed justified. But a period of anxiety and its subsequent relief were salutary in giving high officials a realistic appreciation of the value of any statistics about potatoes. 'No one knows', wrote a high official upon enlightenment, 'or under present circumstances can know, how many potatoes there are or what is their condition. The farmer guesses as to the quantity of potatoes in his clamp, in many cases without even inspecting them; the Division in turn guesses as to their quality and the prospective demand'. Improvements in statistical control had been an integral part of the declared policy at the beginning of the season. Some sections of Potato Division had little hope of being able to give a more accurate picture;² returns of stocks held by growers and

¹ For example the cartoon by 'Moon' in the *Sunday Dispatch*, 7th January 1945, over the caption 'Cancel the Campaign—There's a Shortage Now', showing a Ministry of Food van disgorging officials laden with slogans reversing those even then being pasted on a hoarding.

² A senior official wrote in August 1942: 'Their statistics are crude enough, although on the whole they have been shown to be fairly reliable, but their crudity is due to the fact that we cannot trouble farmers with elaborate returns. It is only with some difficulty that we have recently persuaded the Agricultural Departments to agree to the insertion of one small additional item in the very simple return furnished to us periodically for purposes of the census. Accurate statistics must be built up from accurate and reliable material, and we can never hope to get such material from the potato growers'.

merchants were still used, as they had been by the Potato Marketing Board, as the main source of computed information, but an attempt was made to check their accuracy by inspection;¹ the cross-section of retailers in the various regions who had occasionally in the past been asked for returns of their sales was considerably extended;² a more reliable guide, which was used this year for the first time in comparison with these returns and those from growers of the tonnage moved from farms, was provided by the tonnage subsidy claims³ (these, in fact, caused the Ministry quietly to revise its estimates of 1941 consumption and of the subsequent increase, with a bewildering effect on the Treasury).⁴ But there was still a long gap between the beginning of November and the beginning of January when no census of growers' stocks was taken, and the figures obtained at the later date indicated a disquietingly large disappearance. Growers might have overestimated their stocks in the November returns, when some of their potatoes were still in the ground; more doubtful potatoes might have been discarded by farmers for much-needed stock-feed, publicity having led them to think that supplies were so plentiful that less care was necessary in maintaining stocks. The public, too, might have had a similar impression about the unimportance of wasting potatoes in the kitchen.

In February 1943, therefore, there was talk of calling off the campaign; but the Minister justifiably objected to being asked to do so 'on the basis' (as he said) 'of a series of speculations'; he was prepared to continue the publicity and run the risk of a shortage at the end of the season, although he agreed that no potatoes fit for

¹ About 1,000 growers were visited by Area officers, who found slightly more than 1½% of over-estimation. (At best another estimate!)

² 500 retailers were asked for their sales in September 1942. Efforts to extend the sample to well over a thousand were not so effective as could be hoped, since a corresponding proportion of returns were not sent back, or were badly filled in, or showed no sales of potatoes.

³ It should be noted, however, that this check was of limited value in being but a sample. Only when the total figure of tonnage subsidy paid in any given period had been taken out could there be a really trustworthy figure for human consumption—and this Potato Finance could not give until too late for it to be of any assistance in planning future utilisation. A comparison of estimates from the three sources for the last three months of 1942 gives an average increase in consumption of 18% but reveals no consistent variations in the three methods.

⁴ As the revised estimates of the 1941 disappearance were lower, the apparent increase in 1942 crop consumption had therefore to be put at a higher rate than had been previously given. The higher estimates found their way into a report from the Central Statistical Office to the Lord President's Committee without explanation. 'It is embarrassing for me when I have to explain to my colleagues in the Government why the Department's estimates of potato consumption vary so considerably . . .' the Minister complained. 'I am aware of the difficulties of estimation but when we improve our technique of estimation let us publish it at regular intervals'. A further revision was made when a sample of subsidy claims for the 1942 season was to hand, when the Division felt justified in assuming a 20% increase in consumption over the previous year.

human consumption should be processed for flour.¹ Everything possible was being done to increase the quantity of potatoes available, including the alteration of the riddles—so that the Ministry was in the position of following up its publicity by offering the smallest potatoes yet permitted to be sold.² The wisdom of making no more drastic changes on account of one census result was borne out by the next, for the February returns showed a decline in the stocks so much smaller as to lead to an assumption of an increase in demand of only 13 per cent. instead of the previous 20 per cent. Calculations gave a prospective *surplus* of the order of 200,000 tons, and the figure in the March census was very little less in spite of an allowance of 18 per cent. now made for waste because of the early incidence of sprouting in the clamps. Though there is no reason to place greater or less confidence in a statistical estimate that presents an encouraging picture than in one that presents the reverse, the deterioration caused by the mild weather was an additional argument in favour of acting on the later set of assumptions and arranging for an expansion of the very limited processing programme then in operation. Experiments that were being conducted this season on the proportions of shrinkage in clamps³ could help in calculation for subsequent years if not for the present one; but no such scientific enquiry could help greatly with the other uncertain element, that of human guesswork.

At the time the results of the January census came out, a campaign was being launched to encourage the use of potatoes in flour confectionery. 150 volunteers from the bakery trade were already instructing their fellow bakers in the preparation and mixing of potatoes so as to make a palatable article with less flour.⁴ Publicity to the consumer was suspended for the time being, but the enthusiastic activities of the lecturers and demonstrators were not curtailed. There were no means of measuring whether enough extra potatoes were used in this

¹ A minute dated 12th February had recommended, *inter alia*, that processing in the beet factories should not be started for the moment. The Minister at first refused to give any decision on the beet factories until an attempt had been made to 'define the guesses'; 'I shall not alter the publicity', he said. 'If we eat the potatoes now and save flour we shall get the benefit in the long run and I'll risk there being a shortage of potatoes and deal with it when it happens.' At a meeting held on the 17th he said, however, that he would not object to the slackening off of publicity towards the end of the season. Because of deterioration in the clamps, two beet factories were started up at the beginning of March.

² The minimum ware riddle was reduced to 1½" from 4th March by S.R. & O. (1943) No. 319.

³ Investigations were carried out by Dr. Dillon Weston of the School of Agriculture, Cambridge, for which the Treasury approved an expenditure of £2,000. A bigger proportion of shrinkage than had been imagined apparently took place during the early months of the season; the curve then flattened out and rose again steeply during the last months.

⁴ Potatoes and potato flour were made a permitted ingredient even in the loaf by S.R. & O. (1943) No. 42, issued on 13th January.

way¹ to justify the efforts made by the Ministry and the trade to overcome the difficulties of production; but it seems most unlikely.

The implications of the January census had indeed nipped in the bud many ingenious processing schemes. Though there was little likelihood of potatoes being available for them, experiments covering a wide range of products continued throughout the spring and supplied data for the discussions concerning the use of next season's crop. One firm evolved a process for turning raw potatoes into glucose and so reducing imports of maize and maize starch for the syrup used by brewers and confectionery manufacturers; it had the disadvantage, however, that a beet-sugar factory was needed for the main production. Other possibilities studied were industrial alcohol, a known process which was given little consideration since it was not a use for human food; beer, which apparently could not be made from raw potatoes; gin, which the need for special washing and cleaning equipment rendered impracticable; and farina, which had been previously considered and rejected in 1940 for the same reason, that the right type of potatoes were not available in this country.

Potatoes that had gone through the beet-sugar factories, however, could be used for diverse purposes; research on the use of these cosettes for beer had established that up to 5 per cent. of the barley needed by brewers could be replaced, and enquiries went on to see whether more could be used, and whether the residue from the factories, otherwise destined for animal feed, was also suitable for this purpose. Experiments at the Cupar beet factory had produced a high grade potato flour, and there was talk of equipping all beet factories for its manufacture. An early but abortive decision was made to include 25 per cent. of this flour in cereal breakfast foods; it was also said to be suitable for sausage rusk, cakes, and biscuits, for various manufactured foods normally using wheaten flour, and possibly for bread dusting; as an ingredient of chocolate it had been tested and found unattractive. Little attempt was made, however, to revive the project of using the flour in bread; though it was of higher quality than hitherto its effect on loaf quality was said to be much greater than that of flour from diluent grains. The outstanding innovation of the year as far as processing methods were concerned was a plant to produce potato mash powder; but its output was reserved for the Services.

All these activities in so many parts of the Ministry raised a problem of organisation which the appointment of a senior member of the General Department as a sort of *rappporteur* or co-ordinator did not suffice to solve; at the end of the year it had to be reiterated that

¹ One baker wrote that he had increased his potato usage from 56 lb. to half a ton a week. An estimate of possible usage in this way, should propaganda be continued in the following year, was 50,000 tons.

'there should be one individual who is the centre of all this potato activity'. The difficult links were between Potato Division, Dehydration, and Scientific Advice; the experimental flights of the last two could not be carried further except in close relation to such estimates of supply as were available. Without a clearer definition of the functions of each Division it was impossible to arrange to get processing smoothly under way. The policy of using as many potatoes as possible for human consumption meant that Dehydration Division ought to try and make the highest grade product from them; Potato Division's need was rather to dispose of deteriorating potatoes quickly towards the end of the season. The surplus was once again master rather than servant. Only those in touch, through Area Officers, with conditions 'in the field' were in a position to realise when it was necessary to rush supplies to the beet factories. To Dehydration Division, however, a request to turn factories on to the quicker process of producing animal food and thereby absorb more potatoes at short notice was bound to seem an unjustifiably sudden change in policy. These difficulties led in April 1943 to the devolution of the main responsibility for potato utilisation on the Potato Division itself.

The Minister's refusal to be alarmed by the mid-winter stock position was more than justified by the situation at the end of the season; but the very fact that the prospect of shortage had been mooted was a cause of delay in starting up the beet factories. Though the factories kept up a good average of over 15,000 tons of raw potatoes a week from April to the beginning of July, it was still necessary to make a bargain offer to farmers of even bigger quantities of potatoes than in the previous season. The new crop was the earliest known to many experienced growers, and the final figures of the May census showed that the Ministry held some 120,000 tons of the old that were now not likely to be needed for human food. Although the amount was larger than that of the previous year it did not excite the same degree of adverse comment; the public had been repeatedly warned of the surplus; the East Anglian growers had been to some extent pacified by permission from the Ministry of Agriculture to lift new potatoes earlier; and even in those areas giving rise to anxiety the crop was cleared by the end of July, growers being in some instances willing to buy back their own produce (of course at the reduced stock-feed rate, a much lower price than they had been paid for them by the Ministry). Though the financial loss in this period was considerable, the wastage was negligible in comparison with the previous year.

CHAPTER XI

The Crops of 1943 and 1944

I

ANY DOUBTS about the wisdom of an ever-increasing potato acreage, that the Agricultural Departments might have aroused in the Ministry of Food during the summer of 1942, gave way before the indications of so large an increase in consumption towards the end of the year. When the inflated figures of the January 1943 census came out, the Ministry of Food made an immediate effort to get the acreage increased as much as was possible at that late hour; it seemed to Potato Division that otherwise rationing could not be avoided in 1943-44. The growing practice of feeding potatoes to livestock, in Great Britain as well as Northern Ireland, was thought likely to aggravate the position. It was agreed to press for 1,215 thousand acres (in Great Britain), as against the 1,166 thousand originally agreed upon. In the end, however, no more than 1,193 thousand acres¹ were obtained—an increase of some six per cent. on the previous year's acreage, but still appearing to leave only a small margin of safety, at current rates of 'disappearance', if yield were no less than 7 tons an acre and wastage no more than ten per cent.

The first problem the Ministry encountered over the 1943 crop was nevertheless not one of scarcity. Encouragement had always been given throughout the war to the planting of early varieties, as a second insurance policy against end-of-season shortage, and this year, with the assistance of a mild spring, it bore embarrassing fruit. The crop of new potatoes was the earliest and heaviest within living memory, but of less outstanding quality; a special publicity drive had to be made to get rid of as much of it as possible for human consumption. The Potato Division would have liked to reinforce this by a drop in price early in July instead of waiting for the reduction for Cost-of-Living purposes that had been agreed with the Treasury for 17th July 1943. As growers must be allowed to realise their full expectations of profit, the gap would have had to be bridged by an earlier subsidy on new potatoes than had been arranged for. The argument that it would be better to subsidise new potatoes rather than let them degenerate into stock-feed (also a drain on

¹ This is the acreage finally found to have been sown; the figure estimated and worked on for the year by the Ministry of Food was 1,188 thousand acres.

public funds) had however to give way before first, the general conviction that a reduction in price might not increase consumption, and secondly, the particular difficulty of altering financial arrangements at short notice. In any event, as the Ministry accepted responsibility for finding the grower a market, a considerable tonnage found its way, during July and August, to such processing factories as could be kept open; and some of the 'second early' crop was put into clamp for use later in the season.

After the early glut had been absorbed as best it could be, the position, notwithstanding the increase in acreage, seemed likely to be tight for the rest of the season. A fall in yield of 0.1 tons per acre meant the loss of over a week's supply at estimated rates of consumption, and the fact that the yield for England and Wales was reckoned in October to be only 6.9 tons¹ was disquieting. It had been thought necessary, too, on account of transport difficulties, to provide for a higher ware riddle in England and Wales² to conserve supplies of seed. There was thus little scope for the ingenious utilisation devices of the previous year; hardly room, in fact, for more than priority processing for the Services, and for the manufacture of some high grade potato flour plants in Northern Ireland so long as supplies permitted; the other factories, equipped and staffed at considerable cost to produce potato flour, could not be given sound potatoes. From the deteriorating potatoes withdrawn from the market from time to time little could be made that would serve as human food. The sugar-beet factories, some space in which, it was thought at the beginning, might be used for additional glucose manufacture, did not warrant reopening after the end of the beet season.

No new publicity was given to the encouragement of consumption either in the housewife's kitchen or in the confectioner's bakehouse; nevertheless there was a steady increase in the quantity accounted for as human food—as much as 14½ per cent. in October-December 1943, in comparison with the same months of the previous year. (This phenomenon appeared all the more serious because allotment-holders had been advised, as a result of previous surpluses, to concentrate on other vegetables than potatoes.) How far some of the increase, both during this year and previous ones, was chargeable to domestic livestock it is not possible to say; no doubt, as Professor Engledow wrote in December 1943, 'much of the remarkable increase in potato consumption, together with the improvement in national health which it has no doubt induced, arises from the

¹ The yield had been previously reckoned as 7 tons. Final statistics, however, present it as 7.2 tons—0.1 tons per acre less than the previous year.

² Though the arrangements, in force since 1941, to bring the heavy weight of seed from Scotland by sea, had helped the transport position, it would be an advantage for the burden of southward traffic to be eased, particularly in view of the preparations to invade Europe.

potatoes entering the human system in the form of eggs and bacon and rabbit flesh'. (Pigs, in particular, are great consumers of potatoes; it was the reduction of the pig population in Northern Ireland that brought about so difficult a surplus there.) A measure of the amount of potatoes fed in this way is, however, lacking.¹

II

The end-of-season reserve was intended, like the acreage, to be larger than ever before—700,000 tons—and Ministry purchases actually overstepped that figure. Control at the outset of the maincrop season was therefore mainly directed towards ensuring that this reserve should consist of the best potatoes available: the fact that the previous year's reserve had kept so well was encouraging. Restrictions on the sale of long-keeping varieties in certain areas were imposed on 17th October² and were removed gradually from mid-December onwards when the reserve was secure. In the hope of conserving the better supplies within the freedom of the market, the Ministry fixed retail prices from 6th November that, by means of a subsidy, widened the gap between Grade A and Grade B (this new differential took the place of the soil subsidy paid in the previous year).³ But it was perhaps hardly to be expected that consumer preference for the best quality potatoes would be influenced by the fact that Grade B potatoes were now $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per 7 lb. cheaper and Grade A $\frac{1}{2}$ d. to 1d. dearer. Merchants still sought out the best supplies. It was necessary to make special arrangements in certain areas in the north-east to prevent the poorer keepers from going to waste without finding a market.

The keeping quality of the crop indeed turned out to be poor generally; stocks were being disposed of at a rate that promised a shortage of about two weeks' supplies at the end of the season. The only course⁴ open was to reduce the ware riddle as in the previous season. It was arranged that the riddle of two inches, imposed in the interests of seed, should come down to one-and-a-half inches, on 1st February in all but the principal growing areas and Wales, on 19th March in the whole of England and Wales; but Potato Division

¹ An enquiry was conducted for the Ministry's Surveys Branch in April 1944, into the comparative expenditure on certain foods, of domestic poultry keepers and others; so far as potatoes are concerned, the sample was too small to serve as useful evidence.

² S.R. & O. (1943) No. 1463.

³ S.R. & O. (1943) No. 1525. The suggested widening of the gap between the retail price of Grade A and Grade B potatoes came from the trade and not from the Division.

⁴ Even this step was not enough to allay anxiety; an announcement warning the public to cut down consumption was considered, but abandoned.

later decided that the reduction on 19th March must be more drastic, to one-and-a-quarter inches for the whole United Kingdom. This reduction, which had the effect of obtaining perhaps an extra 50,000 tons for human food, continued in force until 31st May,¹ by which time, although the management of supplies still needed considerable care, there was less need for anxiety (and none, fortunately, for rationing).²

The peak period of Ministry trading coincided with the climax of preparations for the invasion of France, and the end-of-season problem this year was one of evening out the distribution of small lots in the face of great limitations on transport. In the fear that supplies from East Anglia might be cut off, Potato and Transport Divisions made arrangements for the movement of nearly 100 thousand tons in bulk into the south-west of England during March, April, and May; special trains and sea transport were employed for this purpose, and farmers in the area provided space and material for clamping them. Smaller in extent, but essential because of the pressure on the railways, were the movements of old potatoes by coaster at the end of the season; Scottish potatoes came down to the Western ports, and London's needs were supplemented by shipments from the North of England. In this way the means of transport hitherto used chiefly for seed potatoes during the war became a useful means of bridging the end-of-season gap.

III

'We should be placed in an impossible political position', a senior official wrote, 'if we had to celebrate the Armistice by potato rationing'. That was in November 1943, when the Ministry of Food was engaged in making out the best case possible for an increased acreage in the next crop year; but though supplies at that time promised to cause some anxiety, rationing was then still no more than 'an academic exercise', and even the final outcome of the acreage discussions did not foreshadow how nearly the Ministry would come to the imposition of consumer rationing in the last few months of the war in Europe.

The potato acreage provided the main source of disagreement in discussions on the 1944 cropping programme. The rod that the Ministry of Food had at any rate helped to make for its own back, a continual increase in apparent domestic consumption, was not the

¹ A reduced riddle was, contrarily enough, in force for a shorter time than in the previous year, that of the surplus.

² Rationing was not actually considered during the March crisis, but desultory consultations had taken place about it ever since September.

only reason for pressure to increase production; there were now the probable needs of the Services in Europe (including the Americans, for whom potatoes represented one item of reverse Lend/Lease) to be considered, as well as considerable quantities of seed that might be needed for relief purposes. On the other hand, the Agricultural Departments were bound to resist any increase in the production of a crop so expensive in seasonal labour and so difficult for the small producer to harvest; more especially as repeated planting during successive years had encouraged infestation of the land by eelworm. Nevertheless, in May 1943, County War Agricultural Executive Committees were told that the 'target' for 1944 would be an increase of 5 per cent. on that of the previous year; this would give the Ministry of Food 1,230 thousand acres out of the 1,250 thousand asked for in Great Britain. The price awards for 1944 crops were, however, to offer no increased incentive to grow potatoes; the decrease in the price of first earlies, calculated to encourage the sowing of main-crop varieties, was no more than balanced by increases in the February, March, and April prices.

In November 1943 the Minister of Agriculture asked to be relieved of the necessity of pressing for an increase in potato acreage on account of difficulties over labour supply and agricultural prices. This request was followed by the alarming suggestion of a 10 per cent. *reduction*, and discussions were vainly reopened at the official level; the Ministry of Food would not assent to any figure below that supposed to have been agreed. In December, when manpower policy for 1944 was being discussed, the Minister of Agriculture told his colleagues that the result of his small allocation of agricultural labour would inevitably be a much smaller potato crop; after reviewing the position in conference with its Liaison Officers his Ministry could offer no guarantee that the acreage would be even as much as that actually obtained in 1943.¹

Even more disquieting were the predictions made when a cut in recruitment to the Women's Land Army was mooted. In an exchange of letters Ministers reiterated their original arguments with some variation in emphasis; the Ministry of Food were now prepared to accept 1,200 thousand acres as the minimum to avoid the risk of a shortage, and even to offer some concession on sugar beet; the Prime Minister asked for the largest production possible with the resources

¹ At the Liaison Officers' meeting, it was decided that the quota originally allotted could not be enforced by compulsory direction if necessary, as in previous years. The Ministry of Food derived little comfort from the Ministry of Agriculture's suggestion that any deficiency in acreage would be somewhat offset

(a) by the fact that performance (in the matter of acreage planted) might be better than promise in some areas;

(b) by the efforts of C.W.A.E.C.s to improve efficiency by the avoidance of inadequate cultivations and bad seed. (One gathers that insufficient attention had been paid to this problem in past seasons.)

available. Nevertheless the Minister of Agriculture refused to guarantee more than 850 thousand acres in England and Wales (as against the million hoped for) and authorised his Liaison Officers to regard that figure as their target or even to allow reductions of as much as 5 per cent. in cases of labour shortage. Eventually, however, Liaison Officers obtained from their Committees the promise of 925 thousand acres, on the condition that supplies of seed arrived promptly; this figure the Ministry of Food accepted with some relief, though still hoping that County Committees might improve on it.

Apart from the rearrangement of crop return that had been announced in December 1943, there was little alteration in plans for ware control.¹ The principle of compensation for prices more discouraging to 'first-early' production, by way of an increase in the February, March, and April prices, was admirable in itself, but unfortunately conflicted with the ascending scale of reward for clamping and storage that had been for some years an important feature of price structure in the later months of the season. May prices were now the same as April, with every encouragement to the grower to market his potatoes in the earlier month. Potato Division would have liked to add a further sum to the May price, but it was felt to be unwise to reopen any part of the general question of growers' prices in the current season, however much there might be a case for an increase in 1945. The re-grouping of varieties of seed, which had been discussed for some time, is noteworthy.² Differential subsidy according to grade had proved popular with all but the accountants, and was to continue; retail margins, which the Margins Committee would have liked to see reduced, were given some slight adjustments, but no more.

In 1944-45 the end of season reserve presented a particular problem—or rather a number of problems that had long existed, but had finally come to a head. The labour situation made the keeping of supplies for dressing and lifting at the Ministry's bidding an added burden to growers, and the Agricultural Departments successfully pressed that the proposed size of the reserve should be slightly curtailed; to 700,000 tons against 754,000 in 1943-44.³ The legal problem of how the burden could be distributed more fairly and growers prevented from selling off their crops early,⁴ and evading

¹ It should be noted that this year an order had been made incorporating the general provisions of control (S.R. & O. (1944) No. 648); prices for each period could then be fixed separately without repeating the control regulations.

² e.g., a variety like Ninety-fold, which had been over-planted and had to be disposed of as surplus, was to be discouraged.

³ The hope was expressed that there would be some Jersey supplies in June 1945, but owing to the risk of Colorado beetle infection these would not in fact have been used even if the Channel Islands could have spared them that year.

⁴ In the 'green' state, before clamping and before any restriction on sales Order could catch them. Potatoes were purchased for the reserve only after they had been clamped, when careful selection was possible.

their responsibility towards the reserve, was given considerable thought, for both English and Scottish Agricultural Departments and farmers' unions had insisted on an assurance that some effective remedy would be found that year. That every grower should be required to hold back a proportion of his crop, a measure frequently considered, would be fair but no solution to the problem from the Ministry of Food's point of view, as a reserve would be valueless unless carefully selected.

The Ministry finally agreed to try a new method by which the grower was 'threatened with requisition but given the option of a special contract', delaying any valuation of the potatoes until they were clamped. At the same time the purchase of the reserve was to be spread more evenly over the country; though this concession was not likely to improve its general quality, it was an advantage that purchases should also be diverted from the eelworm-infested areas of the eastern counties. Potato Division for its part would have liked to reduce the advance payments made to growers, described as the main lubricant of the end of season reserve scheme;¹ but there was so much feeling about the scheme itself that this was not pressed. Restrictions on the sale of certain varieties were imposed from 1st October, so that purchases could be made, but so difficult was the season that, later on, sub-standard potatoes 'which may look unattractive but remain perfectly edible' had to be bought even for the reserve.²

On the acreage finally obtained, some 1,219 thousand acres, supplies might be expected to be adequate, with some luck and careful management. But in one respect, lack of labour, the Ministry of Agriculture's recent arguments had proved all too justified. Mr. Hudson had said, 'Though . . . we look like getting the acreage, I have the gravest doubts whether we shall get commensurate results in yield or harvesting of crop. . . .' The bad weather of that autumn made matters worse. Early in November 1944 the Minister of Agriculture appealed at the Lord President's Committee for extra labour to be allotted in order to get in the potato and sugar beet harvests, but little could be offered. Of the total acreage planted that year, some 15 per cent. then remained in the ground as compared with 4 per cent. the previous year. Preliminary estimates of stocks made it seem advisable to reduce the riddle to 1½ in. from 6th December, and to prohibit sales for stock-feed. Supplies were coming forward slowly for the large towns and a special dispensation was made to allow potatoes to be sent to London from areas otherwise closed under the

¹ There had been cases in which the potatoes had not realised the value of £4 a ton already paid, and it was difficult for the Ministry to recover the debt. Some modifications were, however, made in payments for sub-standard ware.

² Estimates of yield finally came out at 6.6 tons per acre.

Order restricting sales. Nevertheless there seemed to be such a likelihood of an acute scarcity of potatoes in London over the Christmas period that the Minister of Food succeeded in persuading his colleagues to provide far more Service labour for riddling and loading than was actually necessary.

IV

By the end of 1944 it was well apparent that there were two distinct causes for anxiety. One—the current local shortages arising because the weather and the dearth of labour had made it difficult to get potatoes out of the ground and off the farms—could be overcome by special arrangements. The other could not; late lifting and bad weather had made a poor-yielding crop so much the poorer that there was little hope of anything but scarcity throughout the season. The November census pointed to a deficit, at the full rate of consumption, of nearly 600,000 tons, or five to six weeks' supply. The next census, taken at the end of December, showed a position only slightly better and therefore not reassuring. Though more of the crop had now been lifted, the wet conditions under which the work had latterly been done did not inspire confidence in the ultimate yield of the clamps.¹ A frost-bound January precluded much investigation of the real state of all other stocks in clamp; wastage, however, was expected to be higher than during the previous year.

This was a season when demands on the crop for Service use and for priority processing were greater than ever. For export to troops overseas the best quality potatoes were needed, but attempts were made to get part of the requirements from Brittany. A reduction of the scale of allowance to troops in this country, deliberately inflated during the year of surplus, was also a little help when finally effected. On the other hand, yield in Northern Ireland was bad, and there was little prospect of increasing the already low rate of shipments from that source. A further reduction in the riddle, already so small that it might well be abolished if it were not for the elimination of soil in the process of riddling, and a free licence to growers to sell as ware 'cuts, scabs and cracks', were the only measures that the Division was able to introduce to stretch out home supplies. Both of them meant a regrettable lowering in the quality of potatoes coming on the market.

¹ It was very difficult to estimate the tonnage still in the ground, as some growers had volunteered information on this point and others had not (the census form had been printed before it would have become necessary to ask the question). Potato Division reckoned that some twelve thousand tons might be salvaged from this unlifted acreage.

The Ministry still felt that more could be done to increase deliveries from farms; but an attempt to go further than the prohibition of sale for stock-feed (which it was hardly possible to enforce) and discourage growers from feeding potatoes to their own stock by a price bonus of £1 a ton, was defeated at the Lord President's Committee. As the Ministry of Agriculture said, it would have meant passing 'from tacit to overt recognition of law-breaking, by offering farmers an extra reward if they comply with the regulations'; 'a measure of the anxiety of the Government, not of the needs or deserts of the growers'. At a cost of some one and a half million pounds,¹ it might still not succeed in getting many more potatoes off farms.

The only course now open to the Ministry of Food, in order to reduce the deficit and eke out supplies to the end of the season, was a substantial restriction of civilian consumption; the severe winter weather, limiting the lifting and movement of potatoes, had brought about a reduction, for the time being, to as little as 50 per cent. of normal in some areas; and in submitting the case for the price inducement the Director had mentioned the possibility of rationing supplies from the end of March. The scheme for short-term 'controlled distribution' evolved in the previous year was exhumed and given consideration in greater detail; in the middle of January, Potato and Rationing Divisions were instructed to be ready to operate a rationing scheme at short notice, though 'the earliest date consistent with successful administrative action' appeared to be 4th March. The wholesale trade, invited to give an opinion on a primitive framework for the scheme, urged that potatoes could be distributed fairly by voluntary means without going to the length of imposing official rationing, which would be of great propaganda value to the enemy. Nevertheless the Ministry went forward with its preparations during February; it obtained from wholesalers particulars of purchases from growers and sales to retailers, that might form the basis of a scheme permitting each trader a proportion of his datum tonnage; each retailer would receive so many 'units' of potatoes to sell to customers presenting ration books.²

An early decision was taken that there should be no registration with retailers; but it took the Ministry longer to decide between the respective demerits of schemes by which coupons were cut out or merely cancelled, and Rationing Division's insistence on the latter procedure was, because of the unpopularity of the similar scheme for oranges, one small factor influencing the Minister against a decision

¹ Not necessarily to be borne by the Exchequer. The increase of 1d. per 7 lb. in retail prices, that would result, were the subsidy not increased, might also do a little to reduce household waste.

² In the belief that consumption varied in different areas throughout the country, Potato Division intended to make the unit variable in five different areas, but the latest Wartime Food Survey figures did not support the necessity for this complication.

in favour of rationing. Timing was a bigger difficulty; Potato Division now put forward a convincing case for postponement until April; though the ration would then have to be smaller, there would be a longer period for free loading of damaged stocks, otherwise liable to waste; and the later date had, among other advantages, that of enabling the Division to obtain a clearer picture of the situation. By this time, mid-February, higher authority was in any case doubtful about rationing at all; if stocks were keeping as badly as was then feared, the Ministry did not want to run the risk of inflicting on the public a compulsory ration that might have to be denied in the last few weeks because potatoes that could have been eaten in March had gone bad by May. So it was decided in March to leave distribution to the trade and hope for the best as far as the few weeks' shortage was concerned; the Press, which had since Christmas speculated freely on what the Ministry might do, was not told of the decision till a month later, when, as it happened, the general position was known to be more favourable.

From the third week in January the Division had operated, through Area Potato Supervisors, a system of allocation to wholesalers that was designed to spread supplies as far as possible evenly over the country. No attempt had been made to requisition supplies, so that in cases where a merchant was able to obtain potatoes through his normal connections he still did so; otherwise he appealed to the Ministry, for whom certain long-keeping stocks were still reserved, and was given a proportion of his requirements. It was inevitable that 'so long as free stocks were plentiful some consuming areas were able to obtain disproportionate supplies'; London, in spite of the different impression given by the Press, had very little less than its needs until April; apart from the West Riding of Yorkshire, which also had nearly 100 per cent. of its requirements, 'free stocks' became rarer as one went northward; Scotland and the outlying industrial areas of South Wales went short for a time. How the trade distributed the supplies obtained in this way could be a matter for recommendation only, and therefore the scheme could hardly be termed even an 'unofficial system of rationing'.

The Ministry was satisfied, however, that the trade had done its best to be fair, and indeed the paucity of general complaint bears this out. There were certainly complaints—some bitter ones from allotment-holders, whose own potatoes were now gone and who, as previously with oranges, found it difficult to get any local greengrocer to serve them. Housewives in one large city—Birmingham—represented that rationing would have been fairer; but it is at least possible that the queues that led to the complaints might have persisted in the towns under rationing. To have introduced it would indeed have been using an untried steamhammer to crack a nut. So long as bread

was unrationed, minor inequalities in potato distribution for a season were, except perhaps politically, of little consequence. (The decision, in 1947-48, with bread rationing in force, to restrict potato consumption from November onwards, was another matter.) It is odd to find a Ministry committee in March 1945 actually canvassing the likely effect of the shortage of potatoes on national supplies of Vitamin C, the content of which in end-of-season potatoes is negligible; over-emphasis of slight and temporary fluctuations in food supply was now frequent, so nutrition-conscious had administrators become.

At one time Potato Division even became alarmed at the extent to which consumption had been reduced; according to the indications of census returns for the period between 10th March and 7th April, when the aim had been to distribute 85 per cent. of the usual supplies, human consumption had apparently fallen to 65 per cent. of normal. This situation must have come about because, at the same time as the Ministry was still preventing the sale or transport of potatoes from certain areas, more 'free' stocks had been withheld from the market than had been expected; during the especially fine weather of March growers had apparently been more anxious to get on with arrears of other farm work than to riddle their remaining potatoes. The political consequences that might have followed if a delay in movement had brought about waste at the end of the season, induced the Division to act rapidly in removing the restrictions,¹ in spite of the risk of dissipating any sound stocks that might otherwise be useful in June-July. The trend of figures on which this decision was based was no better to be relied on than most growers' estimates; 'there is some doubt whether consumption ever really did reach this low level', declared the final version of the census.

At the end of April the Ministry still held the bulk of its end-of-season reserve of some six hundred thousand tons. This quantity, together with 'free' stocks, promised to provide very little less for human consumption than in the corresponding period of 1944. Frosts in May, however, delayed the new crop, which Potato Division had hoped would be a week earlier than usual; during that month there was a generous movement of old stocks, and in June the Division had to turn to the still inadequate and uncertain supplies of new potatoes coming forward, distributing old or new where they seemed most needed. Even in the first week of June it was, according to an early report to Public Relations Division, 'impossible to plan more than twenty-four hours ahead'. The new potatoes under the Ministry's control, those from Cornwall and the Scilly Isles, were diverted to

¹ i.e., the provision that prevented growers in the eastern counties and part of Yorkshire from selling their stocks except to the Ministry, and the Transport Order prohibiting rail movement, other than by permit, from Lincolnshire.

the South-West, London, the Midlands, Lancashire, and the North-East; some from Northern Ireland and Eire were sent to North Wales and Lancashire. The remaining areas had to obtain supplies as they came forward from areas free of control, such as Pembrokeshire and Lincolnshire.

The attempts of the previous autumn to safeguard the quality of seed planted, by the provision of a high riddle and the prohibition of the use of uncertified seed, were doomed to failure; the poverty of the crop was to throw emphasis on obtaining enough seed by any means. There were greater demands on it for export to the Middle East, North Africa, and the Mediterranean countries, and the decision to plant no less an acreage for the 1945 crop meant that no offset would be found at home. Growers were, moreover, reluctant to open their clamps and dress out seed, particularly as the present season's February-April increases in price had, for certain varieties, left that of ware higher than that of seed. Northern Ireland could not spare the extra quantities that had been expected at the beginning of the season, and Scotland had far less to send south than in the previous year; at the end of February 1945, supplies of seed for England and Wales looked like being 50,000 tons short. Transport was also a serious problem; bad weather had held up delivery programmes, and growers could not be sure when their seed was to be collected. The Ministry did its best to relieve the position; to encourage growers to dress out their remaining seed a new provision ensured that prices of seed should be not less than 10s. a ton more than ware of the same variety. (Though the dressing out of seed was already compulsory in some areas, financial inducements were once again necessary to uphold the law.) During the first weeks of March it became clear that the prospective shortage in England and Wales was even worse; the Division felt that the only course was to authorise the use of healthy ware potatoes for planting and, on the assumption that the grower needs about two tons of ware to replace one of seed, to subsidise such planting by an extension of the ware tonnage subsidy arrangements. The Treasury and the Ministry of Agriculture agreed to this course, in spite of its disadvantages, because of the urgency of the problem—one that made the question of ware supplies temporarily less important.¹

V

The point of the story about the boy who cried 'wolf' was that the wolf actually came in the end. So although the Ministry escaped

¹ There was a precedent for this special subsidy; in the spring of 1941, the Ministry had obtained authority to buy and resell certified ware for use as seed. But the use of ware in 1945 far exceeded the 5,000 tons or less of 1941.

potato rationing during the whole of the war years, a rudimentary form of it had eventually to be introduced in the winter of 1947-48. To continue the account of successive crops to that date and beyond would not add much to the lessons to be learned from the war period. Although the experience of the quasi-rationing scheme was not exactly catastrophic (particularly as the new crop came fortunately early), it was sufficiently harassing to the Commodity Division to confirm its belief that the policy of planting the maximum possible acreage, whatever the cost, had been right.

That potatoes do not lend themselves to rationing may be conceded without argument and no one would, therefore, advocate a potato supply policy deliberately framed with rationing in mind, such as was from the first proposed for sugar. On the contrary, not only is a plentiful supply of them desirable, both on account of their intrinsic food value and of their habitual daily use in the diet; they represent an obvious way of making good the shortage of other ingredients in a main meal. If there is little meat or fish, it can be eked out into at any rate a reasonable bellyful by extra potatoes.

The Ministry of Food's policy, however, was not pitched in this key; more especially, it did not conceive of a plentiful supply of potatoes as something *relative* to a demand that might, within reasonable limits, be regulated by means of the price mechanism both up and down. (If it be objected that the demand for potatoes is inelastic, the reply must be that the point was never tested practically.) The policy was nurtured, as it seems, in two beliefs that survived the experience of the first world war; one, that the potato crop can be a safeguard against national starvation, the other, that there can be devised satisfactory means for disposing of a surplus, other than by feeding to animals. By the end of 1942 these beliefs were at length being blown upon; potatoes were no longer regarded as a 'buffer food' comparable to bread, and it was realised that potato-flour in the loaf was a mirage. By that time, however, the Ministry was the prisoner of its own propaganda; it would not willingly call a halt in expanding acreage, even though this was urged on the most telling of grounds—eelworm infestation and the shortage of labour.

One cannot but conclude that the conception behind the policy was over-simplified; into a mere matter of calories per acre. Because a peasant society like that of Ireland before the Famine may be best able to exist, where land is scarce compared with labour, on a diet consisting largely of potatoes, it by no means follows that a population largely urban, in a war situation where agricultural labour is chronically short and transport not much less so, will be well advised deliberately to increase its dependence on them. A conspicuous weakness in the pre-war food plans generally was that their makers seldom took into account the probability that other resources besides food

and shipping would be scarce; still less did they make a consistent effort to size up the supply problems with which they would be faced. Had this been done for potatoes; had the pre-war acreage, the yield, and the contribution they made to the national diet been set against any possible war-time increases in output, it must have become apparent that to raise the acreage beyond a certain point must involve at once diminishing returns and increasing administrative effort. The fact that, from an acreage double that before the war, without any diminution in yield, the calories per head per day furnished by potatoes rose only from four per cent. of the total in 1935-39 to six per cent. in 1943,¹ puts in their place the long arguments of 1943-44 about an increase of five per cent. on an already huge acreage.

In terms of feeding the people, an increase of that magnitude was hardly important, even supposing that its net yield in potatoes fit for human consumption were up to average. But the point had been passed at which the yield from extra acres could be expected to be average. Not merely could new growers, in districts not habituated to potato growing, not be expected to produce crops of the size and quality of those from established growers in, say Lincolnshire; their potatoes were also more likely to need disposal for stock-feed during the season. The disadvantages of pressing potato-growing too far did not end with the low yield from the extra acres. The sheer size of the whole crop meant that, in a bad year like 1944, a smaller proportion of it could be harvested and clamped successfully; it might even be argued that the large acreage positively contributed to the shortage of that winter.

It is admittedly easier to say that the acreage under potatoes was permitted to become too large, than to determine at what point the increase had better have been halted. Much depends, obviously, on technical and local conditions governing, for instance, the alternative crops that might have been substituted. But it seems at least doubtful whether the Ministry of Food was well advised to ask for any large increase beyond the near-million acres planted (in Great Britain) in 1941, or whether it would have done so, had it not been deceived about the prospects of putting potato flour into bread. Potato policy at most times seems to have been over-influenced by the difficulties of the moment. Just as the acreage payment was adopted in a hurry on account of the dry spring of 1941, so the fact of blight in 1941-42 overlaid the fact that the surplus of sound potatoes that year would otherwise have been unmanageable, and so stilled doubts about the

¹ These percentages are calculated from the information in the First Report of the Consumption Levels Inquiry (H.M.S.O. 1944) Appendix V. They merely indicate the order of magnitude of the contribution made by potatoes. In terms of Vitamin C it was, of course, more important, but not so much as to invalidate the general argument urged here.

larger acreage of 1942. In 1942, on the other hand, the fact that the crop was a bumper one was the means of confirming the Ministry of Food in its policy. For out of the prospective surplus came the advertising campaign, the 'Potato Plan'; faced thereafter with an increase in apparent consumption beyond its hopes, the Ministry convinced itself that this must be treated as wholly genuine, necessary, and permanent.

Prima facie, there would seem to be no reason why people should not be asked to vary, within limits, their consumption of potatoes, as of any other food, in accordance with the supply position, or why the price should not be manipulated to encourage them to do so. (The Cost-of-Living Index was a hindrance, but not a fatal impediment to this.) By 1941 the acreage had already risen to a level at which there was no reason to apprehend that consumption would have to be reduced to below the pre-war average—or in terms of calories, 60 per day below the 1943 average level. The alternative policy, chosen by the Ministry, was an inflationary spiral in which the means—greater consumption—of disposing of a surplus one year was treated as the norm for the next, so threatening either a new and bigger surplus, or a deficit absolutely greater, because demand had been enhanced.

Just as the policy of fostering consumption was rational, given the nature of potatoes, only if it were capable of going into reverse if occasion demanded, so the various processing devices were only worth while on two conditions. First, they must make serious inroads into a surplus; as Beveridge puts it, 'any satisfactory dealing with potatoes depends on having an indefinitely large outlet for a surplus, by conversion into flour or some other non-perishable form'.¹ Secondly, they must not be allowed to stake a permanent claim on supplies and thus make worse the problem they were designed to cure. By these criteria, the use of the sugar beet factories in the off-season alone emerges as an economic expedient; the others were at once trivial and, as Coller pointed out long ago, 'expensive'. Expensive also was the subsidised sale of raw potatoes for stock-feeding, though justifiable in so far as it used potatoes unfit for human consumption. On the other hand, the indulgence—inseparable from the policy of meeting all demands ostensibly for human beings at an artificially low price—to keepers of backyard livestock was unfortunate. As Professor Engledow remarked in December 1943, 'whether the farmer and the land ought to be pressed to keep on increasing the potato crop in order that a limited section of the population may have extra eggs and bacon and rabbit flesh, is an interesting question'; a question, it should be added, that was not completely answered by

¹ *op. cit.*, p. 161.

Potato Division's comment that the only remedy was 'rationing, which God forbid'.

That comment reveals much about the Ministry's potato policy. No mere calculation could shake the conviction of the Potato Division that it was responsible not for any ordinary food, of which a shortage could be made good by others, but something *sui generis*. In varying degrees this belief was, of course, and quite properly, held by every Commodity Director, as has been noted in discussing stock levels.¹ But for no other food, even bread, did it impose itself on the Ministry as a whole to a comparable extent; so that an estimated fall in the yield of one-tenth of a ton per acre, or 1½ per cent., on an acreage twice that before the war, could be canvassed as if it were a harbinger of disaster. One can but conclude that memories of the depressing potato queues of 1916-17 (themselves partly the result of price control) were strong enough to brush aside considerations of proportion and expense.

Most of the criticisms that can be, and were, levelled against the *organisation* of potato control—most notably by an investigator from the Ministry's own Organisation and Methods Division—may be shown to turn on the point of policy. If the Ministry had been prepared to tolerate local or temporary shortages or variations of price, not only would all the problems of waste and surplus disposal have been more manageable, but also the particular difficulties arising from the end-of-season reserve. The abuses that crept into the payment of growers' claims, the complication and friction that arose from the taking over by the Ministry of traders' functions during the later part of the season, the cumbersome—as was alleged—arrangements whereby the Division made itself responsible for providing potato sacks; all these arose, in the last analysis, from trying to do so much. So also the fact that the stock census returns offered at best a digest of guess-work that, as trial showed, could only be made more accurate at the expense of delay, might have been used to justify an easier attitude to a problem inherently unmanageable. There were those who thought that for the Government to take over the whole of potato trading, as it had done in 1918, would have been tidier and more economical; the Director of Potatoes, however, despite his responsibility for the depot scheme of 1939, stoutly maintained that this would have cost more money and have had no compensating advantages. Perhaps because of the fiasco of the marketing scheme for carrots and onions in 1941-42, the Divisional view was allowed to prevail (indeed, carrots were handed over to it for treatment on the same lines as potatoes).

This much the Division could claim: at whatever cost—and it was not, in the last resort, for it to decide on that—the experience of 1916

¹ Vol. I, Chapter XXI.

had not been repeated; the public, throughout the war, had never had to complain of any shortage of potatoes. There had been no difficulties over the guaranteed price, comparable with those over 'abnormal wastage' in 1918. Thanks to the flexibility with which the riddle regulations and the surplus disposal arrangements had been worked, there had been little unavoidable waste; the unexpected problem caused by the loss of Channel Islands potatoes had been met successfully. If the contribution of the potato to the general food supply had not been as great as some enthusiasts had expected, that was not the fault of the Division (though it cannot escape some responsibility for the illusions that were put about); it was inherent in the unreliable character of the vegetable. The real lesson of potato policy lies just in that fact; the potato shows very sharply the danger of too great a reliance on home-produced food. Ability to maintain imports is, in our present state of knowledge, the only safeguard against famine.

ANNEX: GOVERNMENT STATEMENTS ON POTATO POLICY

I

MR. W. S. MORRISON'S STATEMENT OF DECEMBER 1939

'The Government have given careful consideration to the question of ensuring to farmers reasonable prices for Ware potatoes of the 1939 crop. At present the trade in Ware potatoes is subject only to the Orders of the Ministry of Food prescribing maximum prices. It is proposed in the near future after consultation with the interests concerned, to fix minimum prices for the remainder of the season. Maximum prices will also be fixed to enable account to be taken of variations in value due to special quality or proximity to markets. The Government have taken over the regulatory powers of the Potato Marketing Board and propose to watch the situation closely and to exercise those powers as and when required.

'It is proposed by means of a tonnage levy payable by the first buyers, to create an insurance fund which, after the deduction of a small percentage towards the cost of the scheme, will be used to ensure to farmers a reasonable return for any surplus crop remaining at the end of the season. No deduction would be made from the growers' price in respect of this levy, which would be added by the first buyer to his price on re-sale. It is not anticipated that the retail price would be appreciably affected. The details of arrangements on these lines are now being discussed with the interests concerned.

'As regards the 1940 crop, the Government have already announced that it is desired, as part of the home food production campaign, to secure a substantial increase in the acreage planted to potatoes next spring. Minimum prices for that crop will be fixed on the basis of the new 1939 minimum prices with such adjustment as may be necessary to take

account of increased costs of production and in relation to yield. As regards the proposed adjustment in relation to yield, it will be appreciated that, if the yield of the crop generally is above normal, farmers should not expect the same tonnage return as if the yield were normal. Similarly, if yield is abnormally low, it would be right to adjust the price per ton upwards. In the event of a surplus, whether resulting from an expansion of acreage, or exceptional yields, the Ministry of Food will make the necessary arrangements for ensuring that growers will be enabled to obtain a remunerative return on their potato crop as a whole.

'The assurance I have given will apply in respect of all potatoes of the 1940 crop marketed after 1st September.'

II

MR. R. S. HUDSON'S STATEMENT AT HEREFORD, 4 MARCH 1941

'The Government have had under consideration the question of the marketing of the remaining stocks in Great Britain of the 1940 crop of potatoes. The arrangements at present in force are that the Ministry of Food purchase from time to time ware potatoes which are surplus to the requirements of the market for human consumption or which are showing signs of deterioration, and will buy any sound marketable surplus which remains on growers' hands at the end of the season. Apart from these arrangements, the grower is expected to find his own market.

'It has now been decided to relieve the farmer of the risk of being unable to find a market for his ware potatoes. The Ministry of Food will accordingly be prepared to buy from any grower the whole of his remaining stocks of marketable ware for immediate or future delivery (at the option of the Ministry of Food) at the minimum prices appropriate for the grade and district concerned at the date of removal of the potatoes from the farm. Growers who wish to take advantage of this offer should notify the Director of Potato Supplies, St. John's College, Oxford, as soon as possible and in any case not later than 30th April next, indicating the approximate tonnage for sale. The Ministry of Food if it so desires will have the corresponding right of purchasing the whole of the remaining stocks of *any* grower at minimum prices on the above basis. Where the Ministry does not exercise this right, these growers who prefer to continue to find their own markets are, of course, at liberty to do so and in their case any surplus left on their hands at the end of the season will be eligible for purchase by the Ministry of Food. The price for this surplus, as already announced, will be the mid-season (January-February 1941) minimum growers' price for the *lowest* grade of potatoes in the district where grown.

'As regards the 1941 crop, it is not possible to prescribe prices and other arrangements in detail until an estimate of the yield of the crop can be made. The Government, however, renew the statement made on 13th December 1939, that growers will be enabled to obtain a remunerative return on their potato crop as a whole. The principle of relieving the grower of the risk of being unable to find a market for his crop will be maintained and adequate arrangements to this end will be made.'

III

THE DUKE OF NORFOLK'S STATEMENT, 6TH AUGUST 1941
(made in the House of Lords on behalf of the Minister of Food)

'The policy of His Majesty's Government has two main objectives. The first is to put as much as possible of the crop of potatoes into human consumption, and secondly to see that any surplus remaining should be used to the best advantage in the national interest. The measure of the increase in potato consumption is difficult to estimate, but it may safely be set down at not less than 400,000 tons during the past year. This is not a very great increase relatively to the normal annual consumption of about 3,750,000 tons, including that of Northern Ireland. There will probably be a greater increase during the third year of the war, and it is in the national interest that this should happen. A larger consumption of potatoes, as of other home produced food, means a saving of shipping. What is more important, it will be the best means of maintaining general standards of health unimpaired notwithstanding the loss of certain imported foods, and notably a large part of our normal fresh fruit supplies. There are—I understand—no food values in fresh fruit which do not exist in vegetables, and among vegetables the potato is accorded first place in the order of food value as being exceptionally rich in Vitamin C.

'The Government's policy has been to increase the total acreage of potatoes. The total area of cultivation throughout the United Kingdom has already increased by about 50 per cent. A further increase is proposed for next year. It is hardly to be expected that anything less than an extreme shortage of other foods, a contingency which is not within our contemplation, would suffice to put the whole of this vast tonnage increase into human consumption. The pressure of reduced supplies of other foods will, no doubt, continue to operate, but it will rest largely with the consumer whether the alternative is to be potatoes or bread. It is the Government's duty to persuade the consumer that it is both in his own and in the national interest that the choice should be potatoes. An active and useful propaganda for this purpose is being conducted by the Ministry of Food, and the results have already been most encouraging.

'Price will also be an important consideration. Although experience has shown that price reduction is not, under normal conditions, an effective stimulus to increased potato consumption, it will naturally play a part in determining the consumer's choice, if he must perforce increase his consumption of this or some other food. An increase in price would almost certainly operate as a deterrent. It is desirable, therefore, that the price of potatoes should be maintained at a uniformly low level, and it is the Government's intention to see that the level of potato prices to the public does not rise appreciably above the normal pre-war standard. To give effect to this policy a subsidy will be necessary. The cost of production of potatoes, as of all other agricultural produce, has risen since the war, and the Government are under an obligation to growers to ensure them a remunerative return on their potato crop. We are faced, in these

circumstances, with the alternative of subsidised or excessive prices to the consumer. A scheme of consumer subsidy, paid in the form of an acreage payment to farmers, is now being considered, but the amount has still to be decided. It will however be fixed at a figure consistent with the maintenance of low prices to the consumer.

‘Consideration has also been given to the possibility of increasing potato consumption by converting surplus potatoes into flour, to be used in a certain proportion with wheat flour in the making of bread. Plant capable of being turned to this purpose already exists in Great Britain, and arrangements are now being made to set up additional plant in Northern Ireland. These factories will probably be completed by the end of the year. Provision will then have been made for a total output of 80,000 tons of potato flour annually, the equivalent of a 2 per cent. admixture with wheat flour for bread. This represents a factory intake of 400,000 tons of potatoes. I should mention however that the same plant is also capable of making animal food, flour and other processed potato products, and it may be that the balance of comparative advantage will be in favour of using it for some such alternative purpose. The important thing is that the plant shall be available to be turned to whatever use may be thought best when the time comes to decide. Consideration is also being given to the possible use of raw potatoes for making glucose and in the preparation of manufactured foods. Experimental tests are now being carried out to ascertain the potential demand for such purposes.

‘Whether it will be possible to maintain continuity of supply throughout the year will depend upon conditions over which the Government have no control—namely, the weather conditions affecting next year’s new potato crop. Old potatoes tend to rapid wastage as the summer advances, and it is quite impossible to ensure an adequate reserve in the month of July to make good a really substantial deficiency of new potatoes. Normally, the greater part of our early supplies of new potatoes are obtained from the Channel Islands.

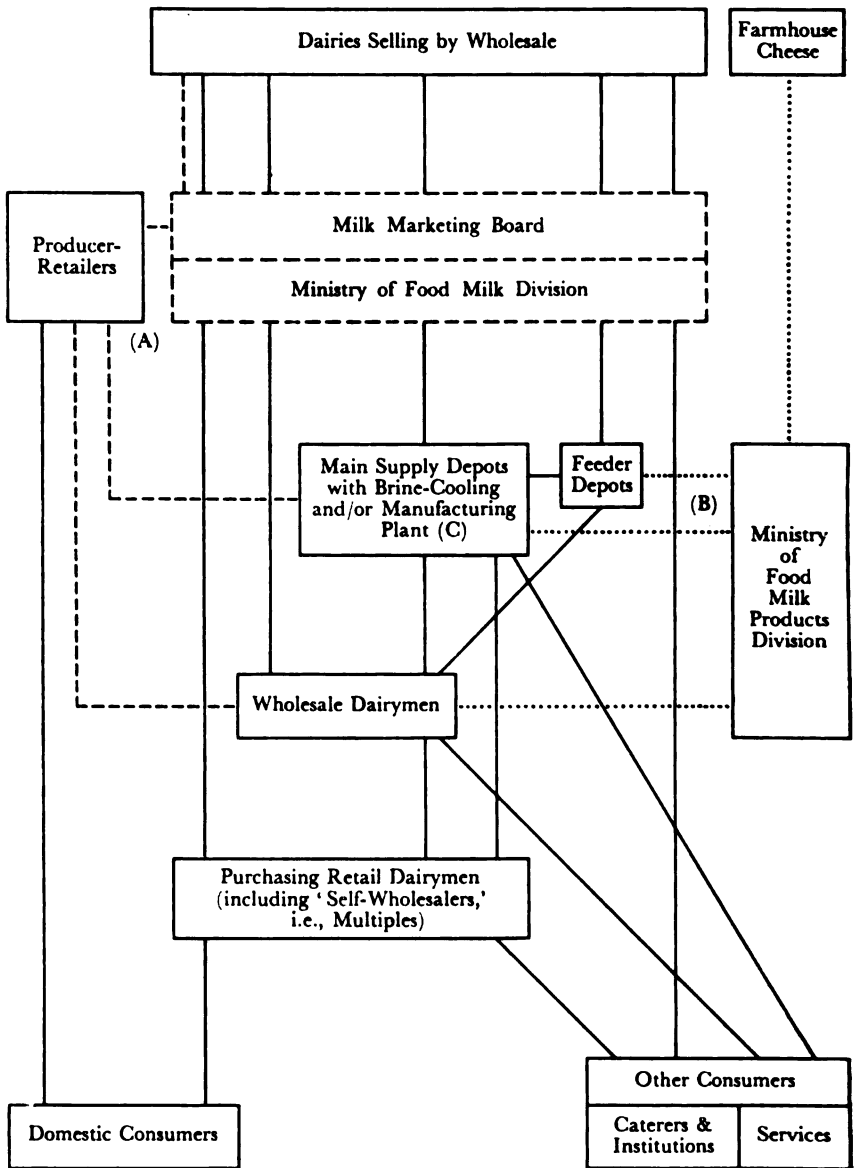
‘These are no longer available, and nothing the Government can do by increasing the potato acreage in this country will enable us to make good their loss during the early part of the season if, as occurred this year, the growth of the new crop is retarded by unfavourable weather conditions. Subject to this reservation, however, potatoes should continue to be available in adequate supply throughout the year. . . .’

Foc

A:
Foods mainly Home-produced

Part IV: Milk

FIGURE V
Milk (England & Wales) c. 1943



- (A) Producer-Retailers might also draw balancing supplies or surrender surpluses as indicated by broken lines - - - - -
- (B) Dotted lines..... indicate movement of milk products (cheese, condensed and dried milk) in flush season.
- (C) On occasion, milk might move from one main supply depot to another.

CHAPTER XII

The Background of Control

I

THE BRITISH milk industry, in the years before the second world war, presented a structure that was complex and, for all that it had been studied by several Committees of Enquiry, incompletely understood. One of the results of war-time control was to make this structure intelligible and thus make it possible, for the first time, to frame a rational policy for the industry. Administrators were driven, by the combination of war-time scarcity and a policy of food welfare, to find out the facts about milk as a condition of managing it successfully; the light of their discoveries can, moreover, be thrown back to illuminate past controversies. For the history of milk in the present century is nothing if not controversial. The natural struggle between farmer and middleman for economic reward was not silent or secret, nor were the contestants left to fight it out alone. As early as 1918 the combination, in Beveridge's words, of 'the milk enthusiasts . . . who had been working for years on grounds of health to improve the quality and increase the consumption of milk'; of 'people anxious to develop state trading for its own sake and seeing in milk and the war a heaven-sent opportunity'; and of those, who, seeing the growing power of the United Dairies 'milk trust' turned to the State 'for fear of something worse';¹ this combination was all but strong enough, under a Labour Food Controller, to bring about nationalisation of the wholesale milk trade. Though this prospect, along with so many others of the Promised Land, receded in the post-war reaction against all controls, Committee after Committee could be found to reiterate its belief that the distribution of milk was in some special way wasteful and in need of reform.

The belief drew its strength in part from simple observation of numerous milkmen delivering a more or less standard commodity in the same street, but it was reinforced by evidence taken from distributors themselves about costs. These were notably higher in London than elsewhere; try as they would, the big London distributors failed to rebut charges of extravagant habits, whether it were distributing groceries on the milk round, making two deliveries a day, selling milk in half-pint as well as pint bottles, or giving credit. It may be observed that similar habits in the distributors of other

¹ *op. cit.*, p. 263 ff.

goods, if they did not altogether escape rebuke, were not held up to continual public obloquy. Such discrimination might be justified by the supreme importance of the commodity. But another criticism of the charges is more damaging; namely that they were made and repeated on insufficient evidence. As an independent investigating accountant engaged by the Ministry of Food remarked in November 1943, 'It appeared that there had been a tendency [in the various Committees that had reported on milk] to gather information in regard to costs without being very clear as to the service represented thereby, and to aggregate figures of costs without being certain that in all cases the services to which they related were similar'. As much had been admitted by the Food Council in 1937, when they confessed inability, except in a few cases, to obtain information about the sub-division of costs between 'the different functions involved in milk distribution . . . as the book-keeping systems were not framed on a basis suitable for this purpose'.¹ This concept of *function* is in fact indispensable to the understanding of the industry, as will appear later.

Contemporaries were no doubt right in regarding the emergence of the milk trust as a portent, though it was not until somewhat later that they began to take its measure.² Broadly speaking, one may say that by 1915, when United Dairies was incorporated as a 'holding company', the problem of milk supplies to the metropolis had ceased to be local and become national. As London engulfed the surrounding country from which it had previously been fed, its dairy trade sought supplies farther and farther afield, and especially in the rich pastures of the west of England. Costs of production there were lower than in the east, and so offset the higher cost of transport and treatment of milk that had to travel longer distances. Such milk could not be taken direct from the farm to the point from which it was finally distributed, and so United Dairies and similar organisations set up in the producing areas what were called *depots*. Here the milk from numerous farms was brine-cooled, perhaps also pasteurised, and despatched by road or rail to its destination. Many depots had factories attached, in which milk not required for liquid consumption was manufactured into condensed milk, butter, cheese, or baby-food; the depots thus provided a useful outlet for casual or seasonal surpluses, thereby 'balancing' liquid supplies, as it was called. The establishment of these depots was highly commended by the Astor Committee, set up in April 1917 to report on milk production and distribution; and the belief that private enterprise would not set them up quickly

¹ Report by the Food Council . . . on *Costs and Profits of Retail Milk Distribution in Great Britain*, September 1937. (H.M. Stationery Office.)

² There is an excellent short analysis by the 'Linlithgow' Committee, in their *Interim Report on Milk and Milk Products*, 1923 (Cmd. 1854). In it, the share of United Dairies in the London *wholesale* milk trade is put at 65 per cent. in terms of turnover.

enough was one of the reasons why the Committee urged, in May 1918, that the wholesale trade should be taken over by the Ministry of Food.¹ This recommendation was not effectively pursued, although an Order was in force for about six months (October 1918-April 1919) by which the wholesale trade came under requisition. Nor can the establishment of depots by private enterprise have been encouraged by the next measure of the Ministry. Producers' summer prices in four south-western counties were controlled at a price 2d. a gallon below the general level, in recognition of the lower costs of production there. In order that the big distributors sending milk out of the area should not profit by this difference, the Ministry simultaneously imposed a licence fee of 2d. a gallon, payable on all milk so exported. A 'combine' company, Wilts United Dairies Limited, challenged the legal validity of this charge and eventually won its case in the House of Lords (June 1922). The fee was held to be in the nature of a tax, which might not be imposed without express Parliamentary sanction; and the Government had to refund the money that other licensees had paid.

The Wilts United Dairies case made its mark in constitutional law, for other war-time Departmental levies stood or fell by the judgement. (They were all validated by retrospective legislation, except the milk charge itself.) Beveridge and Collier, ex-officials both, took the view, as did the House of Lords itself, that the levy was morally right; 'it was money', said Lord Buckmaster later, 'which in honour they [the licensees] were bound to pay'. With great respect, this appears to be taking too simple a view. The trade had, presumably, been induced to incur the expense of transporting milk from the West Country to London by the set-off of lower producers' prices; and a levy that wiped out the *whole* of that advantage might reasonably, therefore, be regarded as discriminatory taxation of an essential service. (The fact that the firms were well able to afford it is beside the point.) The whole episode is illuminating as an example of the mistrust of the milk distributors that runs, as a consistent thread, through the whole of Governmental policy thereafter.²

Mistrust did not, however, prevent the distributors from flourishing. The years immediately after the first world war favoured them, as against the farmers; but in the late summer of 1922, after lengthy discussions, the two sides, in England and Wales, formed a Permanent Joint Milk Committee that should negotiate collective bargains for the sale of milk at first hand, on the model of those prevailing in various parts of the United States. Milk producers were represented on the Committee through the National Farmers' Union, milk traders, through the various associations representing dairymen,

¹ Cd. 8886; Cd. 9095.

² Beveridge, *op. cit.*, pp. 271-5; Collier, *op. cit.*, pp. 291-9.

manufacturers of milk products, and (after 1929) the Co-operative Movement.

The system of collective contracts that was thus brought into being lasted until 1933, when the Milk Marketing Board was established. It sought to deal equitably with the fundamental problem of milk marketing—the ‘balancing’ of supplies with requirements. Although the demand for milk as a beverage fluctuates to some extent with the season, the weather, or even the day of the week, it is stable by comparison with the supply. The distributor’s ideal, therefore, was a ‘level delivery’ from the farm that would minimise his losses, either from having to buy ‘accommodation’ milk at a premium in case of shortage, or from having to dispose of surplus milk on the ‘manufacturing’ market, at a lower price than it would command as liquid. (This lower price resulted, of course, from the fact that the butter, cheese, and condensed or dried milk, into which the surplus milk was manufactured, had to compete with imported milk products.) It was the distributor’s aim, therefore, to get the farmer to shoulder the risk of any surplus, either directly by undertaking its disposal, or indirectly by way of price concessions on excessive or deficient deliveries of milk where the produce of the whole dairy was sold under contract. The farmer, for his part, sought to sell as much of his output as possible at the full liquid price, and to be assured, in particular, that no milk paid for at ‘manufacturing’ rates found its way to the liquid market.

The agreement of 1922 and its successors provided, therefore, for a liquid price that varied as between the six summer months and the six winter months. It was payable on a pre-determined proportion of a ‘standard quantity’ of milk, established by the producer’s actual deliveries during an ‘accounting period’ that, after some variations, was settled in 1925–26 as the three months October to December. In 1923–24, to give an illustrative example, producers were paid liquid rates for 95 per cent. of the ‘standard quantity’ in the winter months; in the summer, when production was, of course, much higher, they were paid liquid rates for 115 per cent. of the standard quantity. Milk surplus to these quantities, if not disposed of by the seller, would be taken at manufacturing rates, fixed monthly by reference to the average price of New Zealand and Canadian cheese on the London Provision Exchange. The agreements also stipulated a standard deduction from the liquid price for milk delivered to a depot or creamery, instead of to the buyer’s nearest railway station.

These arrangements applied primarily to milk supplied to the London market, but they were frequently adapted for use in the provinces. Although they were renewed with comparatively minor amendments for seven years, they cannot have been altogether satisfactory to producers, as they brought about successive reductions in

the winter liquid price; 1s. 8d. a gallon in 1922-23, it was down to less than 1s. 5d. in 1928-29. The summer price remained constant at 1s., a figure about equal to the distributive margin, i.e., the spread between the average price paid to producers and the average retail price, during the whole of that period. Moreover, the Permanent Joint Committee scales generally represented the highest prices producers could obtain. But the weakest point in the system of collective bargaining was the price of manufacturing milk, which the great slump reduced to almost derisory levels. In 1929-30, buyers had agreed to pay 2d. a gallon less than liquid prices for supplies in excess of a 'declared quantity'; but the fall in world prices of milk products made them repent this bargain, and in 1930-31 they insisted on restoring the previous arrangement. For that year the average price of manufacturing milk worked out at 5d. a gallon; the following year, it was 4½d. Moreover, buyers used their bargaining position to enforce lower liquid prices, payable on a lower proportion of total deliveries. Indeed, they over-reached themselves to the extent of provoking a winter shortage, and prices from December 1931-February 1932 had to be revised upwards. In 1932 the annual negotiations resulted in a deadlock, and a hold-up of supplies was only averted by a last-minute compromise, which included a 'floor' of 5d. for manufacturing milk.

II

It was at this crisis in the relations between producers and buyers that the Minister of Agriculture appointed a Reorganisation Commission, with Sir Edward Grigg as Chairman, to prepare a Milk Marketing Scheme for England and Wales. The Commission spent nine months on their task and produced, not only the blue-print of a producer-controlled marketing scheme in accordance with the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1931, but an exhaustive report on the existing state of the industry, coupled with recommendations that went far beyond their formal terms of reference.¹ 'We have no doubt', they wrote, 'that the first step necessary to the welfare of the industry is to strengthen the position of producers, as a body, in negotiating with distributors and manufacturers'; but they were not willing to leave to the 'Central Producers' Board', proposed to be set up under the Act, a statutory right to determine the price at which milk should be sold. They thought that a 'Central Dairymen's Board' should also be established, having an equal voice in all matters affecting price;

¹ Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries: Economic Series, No. 38 (H.M. Stationery Office, 1933).

and that the power of fixing prices should repose in a third statutory body, a Joint Milk Council representing both sides, in which three additional independent members would in effect have the casting vote.

Unlike the 'Central Producers' Board', these new bodies would have required fresh legislation; and it could not be expected, in the then state of the market especially, that producers would be deterred by the Grigg Commission's *obiter dicta*, however weighty, from exercising their powers under the Act. The National Farmers' Union promptly prepared a milk marketing scheme on the model of that published by the Commission, and after due process of law it came into effect in October 1933. Meanwhile Scottish producers had promoted three separate schemes; one (the 'main' scheme) for Scotland south of the Grampians, another for the counties of Aberdeen and Kincardine, and another for the North of Scotland, which came into force at various dates between December 1933 and October 1934. The principle underlying all these schemes was the same; the prescription of several prices, for liquid and various classes of manufacture respectively, at which all registered producers should sell; and the pooling, either throughout the scheme's area or regionally, of receipts from both types of sale, so that a producer would receive the same 'pool price' per gallon for all his milk, no matter for what purpose it was used.

The Milk Marketing Boards were not mainly concerned with the physical aspects of marketing, nor did they interfere with established connections between producer and buyer, though they had power to do so.¹ Producer-retailers, though obliged to register with the Boards and pay a levy calculated on their sales (in order that they might not escape altogether the burden of 'manufacturing' milk), continued their business as before. They were, however, bound by the Boards' minimum retail price provisions. These, which in England and Wales came to be categorised partly by region, partly by the population of the local government area, were inserted in the tripartite contracts between buyer, seller, and Board at the instance of the distributors, who had previously suffered much from price-cutting in the wholesale market. The prescription of a minimum price was much criticized, notably by the Perry Committee of 1940, as encouraging the growth of unnecessary and expensive competition in services between distributors. However that may be, in itself it did no more than give legal embodiment to what had long been the practice of, for example, United Dairies—not to enter on a ruthless war of extermination against their smaller competitors:

'We fully appreciate', wrote the Linlithgow Committee in 1923, 'the

¹ Conferred by the Milk Act of 1934.

reluctance of the Company to take any action that would lead to this result [the driving of small dairymen out of business]. It has long been customary for large business amalgamations to seek to preserve, in their own interests, the small trader whose operative costs are necessarily heavy in relation to the volume of his business. He ensures for the big combination both "cover from view" and "cover from fire". It is true that he is usually left the least remunerative portion of the trade, and that his continued existence seems to be satisfying to public opinion, but to imagine that he is effective as a competitive agent is fallacious'.¹

Despite this gesture on the part of the Boards, there was much friction between them and distributors. For the first year of the English Board's life no agreement had been possible on price, and it had had to be fixed by the three 'Appointed Persons' for whose intervention temporary provision had been made. In September 1935 the Central Milk Distributive Committee in England and Wales laid formal complaint against the Board for increasing the price of milk unreasonably, for halving the 'transit risk allowance' paid to depot proprietors, and for imposing other conditions the distributors considered unreasonable; a complaint in similar terms was laid by the Parliamentary Committee of the Co-operative Congress. They were referred to the statutory Committee of Investigation, which after lengthy hearings gave judgement partly in favour of the Board, partly in favour of the complainants. Leaving aside the merits of the actions in dispute, it was clear that the milk trade of the country was not best carried on in an atmosphere of continual litigation.²

Already in February 1935, not sixteen months after the inception of the first of the schemes, the Agricultural Ministers had appointed a second Reorganisation Commission for Milk, this time with terms of reference covering the whole of Great Britain. Moreover, the Government had been constrained in 1934 to include in the provisions of its Milk Act a temporary guarantee, by way of money advanced to the Milk Marketing Boards, of a minimum price for manufacturing milk (5d. a gallon in summer, 6d. in winter). This was extended for a further eighteen months, i.e., till 30th September 1937, by the Milk Act, 1936, while the 'Cutforth Commission' was still sitting. The Commission eventually reported in November 1936.³ Like its predecessor, it went very closely into the detail of milk marketing at the producer's end, less thoroughly into the problems

¹ Cmd. 1854, §104.

² Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries: *Report of the Committee of Investigation on Complaints . . . as to the operations of the Milk Marketing Scheme, 1933.* (H.M. Stationery Office, 1936.)

³ *Ibid.*, Economic Series, No. 44.

of distribution. It demonstrated convincingly that the producer-controlled Boards had created as many problems as they had solved. The pooling of prices had encouraged producers to sell their milk instead of using it on the farm, and had swollen the total volume of milk sales. Though the newly-inaugurated Milk-in-Schools scheme had helped to increase total consumption of liquid milk by four to five per cent. in 1943-45 over 1933-34, most of this extra milk had had to go for manufacture; and so far as producers' returns were concerned, this all but nullified the increase in liquid prices that the Boards had been able to secure.

The dilemma of organised milk marketing thus became plain. It had produced a flood of milk that could not be sold except at a loss. Higher prices in the liquid market had already been passed on to the consumer and had evoked complaints, more particularly from the 'milk enthusiasts'. Increased consumption, they held, could only be achieved by markedly *lower* prices, which, on the principle that 'he that is down fears no fall', could not be expected to come from producers. Inevitably, therefore, attention was once again focused on distributors' profits, which, despite their complaints, were thought by the Cutforth Commission to have improved, on balance, since the inception of the marketing schemes.

One of the members of the Commission was an eminent 'milk enthusiast'—Sir John Boyd Orr, whose *Food, Health and Income* had come out while it was sitting—and his influence may, no doubt, be held responsible for the radical proposals it made for increasing consumption. Briefly, the attempt to make milk self-supporting should (it said) be abandoned. The producers' price ought to be fixed at the level requisite to maintain or increase the level of production; the State should make itself responsible for any surplus, either by guaranteeing the 'manufacturing' price or by subsidising the sale of milk to 'selected classes of consumers at specially reduced prices'. In such a scheme producer-controlled marketing boards could only have a subordinate place; the elaborate negotiating machinery envisaged by the Grigg Commission also seemed unnecessary, as, *ex hypothesi*, prices would not be fixed by producer-distributor bargaining. Instead, the Cutforth Commission proposed the establishment of a permanent Milk Commission, appointed by the Ministers, to have jurisdiction over the whole industry in Great Britain.

In July 1937 the Government issued a White Paper¹ on long-term milk policy, embodying some of the Cutforth Commission's recommendations, and after the customary discussions with interested parties, a Milk Industry Bill was introduced in the House of Commons in the summer of 1938. It proposed, *inter alia*, the establishment of a Milk Commission that was, so to speak, a cross between the

¹ Cmd. 5533.

Grigg Commission's Joint Milk Council and that proposed by the Cutforth Commission; prices would continue to be fixed by negotiation, but the new Commission would act as arbitrator. It would also have powers to regulate distribution, and to embark, by way of experiment, on not more than ten local schemes of 'rationalisation' of deliveries. Distributors (other than producer-retailers, who would remain under the jurisdiction of the producers' boards) would be empowered to organise themselves into a statutory body or bodies. Finally, steps were proposed to make the milk supply safer, not only by encouraging better standards of quality and hygiene on farms, but (under a system of local option) by giving the Government power, with safeguards, to make orders for the compulsory heat-treatment of milk.

The Bill was a tentative, not to say enfeebled, move in the direction reformers had been urging for twenty years; but it could not have aroused much greater opposition had it been uncompromising. The Government found that it had reared, in the English Milk Marketing Board, a formidable political force; the Board and the National Farmers' Union organised meetings up and down the country to resist the proposals. The farmers objected to the loss of the Board's price-fixing powers, and to compulsory pasteurisation; the producer-retailers and the smaller urban retailers, to distributive reforms that might put them out of business. There was no current of general public enthusiasm that could offset this hostility; the larger distributors were indifferent, more especially as they felt that the powers proposed to be given to the Milk Commission were inadequate. Postponement of the Bill's second reading did not still the clamour, which came to a head when a meeting of East Anglian farmers refused a hearing to Mr. W. S. Morrison, the Minister of Agriculture. Shortly afterwards, in December 1938, the Bill was withdrawn, leaving the producers in possession of the battlefield.

III

The Food (Defence Plans) Department had been busy with imported foods during the first months of its existence, and only began to think about milk towards the end of 1937. Its first paper scheme, described later by itself as 'totalitarian', was an expression of radical intentions rather than a blue-print for carrying them out, for it betrayed no very close acquaintance either with the economic problems of milk or with the powers and limitations of the Milk Marketing Boards. The scheme fastened upon the existence of individual contracts between buyers and sellers as a possible impediment to the

controlled movement and utilisation of milk in war-time, and it therefore proposed to sweep them away, and make the Food Controller the sole purchaser from the farm of milk that he would subsequently allocate 'as he might consider necessary'. In the event of a shortage of liquid milk, consumer rationing would be introduced, exactly as for other scarce commodities, except that a 'full ration' would be issued to expectant and nursing mothers and to children. Particular stress was laid on the need so to allocate milk as to secure the greatest possible economy in transport.

Discussions with the General Manager (Mr. Sidney Foster) and Marketing Officer (Mr. J. L. Davies) of the Milk Marketing Board,¹ early in 1938, failed to reveal any objections to so radical a plan, or any difficulties in carrying it out. Speaking as individuals, and not necessarily for their Board, they found it commendable, and in due course drew up for the Department a more elaborate form of it, which indicated how the Board's organisation could be brought into its service. They also added something of their own—a proposal for drastic reforms in distribution which, they claimed, would result in 'enormous' savings in the people's milk bill. The Department, however, viewed this proposal with caution:

'In the case of other commodities', wrote a senior official, 'we have been tempted to frame ambitious schemes for reorganising particular industries, but have been obliged to resist such temptations. . . . If, during the course of a long war, the Government found it desirable in the interests of, say, economy of man power or economy of transport, to reorganise the milk distribution arrangements throughout the United Kingdom, they would no doubt take whatever steps were necessary . . . if the war only lasted a few months, I feel pretty confident that they would not aim at any such ambitious scheme. In this, as in many other projects, we must keep our eyes fixed on the first few months'.

Further elaboration of the scheme was, however, delayed; first by the need to wait until the Milk Industry Bill should (as was then expected) become law, and secondly by the Munich crisis. The latter was the occasion for the Department's first contacts with the milk *distributors*; a 'Defence Committee' representing the various interests, with Mr. Foster as Chairman, was set up to prepare plans for keeping London supplied with milk, should there be heavy air attacks. The establishment of this Committee naturally stimulated trade concern about the Government's general plans for milk control, and in the early months of 1939 the Department received anxious enquiries from the Central Milk Distributive Committee and two of its constituent bodies, the National Association of Creamery Proprietors

¹ Of England and Wales. The words 'Milk Marketing Board' constitute the Board's official title and will hereafter be used without qualification when it is meant.

and the National Dairymen's Association. Not unnaturally, the distributors suspected the Department of leaning too heavily on the Milk Marketing Board. An article in a trade paper by a prominent distributor¹ voiced their fears forcibly:

'the M.M.B. are as yet amateurs in the complicated business of milk distribution and manufacture. . . . If the co-operation of all the industry in wartime milk control is to be attained, then the absurd mistake of placing power in the hands of a producers' body alone . . . will have to be avoided'.

The Department repeatedly disclaimed any such intention. But the withdrawal of the Milk Industry Bill, coupled with the urgent need, somehow or other, to get its plans for milk completed, inevitably made it turn more and more to the Board as the sole repository of quasi-official expertise and information. With the authority of the Committee of Imperial Defence, the Board, like other statutory bodies, was in December 1939 formally asked, and promptly agreed, to allow its staff to assist in completing the detailed control plans.² But Mr. Thomas Baxter, its Chairman, was not unnaturally moved to inquire what the Government had in store both for the Board as a legal entity and for its members as individuals. This inquiry put the Department in a difficulty. Hitherto it had given no thought to the constitutional and legal aspects of milk control, and its first reaction was to explore with Mr. Foster the possibility that all the Boards might, in some way, become the agent of the Food Controller. Having got a favourable response from him, the Department next sounded the Ministry of Agriculture; could not the question of 'taking over' the Milk Board 'be left for decision in the light of circumstances'?

The Ministry of Agriculture's answer was an emphatic 'No'; a marketing scheme run in the interests of producers would not be a suitable vehicle for the administration of a war-time control in the interests of the community as a whole. The Board had now (March 1939) come forward with a simple proposal of its own: let the Government guarantee the producers' price of milk, in return for which the Board would be submitted to the authority of the Food Controller in respect of the use to which the milk should be put. In the Ministry of Agriculture's view this proposal was objectionable financially, legally, and administratively:

'The Board would in effect be operating . . . D.O.R.A. powers under the guise of administering a marketing scheme. Producers who

¹ Lieut.-Col. Valder Gates: 'A.R.P. and the Milk Industry'. *Milk Trades Gazette*, 4th February 1939.

² In so far as they concerned England and Wales. It was intended to bring the Scottish Boards into consultation later.

contravened the Controller's directions would be fined by the Board under the fiction that they had contravened a scheme voted into existence by the producers themselves, provided, of course, that the Board saw fit to do so. . . .

'By guaranteeing the producer's price, the Food Controller will shoulder the Board's cost of administration . . . and bear the losses (if any) of the Board's manufacturing and trading operations. Unless the scheme is amended to provide that in these matters the Board shall do nothing without the sanction of the Food Controller, he will be at the mercy of the Board. . . .

'The Controller will not be able to get the disinterested advice of the chief officers of the Board in any matter where the Board's interests would appear to be prejudiced. . . .'

These objections were weighty. For the moment they split the Food (Defence Plans) Department into two camps. There were those who wanted to revert to the original 'totalitarian' scheme, under which the Boards would be suspended and the Food Controller become the sole purchaser of milk (apart from that sold by producer-retailers). 'I cannot see', wrote a supporter of this view, 'the Milk Marketing Board working successfully any scheme but their own, and I fear that they would try to use any scheme to further their own ends'. To guarantee the producer's price by any other means than direct purchase seemed unnecessarily devious. On the other side were those who felt that immediate supersession of the Boards on the outbreak of war was administratively too risky, and would have preferred to do without the guaranteed price; but this was impossible in view of the decision already taken to guarantee the price of other farm products. In its dilemma the Department turned, at long last, to consult the leading distributors; but beyond approving, in general terms, the continuance of the Boards to represent producers, and a suggestion, tinged with reproach, that the Central Milk Distributive Committee¹ be consulted, they had little to offer.

With time running short, the Department hit upon a fresh means by which it could secure, without abolishing the Boards, the powers deemed essential for the Food Controller to have, i.e., of switching supplies to conform with movements of population, and of determining that milk should be canned or otherwise 'manufactured', instead of being sold on the liquid market. Let the present tripartite contract between seller, buyer, and Marketing Board, become quadripartite, with the Food Controller as the fourth party; required diversions of supplies could then be achieved by consent. This, it was hoped, 'would

¹ The Central Milk Distributive Committee was the descendant, on the distributors' side, of the former Joint Milk Committee. It was recognised under the English Milk Marketing Scheme as the accredited representative of the distributors, but had no statutory powers.

enable the Food Controller to interfere with the existing arrangements as little or as much as was necessary'. With the reluctant assent of the Ministry of Agriculture, which still held that the Boards should be suspended for the duration, but with the ready assent of other interests, the Department redrafted its original scheme. There would still be a Director of Milk Supplies, now with separate advisory Committees for England and Wales and for Scotland; there would still be Divisional Committees and Divisional Milk Offices; retailers would still be registered with food officers, and prices would still be controlled. But the Milk Marketing Boards would continue to administer the price pools, which would continue to be self-supporting; 'any deficiencies in the pool would need to be made up by subsequent adjustment of prices'. The reference to rationing was reduced to a single sentence; it would be introduced only when a shortage of supplies was imminent.

At the end of June 1939 the Milk Marketing Board gave formal assent to the appointment of Mr. Foster as Director-designate of Milk Supplies; in mid-July there was convened the first meeting of the Advisory Committee for England and Wales, at which the revised scheme was expounded and in some small respects amended. A leading member of the distributive trade, Mr. Tudor Price of United Dairies, had agreed to become Deputy-Director-designate. All that remained to be done was—virtually everything. For the Scheme, as amended, was little more than a form of words to serve as pretext for the appointments being made. When, at the first meeting of Divisional Food 'Commissioners' with Lord Rhondda in 1917, one of them ventured to suggest that it would be valuable to have a definite commission, the Food Controller is said¹ to have replied:

'I have placed you, gentlemen, in posts of much trust and responsibility, and I expect you to prove yourself worthy of the former and to exercise the latter'.

Much the same might be said of the Director-designate of Milk Supplies. From first to last, the Food (Defence Plans) Department had made no attempt to set out in reasoned form either the ends of a war-time milk policy or the means by which it should be pursued. For all the traces of them that can be found among the Department's policy papers, the reports of the Grigg and Cutforth Commissions might never, it seems, have been written. Even at a superficial reading, these reports make clear the danger of basing milk policy on a producer-controlled marketing system alone; a danger emphasised by the fate of the Milk Industry Bill. Yet after the Bill had been withdrawn, the Department allowed several months to elapse before

¹ Beveridge, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

seeking distributors' views¹ on the general principles of a control scheme. By that time, May 1939, officials had been hand-in-glove, one might almost say, with the staff of the Milk Marketing Board for seventeen months.

This unbalance in consultation appears so remarkable as to demand explanation. One is forced to the conclusion that the Department had failed to brief itself adequately at the beginning on the history and organisation of the milk marketing schemes, and hence was unable to examine critically the claims of the Milk Marketing Board's officials to omniscience. The latter would have been less than human had they not attempted to turn their position as exclusive advisers to good account on behalf of producers. But the parallel with fish, where also the Department found itself inextricably tied in the last months of peace to the line of action favoured by a single trade adviser, is disquieting. Like the want of rigour in the pre-war assumptions about shipping, it indicates a deficiency—in what one may perhaps call *scholarship*—of a kind that critics of the Civil Service have not led us to expect.²

The soundness of the appointments made in July 1939 is not therefore necessarily open to question. But had the need to balance war-time control between producer and distributor interests been grasped from the very beginning, there might have been some chance of devising machinery that could function from the day war broke out. As it was, the Department had no alternative in September 1939 but to refrain from control altogether, for it had as yet nothing to control *with*. The Milk Marketing Board and the trade agreed that the contracts due to expire at the end of September should be extended till the end of January 1940. Thus the new Ministry of Food gained four months—fortunately free from air raids—in which to work out a war-time milk policy.

¹ Officials' reluctance to consult the trade was made quite explicit in a minute of 23rd February 1939, referring to the various inquiries the Department had recently received:

'I think it is very desirable that we should take steps to set up a National Milk Advisory Committee representing all interests . . . otherwise some of these people may begin to go over our heads and complain elsewhere'.

² It must be recalled that the Department's internal organisation was not especially adapted for the purpose of planning, which would have required a larger proportion of administrative staff. As its senior officers were perforce taken up with negotiation, the drafting of control schemes often fell to officers who could not be expected to possess the required qualifications and background knowledge. The original milk scheme was mainly the work of a Higher Grade Clerical Officer; another such officer was in effect the shaper of the rationing schemes. Contrast Sir Stephen Tallents's account (*Man and Boy*, 1943, p. 236) of the way he and Beveridge, in 1916, personally worked on rationing. 'At the outset we made an appointment together to have a first round with the subject in the quiet of a Sunday morning'.

CHAPTER XIII

The First Year of War

I

THE TROUBLES with milk distribution that had been expected at the outbreak of war did not materialise. The normal trade machinery for diverting supplies proved capable, in the absence of air raids, of coping with the mass movements of population, and on the 14th September 1939 a Ministry spokesman could tell the English Advisory Committee that no complaints had been received. (There was, however, a run on condensed milk, for which a price control Order was issued on the 18th.)¹ But as the autumn went on, the very conditions that made for ease in adjusting distribution helped also to impel the Ministry towards control from another direction—that of price. Favourable weather meant that milk production was exceptionally high; an estimated 10 per cent. in September, 6 per cent. in October, higher than in the same months in 1938. Liquid sales, particularly under the Milk-in-Schools scheme, disorganised by evacuation, had fallen. More milk had, therefore, to be sold at manufacturing rates, with the result that the average 'pool' price for England and Wales in October 1939 was 13.4 pence per gallon, compared with 14.0 pence a year earlier.

In mid-October, therefore, the Milk Marketing Board, in order merely to offset these losses on manufacturing milk, proposed to raise its price, on an average, by 1½d. a gallon from 1st November. The Central Milk Distributive Committee, to which this proposal was duly put, accepted the rise as inevitable; it naturally took advantage of the opening, however, to claim that distributors in evacuated areas were in a similar position to producers, and ought to be compensated for loss in turnover by an increase in margins; though where such compensation was to come from was not made very clear. Both sides looked to the Ministry of Food for guidance, which the Ministry found it difficult to give. Apart from the broad principles of war-time milk policy, which it had barely begun to think about, there were practical points that claimed attention. For instance, the largest rise in the new manufacturing price scale was in respect of milk sold to condenseries (2½d. a gallon); and this, according to the Ministry's own Condensed Milk Branch, would mean that the export trade, to the Colonial Empire in particular, would be

¹ S.R. & O. (1939) No. 1212.

captured by Holland and Denmark. Moreover, the creamery proprietors disputed the Milk Marketing Board's arithmetic; it was, they said, raising prices by more than was necessary to balance the pool. The Ministry had as yet no means of verifying such points, nor could it have merely withheld consent to the Board's proposal, without making positive proposals of its own. As the Ministry of Agriculture pointed out, so long as the peace-time marketing scheme was running, its logic had to be accepted; a fall in 'liquid' receipts was being quite properly met by a rise in the manufacturing price.

Ministry of Food assent to this rise was thus all but inevitable. Equally inevitable was that it should be shortly followed by further demands on behalf of producers. Feeding-stuffs for cows, owing to the fall in imports, were scarce and unless the Government was prepared, which it was not as yet, to subsidise them¹ must shortly become dearer. The prices the Ministry proposed to embody in its new Feeding-stuffs Order were reckoned of themselves to add 1½d. a gallon, on the average, to milk production costs, which the Milk Marketing Board estimated had already risen by 1½d., and which were still rising. The only way the Board could see to meet the position was to put up the retail price of milk on 1st January 1940 by 4d. a gallon, of which perhaps 1d. might go to the distributors. The Board was reluctant to raise the price, lest it reduce consumption still further; and it found officials sympathetic. This was the time when the rise in the Cost-of-Living Index was beginning to cause alarm, so much so that a Treasury official could put on record that the rise (equal to ½d. a pint) would be a 'disaster'. And, indeed, the Treasury shortly assented to a temporary subsidy to the Milk Boards so as to prevent it, and, as Mr. W. S. Morrison announced in the House of Commons on 14th December 1939, 'to permit a full examination of the position'.²

In the hammering-out process that followed, during the early months of 1940, three influences were dominant, and a fourth made itself felt mainly by way of protest. The first was financial; Treasury insistence that, leaving aside cheap milk schemes for the benefit of what later came to be called the 'vulnerable groups', the 'Milk Fund'³ should be self-supporting. (The exception means that the discussions between the Departments that eventually resulted in the National Milk Scheme stand apart, except on occasion, from those

¹ See Vol. I, Chapter VI.

² *Official Report*, Cols. 1356-7. The need to make a statement before Parliament should go into recess expedited this decision, along with others. Cf. the case of potatoes (p. 113 above).

³ This was the phrase commonly used at the time. As the Ministry of Food did not trade in milk, it represented merely an aspiration that milk receipts and expenditure should balance. With the coming of deliberate subsidies, the phrase became inappropriate.

on general policy.) The second influence was the continual inflation in the cost of milk production, which, just as Departments thought they had taken its measure, was jolted upwards by the general increase in farm-workers' minimum wages. The third, on which 'milk enthusiasts' and producer interests found themselves in accord, was the need to provide 'incentive' for the dairy farmer to maintain his efforts, when, as a result of the war, the profitability of other, less onerous, branches of farming had increased. The second and third lent themselves to much fine calculation of the precise number of extra halfpennies per gallon that would be required to maintain milk output; in this sport the producers' representatives were to show themselves more than proficient.

But whereas the claims of producers, and of the Exchequer, were in principle recognised, those of distributors (including manufacturers) were not. The request of the Central Milk Distributive Committee for an increased margin, left in the air by the cancellation of the proposed price increase, had been refused pending a costings inquiry. Nor had the Committee been consulted on the terms of the Order that was to be introduced to enforce the standstill on retail prices that had been a condition of the temporary inquiry. The Order imposed *maximum* prices equal to the *minima* prescribed in the Milk Marketing Board's contract, i.e., in terms of the population of the sanitary authority concerned. It ignored both the cases where, by common consent, a higher price had commonly prevailed, such as in the suburbs of large cities, and the various types of 'designated' milk, other than Tuberculin-Tested, that had commanded a premium over ordinary milk. Introduced on 31st January, it had therefore almost immediately to be withdrawn, amid distributors' protests, and replaced by another simply freezing the prices that had ruled in the last week of the Old Year.¹

Distributors, quite rightly, detected the hand of the Milk Marketing Board's officers behind the Ministry's actions, and resented it. (One, designated Deputy-Director of Milk Supplies before the war, had tendered his resignation on hearing 'for the first time over the wireless' of the temporary subsidy.) Their resentment found vigorous shape when they were confronted with the official proposals for balancing the Milk account during 1940-41. Estimating that producers would require to be paid 2d. a gallon more in the summer months, and 4d. a gallon more in the winter months, than in 1938-39, at a cost of some £12 million, the Interdepartmental Committee on Food Prices had agreed that, in order to avoid any rise in retail prices before the autumn, the burden should be laid on manufacturing milk. 8d.

¹ S.R. & O. (1940) No. 197 (revoking No. 150). This Order had in its turn to be superseded in April, since distributors in some districts took advantage of it to charge winter prices in the summer season.

a gallon, however, was the highest price that it was thought should be charged for milk to be made into butter or cheese; butter because a rise in price would diminish consumption (this was February 1940, when the Ministry of Food had a glut of butter), and cheese because 'it is largely a working-class foodstuff'. The main load, therefore, would be put on milk for condensing and drying, whose price it was proposed to raise from 9½d. to 1s. 3½d.; even so, the retail price of milk would have to go up by ½d. a pint on 1st September—a month earlier than was customary.

These proposals had been endorsed by Ministers, though the Chancellor of the Exchequer had entered a protest against 2d. being put on the producers' summer price, instead of the 1½d. that rises in costs appeared to justify. The extra halfpenny had been added to help restore the balance of 'inducement' between milk and beef, since there were those who professed to fear that otherwise farmers might swing over to the latter after the price awards of December; but, as the Treasury put it, 'one mistake did not justify another'. The distributors, however, declared that they would not accept the new prices for manufacturing milk, nor even discuss them, until the Government gave evidence of having a long-term policy. They urged that retail prices should be put up forthwith, and that a guarantee be openly given to producers for next winter; otherwise they feared that there would be insufficient milk to distribute.

On reflection, the Ministry of Food was inclined to think that the price for condensing had been set too high; it was, in fact, equal to the average first hand 'liquid' price in the six summer months, and therefore higher than the lowest level to which this price would fall—1s. 1½d. The Ministry proposed to meet the distributors half-way, therefore, by prescribing 1s. 1½d. as the uniform price for condensing, drying, and cream. This would, in turn, mean raising the retail price on 1st July, in itself a concession to distributors' views. Meanwhile the producers had been asking for *more* than the 2d. rise they had been promised. As early as 16th February the Chairman of the Milk Marketing Board had prepared the ground for such a claim by telling the Ministry of Agriculture that farmers' uncertainty about the course of prices was causing them to delay putting their heifers to the bull, and so endangering milk supplies next winter. On 26th February, when the Ministry's proposals were formally put to the Milk Marketing Boards, they countered with a request for 2½d. a gallon. This was rejected by Ministers at a meeting with producers' representatives on the 29th February; but a week later the Minister of Agriculture had changed his mind. Farmers, it appeared, were angry with the English Board for not having asked for more than 2½d.; for the Government to offer less would be courting a producers' revolt like the one over the Milk Industry Bill. On political grounds, that

is to say, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith appealed to the Chancellor to agree to the extra $\frac{1}{2}$ d.; which he did, on 8th March.

This concession to producers meant that the retail price of milk would have to go up yet one month earlier, on 1st June. The distributors, meanwhile, had rejected the Ministry of Food's revised manufacturing prices, though they professed themselves satisfied with its assurances on policy generally; and they maintained this position at a meeting with the Minister (Mr. W. S. Morrison) on 12th March. As the pre-war procedure was still in force, this would have meant that the Milk Marketing Board would have had to 'prescribe' the contract, and an appeal to the 'Consulted Person' have followed. Next day, however, the distributors decided to accede to the Minister's appeal to give the new prices a trial, and the contract, to come into force on 1st April, was agreed to. The producers' summer prices, though not the proposed 4d. rise for the winter, had been announced in the House of Commons, also on 12th March; a 'full statement' was promised later.

II

By the time that statement came to be made a new Government, a new Minister of Food, and a new atmosphere—of national crisis—had all made their mark on milk policy. The delay in making the statement was mainly, if not wholly, due to the unwillingness of Ministers to announce a rise—even of a penny a quart—in milk prices, unless they could temper the news with encouraging statements about cheap milk for the 'vulnerable groups'. The plan for a National Milk Scheme, mooted as early as January, had become involved by the end of April with more general proposals to supply cheap food to poor consumers, in which Lord Woolton himself took a lively interest, but which threatened to delay the milk scheme. The Treasury was still fighting a vigorous rearguard action on this front, and it would have liked the statement on milk policy to confine itself to some reassuring remarks on the effect of the existing permissive cheap milk schemes. But the Minister of Health (Mr. Walter Elliot) objected to this. There should, he declared, be no statement until the policy had been decided; moreover, the facts did not justify the Government in being sanguine about the pre-war schemes.¹ Nevertheless, his colleagues on the Food Policy Committee, on 9th May, authorised a search for a new formula, and it continued for the first week or two of the new Government under Mr. Churchill.

¹ See Vol. I, pp. 100–103. The influence of the Treasury on the draft announcement has come to light since the account on p. 102 was published.

Lord Woolton, who unlike Mr. Elliot retained his post,¹ had been much impressed with the latter's revelation that the machinery for providing cheap milk for mothers and children was, owing to the opposition of many local authorities, incapable of extension. In a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Minister of Food asked for the general subsidy on milk to continue while the situation was explored, and on 24th May Sir Kingsley Wood agreed. A delegation from metropolitan distributors was meeting Lord Woolton that same day, and showed itself willing to co-operate, given reasonable terms, in a national cheap milk scheme. A margin of 10d. a gallon was mentioned; a few days later the Central Milk Distributive Committee formally offered to work the scheme at this figure.² What might have been a formidable obstacle to the early introduction of the National Milk Scheme was thus removed, and on 12th June a statement, coupling the price rise with the announcement of the Scheme, was duly made in the Lords by the Minister. He revealed part of the *quid pro quo* of the distributors' assent to a 10d. margin on cheap milk: an increase equivalent currently to 1d. a gallon in the margin on normal sales. This increase was to be for three months only, for, as the Minister said:³

'I have told the distributors . . . that we cannot look at the costs of distribution of milk without concern . . . I have appointed a committee of business men, and I have asked this committee to go into the whole question of distribution costs. . . . I shall have to look into the matter again when I receive the report of the Committee'.

The other part of the *quid pro quo*, consonant with the Minister's concern about distributive costs, was an Order prescribing that the delivery of milk should not begin before 6.30 a.m., in London and towns above 250,000 in population. It was made at the request of the distributors, in order to maintain an economy which the larger of them had voluntarily effected in the autumn of 1939: the restriction of deliveries to one a day, in face of the black-out and rising costs. The once-a-day delivery had been fairly general during the first winter of war, but with the warmer weather the small dairymen and producer-retailers, who had never liked it, began increasingly to insist on making two deliveries. (Many of them sold 'raw' milk that would not keep till next day.) Other distributors, faced with this competition, threatened to follow suit, and it was to prevent the voluntary limitation from collapse—which would inevitably lead to a claim for higher margins—that the Ministry at length agreed to

¹ He had succeeded Mr. W. S. Morrison at the end of March.

² The Scottish distributors were offered, and accepted, 9d.

³ Official Report (House of Lords), cols. 526-530.

make the Order. While not in set terms prohibiting a second delivery, it effectively prevented the larger distributors from making one.¹

The idea that reforms in distribution could have a substantial effect on retail prices of milk was, of course, anything but new; the novelty in Lord Woolton's announcement was the affirmation that these reforms could be made promptly and—by implication—easily. The Minister appears to have believed that this was so; that the distributors could and would make them, if they were once convinced that the Government meant business. Before the meeting on 24th May with the London distributors he had written:

'I want to tell them that I find it very difficult to advocate any form of subsidy to an industry whose costs of distribution are 100 per cent. of the cost of the commodity . . . I conceive it my duty to bring prices within the reach of the people, and that milk prices are not. . . . Behind all the discussion, without ever using the words, I want them to think that if they did not agree there was some danger that we might set up municipal milk depots for dealing with the poorer classes of the community'.

At a further meeting with distributors' representatives, on 29th May, he had hinted that some sort of public utility company might be set up, on the lines of the London Passenger Transport Board. But first (he said) he would propose to appoint 'a small committee of business men' to consider how best the milk industry could be nationalised. 'To my surprise', he wrote next day, 'they welcomed it'. Indeed, their spokesman had declared that they were anxious that an authoritative investigation should remove the stigma of extravagance that they had borne for so long.

During June the composition of the committee was worked out. In the end it was thought advisable not to confine it to business men, although they were to predominate. Lord Perry, head of the Ford Motor Company in Britain, and 'business adviser' to the Minister since the early days with Mr. W. S. Morrison, was an almost automatic choice as Chairman. Three other business men, Sir Alan Anderson, Mr. A. G. Short, and Mr. W. L. Stephenson; a senior civil servant, Sir Francis Floud; and a representative of Labour, Mr. J. W. Bowen, made up the whole committee, whose appointment was formally announced on 13th July. None of the members had any knowledge of milk distribution (though two owned farms producing milk): the English and Scottish distributors, however, undertook to

¹ S.R. & O. (1940) No. 847 dated 30th May. An attempt in November 1940 to bring the exemption limit (in England and Wales) down to 10,000 population (S.R. & O. (1940) No. 2006) produced so many difficulties that it had to be modified. By a General Licence issued in August 1941 (S.R. & O. No. 1207) the limit was raised to 150,000. (The November Order also altered the starting time to 7. 30 a.m.)

form committees that should present proposals to the main committee.

The distributors reiterated, however, their conviction that no reforms, not even the zoning of deliveries through exchange of customers, which would certainly take some time, could bring about the substantial reduction in costs that the Minister and his Committee were seeking. As Mr. J. H. Maggs, of United Dairies, bluntly put it at the first formal meeting between the English distributors and the Committee, 'if a distribution service was wanted, it had to be paid for'; none of the various bodies (he said) that had investigated the industry in the past had ever translated their suggestions into terms of pence per gallon. The most that economies could do, under present conditions, was to prevent the margin from increasing. The gulf between this view and that of the Minister could scarcely be wider, for in June, when the Perry Committee was being chosen, Lord Woolton hinted at great reforms: 'This committee' (he wrote) 'may settle the organisation of the milk trade for years to come'.

How could such high hopes be entertained? Only, as it seems, on two grounds; first, that an investigation into the facts would show that the distributors were wrong, and secondly, that they could then be persuaded, or failing that coerced, into changing their methods. As a member of the Committee put it to his colleagues, 'the time has come to correct a mistake which in a crisis amounts to a scandal'. He did not pause to inquire whether this could be done without a battle of the kind that had broken out over the Milk Industry Bill; from first to last, the Committee seem simply to have assumed that the Minister of Food's war-time powers would enable him to introduce drastic measures of reorganisation. The very fact of his being armed with these powers would, the Committee believed, make it unnecessary to use them except by way of threat, to call the distributors' bluff.¹

III

The Committee set out, that is to say, not in a spirit of detached inquiry but to make out a case, rather on Dogberry's principle: 'It is already proved that ye are false knaves, and it will go near to being thought so shortly'. The smallest worth-while reduction in retail prices would be 4d. a gallon ($\frac{1}{2}$ d. a pint) out of a nominal margin that, on the average over the year, varied from 9d. in the country districts and small towns to 1s. in Greater London. (What this

¹ Thus it was pointed out that if the distributors were recalcitrant the Minister could take them over, as he had the flour-millers. (This was not a happy example to choose; the millers' remuneration under control was nothing if not generous.)

nominal margin meant in practice will be discussed later.) That this margin was not more than was necessary to cover the costs of many distributors, plus a 'reasonable' profit of, say, 1d. a gallon, had been established by the costings investigation earlier in the year, as a result of which the 'temporary' increase had been allowed to them; moreover, the investigation had taken into account such economies as the discontinuance of the second delivery. On the other hand, there were certain distributors, particularly provincial and Scottish Co-operative Societies, for which the current margins showed a handsome profit. The Northern Co-operative Society in Aberdeen put its costs at less than 6d. a gallon for distributing bottled pasteurised milk; and several societies in English industrial towns had costs round about 7d. a gallon. The Committee acknowledged that these low-cost distributors enjoyed certain advantages; their customers, for instance, were many and close together, so that milk rounds were compact. But they were also (it said) virtuous, in that they gave no credit, dispensed with half-pint bottles, and, above all, confined themselves to distributing milk. On the other hand, 'most of the expensive distributors complicate the simple business of milk delivery by combining it with the sale of other goods', with the result that costs were inflated; 'what could be a simple routine process of delivering a standard article is often a complicated feat of salesmanship and book-keeping'. The Committee noted with satisfaction that war-time circumstances were reducing the quantity and variety of goods so distributed, and chided the distributors for not regarding this as 'an opportunity for permanent reform'.

The argument was plausible; but it had two difficulties to meet. The first was that United Dairies, in 1936, had furnished to an earlier Committee of Inquiry¹ elaborate and carefully drawn accounts showing that the profit on other goods 'carried' the milk distributing business. The way in which the company's accountants had apportioned costs between milk and other goods had then been accepted as giving, so far as was possible, an accurate picture: moreover, the Ministry of Food's Director of Costings had endorsed, in 1940, a later set of figures apportioned in the same manner. The second difficulty was that the costs of Co-operative Societies in London were of the same order as those of United Dairies, for all that milk made up 90 per cent. or more of their dairy branches' turnover. It seemed at least a fair inference that distribution was inherently more costly in London than elsewhere.

The Committee did not so much answer these objections as look them boldly in the face and pass on. Because different 'mixed'

¹ *Report of the Committee of Investigation (loc. cit.)* 1936. The discussion of the problem of mixed businesses in this Report, and, indeed, the Report as a whole, are on a far higher plane than the Report of 1940.

distributors apportioned their costs differently, all attempts to do so were brushed aside as accountants' sophistries; 'it is indeed possible that the distribution of milk does not cost the expensive distributors as much as they suppose. A different apportionment . . . might bring them into the group of economical distributors'. The point was well taken, in that any apportionment of costs in mixed businesses must be arbitrary, but it cut both ways. If the dairy department of a co-operative society (say) were not charged with its appropriate share of the overhead costs of the whole business, its distribution costs would appear lower than they should. The Committee's scepticism, however, was not equally distributed over all their evidence. As for the London Co-operatives, they (said the Committee) had been infected with the desire to compete 'with private distributors on the basis of service'.

This matter of mixed businesses was, it must be emphasised, crucial to the Committee's argument that costs could be reduced by as much as 4d. a gallon. For although they could point to certain other possible economies—prepayment for milk, the elimination of the half-pint bottle, the charging of a deposit, as with beer, to discourage bottle losses and breakages, these were admittedly 'minor reforms'. Even the reorganisation of rounds by exchange of customers, valuable though it might be, would not be sufficient. In most of these changes the distributors were prepared to acquiesce, though they felt that the last should be made compulsory on all distributors. But, of course, they continued to deny that the economies would outweigh the upward pressure of rising costs; and the point on which pre-war custom was most vulnerable, that of the second delivery, had been conceded in advance of the Perry inquiry.

The Committee had not, that is to say, even begun to *prove* that the disappearance of goods from the milk round and the disallowance, for the purpose of computing the margin, of any of the costs of the shops maintained by United Dairies and others would make it possible to get the maximum margin down by 4d. But, attacking the problem from the other end, by taking the costs they *were* prepared to allow in the rough proportions that seemed to be revealed by the material before them, they were able to build up 'a reasonable allowance' for distribution costs and profits as follows:

	d.
A. processing and bottling	2½
B. roundsmen's wages, vehicle and depot operation and upkeep	3½
C. general selling and administrative expenses	1
<hr/> Profit and interest on capital	<hr/> 1
Total	8

They therefore recommended that the Minister should, in effect, enforce the economies they considered possible and desirable by reducing the margin, by stages, to this uniform level, both in England and Wales and in Scotland; as a corollary, they recommended that both wholesale and retail prices should henceforth be uniform.

Quod erat demonstrandum. The reduction of $\frac{1}{4}$ d. a pint in retail prices would thus be achieved; as a spur to distributors the Committee also recommended the abolition of the minimum price. It should be noted that the proposed 8d. margin was not strictly comparable with the nominal margin as prescribed by the Milk Marketing Board. As built up, it made no allowance for the all-important function of 'balancing',¹ whether by way of level delivery premiums, such as were paid by many distributors to farmers, or by premiums paid to wholesalers for 'accommodation' milk. The Committee drew attention to the disadvantage the small urban distributor had under the existing system, in that he could not, like his larger competitor, obtain rebates from the Marketing Board for surplus milk that had to be 'manufactured'. But they proposed no specific measures for helping him, not even the prescription of maximum wholesale margins. The reason is apparent from the verbatim record of their proceedings, though they thought it best not to avow it openly in their report. They thought his disappearance both inevitable and desirable in the interests of economic distribution; he might find an honourable and useful end as a servant of the reformed combines. The 8d. margin, that is to say, would, even granted the Committee's assumptions, be adequate only for the large distributor who, thanks to the system of 'manufacturing rebates', was supposed to be able to balance supplies at no cost to himself.

'Our appointment originated', the Committee wrote, 'in circumstances arising out of the war, and we are reluctant to make proposals which, if adopted, would permanently alter conditions in the industry'. It would, they thought, be undesirable even had it been practicable for the Government to use its war-time powers to nationalise or 'municipalise' milk distribution. The reduction of the margin to 8d. they regarded as an alternative which would enable distributors to 'set their house in order' without making fundamental changes. But, as a senior official of the Ministry of Food promptly pointed out when the report was received, two recommendations alone—the exclusion of other goods from the milk round and the voluntary adoption of zoned deliveries—would 'amount to a complete and permanent reconstruction of the trade organisation, for it is not conceivable that after the war that that organisation would automatically resume its present form'. The same critic noted that to

¹ See above, p. 178.

prescribe a margin, on which only a certain section of the trade could manage, could not be justified by the answer that those who could not work on the margin proposed must get out of the business:

'It is not the object of the Government (of this country at any rate) to enforce confusion in and bankruptcy of a trade at any time, least of all when maintaining distribution is very difficult, and when the primary duty of the Ministry of Food must be to see that food supplies, including milk, are actually got to consumers in spite of air raids. . . .¹

'If the Government wishes to intervene in the milk distributing industry because it thinks that the price of milk is too high, and the industry as at present organised is inefficient, the correct procedure . . . is surely to provide by statute, or authority based on statute, that the industry shall be re-organised, and that inefficient elements shall be got rid of with appropriate compensation. The other technique of imposing too severe conditions on industry in order that the situation may be altered is one which is commonly followed in Eastern and Southern American countries, but not in this country'.

On the merits of the case, there was little more that could be said, even had the Committee been able to provide conclusive evidence in support of their thesis. But the advertisement that had been given to the appointment of the Committee, and the decision² to publish the report, taken before it was presented, meant that the Ministry must have more than the usual difficulty in deciding its own course of action on the merits of the case. It was bound to be asked to redeem in October the promise that had been given in June.

IV

The inquiry into distribution costs had occupied all and more of the three months allotted to it, and during this time there had been considerable developments on the 'supply side' of milk control. Producers' summer prices had come in for revision in June as part of the general award that had been made to farmers to meet the rise in the statutory minimum farm wage on 1st July. The guaranteed pool prices for July, August, and September 1940 were raised by 1½d. a gallon, thus unbalancing the 'Milk Fund' once more. In the discussions, both on the June award, and on the more important matter of the prices for 1940-41, which for milk would come into

¹ He was writing in October 1940.

² This decision necessitated the 'construction' (to use the official word) of a formal minute of appointment by the Minister, back-dated to 15th June. The original invitation to the members had been quite informal, and their consent to serve was in most instances not received until after that date.

force on 1st October, the Ministry of Food consistently pressed for a larger share of the total sum to be given to milk, as against livestock. Its advisers feared that the fall in production, estimated at between five and ten per cent. compared with the previous year, that had already taken place would not be arrested unless the balance between milk and fatstock prices, which had shifted in favour of the latter since the war started, were redressed, or even tipped the other way; for this purpose they calculated that the average price rise required over the year would be 5½d.—7d. in winter, 4¼d. in summer above the corresponding prices in the last pre-war season.

These figures turned out to be an almost exact compromise between the demand of the Milk Marketing Boards—for a rise of 9d. in winter—and the view of the Minister of Agriculture that 5d. would be sufficient. As such, they emerged almost unaltered from the interdepartmental tussle of August; the annual average increase was to be 5½d., obtained by averaging summer prices at 4¼d. instead of 4¼d.¹ These changes meant that, if the 'Milk Fund' were to balance, another £10 million would have to be realised on the sale of milk and milk products. The Ministry proposed to raise about three-quarters of this by an immediate further increase in the price of milk sold for manufacture into butter, cheese, and condensed or dried milk; the remainder would have to come from liquid milk, by way either of a higher retail price or (it was hoped) in part by a reduction in distributive margins, consequent upon the Perry Report, which was not yet ready. In any event there was no need to provoke public comment by putting up retail milk prices again so soon after their last rise on 1st July; for the 'Milk Fund' could be made to balance, even without any levy on distributors' margins, if the new increase were not made till April 1941. Indeed, until the Report should be received and decisions taken upon it, there was no practical alternative but to maintain the existing prices and margins—including the 'temporary' extra penny—on a hand-to-mouth basis, month by month. The Treasury duly sanctioned this course for October.

During the summer also, decisive steps had been taken to put the relations between the Milk Marketing Boards and the Ministry of Food on a proper war-time footing. Discussions towards this end had begun as early as February, when the temporary subsidy to the Boards was in force; and they had started, so far as the Ministry was concerned, not from the pre-war position, but virtually *de novo*. Neither the Ministry of Agriculture's objections to making a producers' board the vehicle of control in the national interest, nor the device of a quadripartite contract for each producer, devised to get

¹ A slight readjustment was also made by which the price in December and January would be 8d., instead of 7d., above pre-war. For the general background of these price negotiations, see Vol. I, Chapter VI.

round them, were revived or even, as it seems, remembered. Instead, the proposal was mooted of a contract between each Board and the Ministry, by which the powers of the former, possibly extended as might be necessary in war-time, should be exercised as the latter might direct; the *quid pro quo*, of course, being the financial guarantee. Negotiations with the Boards, the Agricultural Departments, and the Treasury pursued an amicable course; 'Heads of Agreement' were drawn up, which it was proposed to convert into formal contracts. Then, and only then, early in May, were the lawyers consulted; they advised that such contracts would be *ultra vires* the Boards, who were 'not empowered to fetter the free exercise of their own discretion'.¹

This difficulty might, it was thought, be got over by issuing a Defence Regulation empowering the Boards to enter into contracts, notwithstanding the Agricultural Marketing Acts. But Parliamentary Counsel advised that there should be no contract; instead, a Defence Regulation might be issued obliging the Boards to comply with directions issued by the Minister of Food, and empowering the Minister to modify, by Order, the statutory powers of the Boards. With the concurrence of the Boards, this course was adopted; a new part—IX—was added to the Defence (Agriculture and Fisheries) Regulations by Order in Council, dated 29th July 1940.² In addition to the powers and obligations just mentioned, it provided for the suspension of the right of producers to call for the revocation of the marketing schemes, and of the right of aggrieved persons to appeal to the Minister of Agriculture under Section 9 of the Act of 1931.

In September 1940 four 'Modification of Functions' Orders, one for each Marketing Board, were issued, in agreement with them and with the Treasury and the Agricultural Departments.³ Apart from certain financial provisions arising out of the Ministry's price guarantee, the principal novelty in the Orders was the wide powers over milk distribution that the Boards would now enjoy, subject to the Minister's direction. They might, *inter alia*, determine the buyers to whom milk might be sold, the place of delivery, the methods and agents of transportation, and the description, price, and terms and form of contract for the sale of milk; they might terminate or vary any contracts to which they were parties at any time and without consulting any other person.

The way in which these powers should be exercised was laid down in a 'gloss' to each Order, viz., a formal letter addressed by the

¹ The Ministry of Agriculture had said as much in March 1939 in a letter, part of which has been quoted above (pp. 185-186). 'If the Food Controller is to direct the channels into which milk is to flow . . . there is nothing in the [milk marketing] scheme which would authorise the Board to carry out his directions.'

² S.R. & O. (1940) No. 1330.

³ S.R. & O. (1940) Nos. 1716, 1717, 1718, and 1719.

Ministry to the Board, which enunciated three objects to be secured (in the terms of the letter to the English Board) :

- (a) To ensure that distributors of liquid milk have adequate supplies and that their supplies on contract from producers are adjusted to meet the demand arising from movements of population and the increased demand following the operation of the National Cheap Milk Scheme.
- (b) To ensure that liquid milk supplies are made available to distributors with the greatest measure of economy in transport both from farm to dairy or depot and from the depot to the ultimate distributor.
- (c) To ensure the best utilisation of milk in manufacturing in the national interest'.

This form of words had, in fact, been suggested by the Milk Marketing Board itself, in response to a request to all the Boards for a report on what they intended to do with the powers newly conferred on them. There was some misgiving within the Ministry about the extent to which so general a formula permitted the Board discretion; early drafts of the formal letter did, in fact, impose conditions that would have considerably cramped the Board's actions. However, as a senior official remarked, the wide powers had been bestowed just because

'the milk industry . . . is a vast organisation which the Ministry could not administer itself in detail . . . whilst we should endeavour to check any possible actions against public policy . . . we should be very careful to avoid giving the impression that we do not trust them. If we do not trust them, why did we give them such wide powers?'

As a guide to overt conduct, the logic of this was unanswerable; it settled the form of the official letter, which had been delayed by these doubts till early November. But, of course, the decision to use the Boards (as well as their machinery) had never been the confident act of a fully free agent: it was a matter of expediency, imposed by the incompleteness of pre-war preparations and the want of any easy alternative. As early as February 1940, the Finance Director of the Ministry's Milk Division (an accountant with much experience of the industry) had drawn attention to the one-sidedness of the proposed Trade Directorate under Mr. Foster, and had suggested the appointment of a Joint Director 'from the distribution side'. Now, with Mr. Foster firmly in the saddle as (unpaid) Director of Milk Supplies, and the Chairman of the Milk Marketing Board ensconced in an office especially opened in Colwyn Bay to be near the Milk Division, the question of a counterbalance to undue influence from producers was revived. There was no question of the Director's

conduct being other than correct; indeed, he had volunteered to stand aside whenever his position with the Ministry was in conflict with that as General Manager of the Milk Marketing Board. But it would be precisely in such a situation that the Ministry would most be in need of independent expert advice. Moreover, the position was vulnerable politically; the publication of the Modification of Functions Order was promptly followed by a protest from the Central Milk Distributive Committee. They complained, quite justly, that there had been no consultation with them before the issue of an Order which appeared to abolish their main function *vis-à-vis* the Milk Marketing Board. A deputation to Mr. Attlee, the Lord Privy Seal, from the Co-operative Movement on 21st October expressed misgivings about the dual position of Mr. Foster and the neglect of the Central Milk Distributive Committee. Accordingly it was decided, early in November, to appoint a part-time Adviser on Milk Distribution drawn from the trade; and this decision took final shape in the selection of two advisers; Mr. W. A. Nell, Chairman of Express Dairy Co. Ltd., and Mr. G. Walworth of the Co-operative Union. Their appointment was announced in January 1941, by which time the Ministry was immersed in new problems that called for the closest co-operation with distributors. But there still remained a stumbling-block to be cleared away—the recommendations of the Perry Report on which the Ministry had yet to take a decision.

CHAPTER XIV

The Second Year of War

I

BY THE TIME the Perry Report was published, on 23rd October 1940, the great air raids were in full swing, and the distribution of milk in the cities, particularly in London, was being maintained only at great cost and difficulty. It was hardly necessary for the Ministry of Food to consider the recommendations on their merits since, whatever these might be, a drastic reorganisation of the trade was obviously inopportune. The Ministry's attitude, even before the date of publication, was one of extreme wariness; its public-relations officers were instructed to adopt a 'neutral' position towards the Report, and formulation of policy was held up until the reaction of public and trade should become clear. Marketing Boards and distributors had been asked to let the Ministry have their comments by 31st October, but there can have been little expectation that they would be able to comply. Meanwhile the Treasury had reluctantly agreed to continue the distributors' 'extra penny', first for October and then for November. The attitude there to the Report was quite uncritical; it was described as 'excellent', and the proposal to reduce the margin considered to be 'right'.¹ The Treasury was much concerned with the need for publicity, lest the Report meet the fate of the Milk Industry Bill; in particular it was hopeful of enlisting the support of the Co-operative Movement. Ministry of Food officials continued to counsel caution until a decision was taken on policy; 'a fierce publicity campaign may merely be making a whip for the Minister's own back'. In the House of Lords, enthusiasm for the Report was almost unbounded; it was described as not only a businesslike but also a statesmanlike production, and as 'a remarkable document'.²

Comment from the distributors was severe but restrained; they evidently felt themselves to be on a tricky wicket. (Mr. J. H. Maggs, however, in a personal letter to a high official, described the report as a 'fatuous document'.) The brevity, directness, and sense of conviction, with which the report was written made its argument difficult to rebut in short order. Nevertheless, the critics made some

¹ The Treasury was, of course, very properly intent on keeping inflation at bay, and the squeezing of margins was a means to this end. See Hancock and Gowing, *British War Economy*, in this series (H.M.S.O.), pp. 48 *seq.*, 156 *seq.*

² *Official Report*, cols. 603-618 (Lord Addison's motion).

telling points. The English distributors claimed, quite rightly, that the 8d. margin was based on 'hypothetical conditions', and challenged the Ministry to prove that these conditions could be realised; let it (they said) make an Order imposing the Perry recommendations, and in due course let a costings investigation determine what the proper margin should be. The Scottish distributors took much the same line. The Milk Marketing Board took exception to the Committee's slighting references to the activities of producer-retailers in towns, and feared that the prescription of an 8d. margin would cause a breakdown of distribution in the country. The main Scottish Board pointed out that if producer-retailers' margins were cut to an unprofitable level, they would give up their rounds and sell their milk to the Board instead; and that a uniform price for milk all the year round, as recommended by the Committee, would encourage producer-retailers to concentrate on summer production, to the detriment of their customers in winter. It pointed out also that the customers of the Co-operative Societies that had earned commendation for making only one delivery a day had hitherto been able to get extra milk from private traders, and that they, as well as those who dealt only with the latter, would have to put up with reduced standards of service if the margin were cut. The Scottish Board agreed that reforms in distribution could only be achieved by compulsion.

The Ministry found the distributors' comments 'unhelpful'. Officials had hoped, it appears, for some sort of compromise offer from them that could be represented as a first step towards better things; 'it is essential that he [the Minister] should announce some reduction in the distributors' margin in view of the statements that have previously been made'. The most hopeful face-saving device seemed to be one that had been specifically rejected by the Perry Committee, namely an 8d. margin for milk not delivered to the customer's door. Some of the larger distributors had indicated that they would not object to this, but the English Co-operative Societies were reported to be opposed to it, on the ground that they had no dairy shops.¹ Another suggestion, the compulsory abolition of half-pint bottles, foundered on their usefulness at a time of shortage; it had also other disadvantages, such as the need to scrap all the steel crates made to fit that size of bottle. (The Express Dairy Company alone would have needed some 20,000 new 'pint' crates.) Lastly, officials proposed to take up a recommendation that the Committee had thrown out more or less by the way, namely that 'the administration of milk distribution

¹ They made an informal counter-proposal which pin-points the principal weakness of the Perry Report very neatly. They would (it was reported to the Ministry) accept a 10d. margin on two conditions: (a) it should be clear, i.e., the milk should not carry any accommodation or other premiums, nor would they make any sales below the retail price, (b) it should not apply in the London area, where their costs were 2d. a gallon higher than elsewhere.

in the national interest should be made the active concern of some organisation equipped with all necessary powers and facilities'.

The Minister himself was disinclined to enforce minor economies on the trade; he would have preferred merely to abolish the minimum price as soon as 'the supply of milk comfortably exceeds the domestic demand'—a condition that in January 1941 was a long way from fulfilment—and leave competition to do the rest.

'The Perry Committee', he wrote, 'made a mistake in selecting their evidence on a narrow front although I am sure that in any normal conditions their conclusions are right and their recommendations would lead to economies. But it is not enough to have the right ideas: the important thing is to put them in operation at the right time'.

On the 16th January Lord Woolton submitted to his colleagues in the Food Policy Committee compromise proposals officials had evolved, consisting in the rejection of the Perry Committee's main recommendations coupled with acceptance of some minor ones. The only change in the margins was to be a *rise* (from 8d. to 9d. a gallon for milk supplied under the milk-in-schools scheme) and distributors were to keep the extra penny that they had now had, on a hand-to-mouth basis, since July. (The Treasury was still hoping that it might be withdrawn on 1st February.) The Food Policy Committee accepted the proposals reluctantly and for want of better, subject to a reference upwards to the War Cabinet; but the War Cabinet thought the compromise not worth while, and referred it back to the Food Policy Committee, and so to the Minister of Food. The Minister thereupon proposed that 'some central organisation be created to direct the administration of milk distribution in the national interest' and that until this was done, a decision on the remaining Perry recommendations should be deferred initially till 30th June. Discussion on the exact part to be played by the Agricultural Departments in the creation of the new body held up decision on the new proposal, but it was at length approved by the Food Policy Committee on 5th March. By that time, however, the Ministry had avowedly lost what faith it had ever had that this, 'the only "nine-pin" left standing', would lead to any useful result.

'Everyone agreed', wrote an official to the Minister on 1st March, reporting soundings taken in Colwyn Bay, 'that it would give the Ministry a lot of work but that nothing of practical value would result during the war period. . . . It was also agreed that to postpone until 30th June . . . the decision about reducing margins was merely to deceive ourselves and that there would be no more prospect of securing a reduction than there is now.

'In these circumstances I put to the meeting whether it would not

be preferable to face the issue in a realistic manner and acknowledge that under war conditions we cannot expect to bring about a reduction in distributive margins. This proposition was agreed to unanimously'.

How far the Food Policy Committee were made aware of this opinion is not on record. But in his statement on milk policy to the House of Lords on 18th March 1941 the Minister avoided all mention of the proposed new organisation, and simply rejected the Perry recommendations root and branch 'in these abnormal times'. His references to the deceased were not more fulsome than a funeral occasion requires:

'I admit freely that in the light of that Report there seemed to be openings for the reconstitution of the milk trade . . . but I hesitate at this juncture to add unnecessarily to the burden that we [the Ministry of Food] have to carry, unless there is evidence that it will be in the public interest for us to do so. The measure of the public interest in this case is a saving of a maximum of fourpence per family per week'¹.

As much might have been said before the Committee was ever appointed. The case for rejecting the recommendations, in the conditions of 1940-41, is too strong to need defence. What is most remarkable about the whole episode is that any responsible person should have thought that the Committee had made out any more than a *prima facie* case for accepting them in normal conditions. It is possible that with more research and harder thinking, a definite verdict might have been reached; but the only possible verdict on the Committee's indictment of milk distributors is 'not proven'. The fact that two leading accountants serving in the Ministry of Food were diametrically opposed about the interpretation of the evidence collected by one of them, may serve as indication of the difficulty of drawing positive conclusions from cost accounts. But on less technical ground the Committee was equally insecure. Two weaknesses in particular are worth emphasising. One, already mentioned, is the failure to allow anything for the cost of 'balancing' supplies, in the form of 'level delivery' or 'accommodation' premiums. The other goes deeper; it is the complete absence of any historical sense, so that the Committee could pass judgement on (say) the role of the producer-retailer in urban areas without any regard to how he had got there. The Linlithgow Committee, a generation earlier, knew better, or was better advised.² These weaknesses went undetected, and in consequence the Ministry of Food was to be haunted by the ghost of the Perry recommendations.

¹ Official Report (House of Lords), 18th March 1941, cols. 757-762.

² Cmd. 1854, already cited. By a grave error of official judgment this, the best written and most illuminating of all the reports on the milk trade, was excluded from the Perry Committee's 'recommended reading' as being out of date.

II

By this time, the Ministry was already being driven towards some measure of reorganisation of distribution by the pressure of milk shortage. As early as July 1940 the possibility that milk might have to be 'rationed' during the winter was being mooted; in August and September 'liquid' sales, thanks to the National Milk Scheme and the shortage of condensed milk, were the highest ever recorded, while production was falling. By mid-October there was every prospect of a serious winter deficiency, for if only so much milk were allowed to go to manufacture as would keep the plants 'ticking over', and if supplies to hospitals and under the National Milk and Milk-in-Schools schemes were met in full, sales to ordinary consumers would, it appeared, have to be cut by about ten per cent. of normal. This was more formidable than it looks at first sight, for nothing could be more certain than that, if supplies were left to themselves, the amounts by which individual dairymen would go short would vary enormously. A firm like United Dairies, that acted both as wholesaler and retailer, could keep its retail shops fully supplied by stinting its wholesale trade; a Liverpool firm that drew its main supplies in bulk from the Aberdeen Milk Marketing Board might, and did, find itself short by not ten but fifty per cent. So also those distributors who had a heavy priority trade, conducted at margins well below the normal, would be tempted to sacrifice that rather than the ordinary customer, particularly if they were being mulcted in accommodation premiums in order to maintain even a reduced supply.

The Ministry foresaw these difficulties, but was unwilling, even had it been able, to take drastic measures to cover an emergency that at most might last four months. Early in November it called representative distributors together and got them to agree to observe priorities; the Milk Marketing Boards undertook to adjust supplies between one area and another (through the powers newly conferred on them). Within each area, it was planned to set up voluntary pools of dairymen to equalise supplies between them. For its part, the Ministry undertook to determine, and publish, the approximate cut that the non-priority consumer might expect; and an announcement to this effect was made on 28th November. At Treasury instance, the price of milk was put up on 1st December by a further 4d. a gallon, making the total rise since the outbreak of war 8d.; but this was not expected to help very much in choking off demand from the 'non-priorities'.

These arrangements were not, however, complete when the Press Notice went out; in particular, very little had been done towards

setting up the dairymen's pools. Moreover, it became obvious that the writ of the Central Milk Distributive Committee did not run everywhere in England and Wales. The Milk-in-Schools scheme was the first to suffer, and strenuous attempts had to be made by Milk Marketing Board officers, including sometimes the threat of withdrawal of all supplies of 'accommodation' milk, to get supplies to schools reinstated. These troubles only lasted a fortnight, however; on 17th December both English and Scottish distributors, and the Marketing Boards, recommended that the 10 per cent. cut should be withdrawn. More milk was coming off farms, and the rise in price had, after all, had some effect on demand. On 20th December, very fortunately in time for the Christmas movements of population, the cut was suspended; it did not have to be reimposed during the winter months. The problem of distributing a reduced supply was therefore evaded for the time being.

With the New Year it was abruptly revived, in the light of a survey of the prospects for the 'milk year' beginning on 1st April. The Ministry calculated that the surplus milk available for manufacture in the coming summer season would be only 145 million gallons, compared with 235 millions in 1940 and 395 millions in 1939; in the coming winter, supplies were expected to fall below unrestricted requirements by 25 million gallons. The Ministry had already taken steps to curtail the use of milk for purposes considered non-essential; the manufacture of cream had been first restricted and then, in September 1940, prohibited; the use of milk in ice-cream, and synthetic or artificial cream, was prohibited in November and December respectively.¹ It was now proposed to extend this policy further, and to prohibit the use of milk or milk products in bread, biscuits, cakes, and chocolate and sugar confectionery.² This would, it was calculated, enable a balance to be struck between supplies and essential manufacturing requirements (mainly cheese, and condensed and dried milk) at exactly the expected surplus figure of 145 million gallons. But it would leave no margin against an unfavourable season, loss of supplies owing to enemy action, or a further fall in production through shortage of feeding-stuffs. To provide a margin, the Ministry's Milk Utilisation Committee recommended that, during the summer months, a cut of one-seventh in non-priority liquid supplies should be made. This should divert some 50 million gallons to manufacture, mainly of cheese and condensed milk.

The original idea had been that this cut should be made by making all consumers in turn suffer one 'milkless day' a week. But the Minister objected to this because he thought it would favour rich persons with

¹ S.R. & O. (1940) Nos. 1714, 1912, and 2089.

² This was done by S.R. & O. (1941) No. 431, amended so as to specifically include cakes by No. 657.

refrigerators, and after some discussion with the trade the Ministry decided to leave to them the exact means by which the cut should be imposed. No consumers, except those taking the minimum quantity of half-a-pint a day, would, it was said, be left without daily milk. An Order¹ was duly made obliging distributors to limit their total sales (other than to 'priorities' and specified classes of invalid) to six-sevenths of those during a basic week, for which they had already been obliged, under the Food (Inspection of Undertakings) Order,² to make a return of sales to the Ministry.

The restrictive Order had been timed to come into force on 13th April—Easter Sunday—and its fundamental weakness, the regulation of sales by reference to a period some weeks past, became apparent with greater rapidity than if another date had been chosen. The Ministry had fallen into the trap it had barely avoided at Christmas—namely the school holidays. Households with children home from boarding-school found themselves short of milk at a time when their needs might have gone up two- or three-fold. This was only an extreme case of the general problem of population movements, but it brought much correspondence upon the Ministry. Within a week a concession had to be announced; dairymen might apply for revision of their 'basic quotas' to cope with new customers and returned schoolchildren, and in the meantime might supply these in excess of the original quota. Some such adjustment had always, it seems, been intended, though not so soon; of itself it would not have compromised the success of the Order.

There were, however, complaints that did not admit of so easy a cure. Milk distributors in many provincial towns, disregarding the advice of their representatives, began to institute 'milkless days', for which the Ministry was blamed. Consumers objected to a position in which the roundsman could dictate how much milk they were to get; those who used little milk claimed that they were penalised by the uniform application of the cut. By 25th April the Minister was asking his advisers whether it would not be best to drop the plan for that season at once, instead of being forced to do so by Parliamentary or public opinion later. The debate on the Ministry's estimates was due on the 29th, and it seemed essential to make some further concession if anything was to be saved. Rather hastily, therefore, it was decided to announce that households taking one pint or less per day would be exempt, provided they took all their supplies from one dairyman.

Only afterwards, it seems, did the Ministry realise that the exempted households would represent well over half of the total. Its advisers in the trade reproached it for weakness; the Minister's

¹ S.R. & O. (1941) No. 503.

² S.R. & O. (1940) No. 378.

announcement had, they said, wrecked the scheme, just as it was getting over its teething troubles.¹ (They were all the more indignant because the announcement had been made by radio over their heads, and those of the official bodies concerned.) There can be no doubt that this judgment was correct on the facts, for the exemptions destroyed any means of policing dairymen's sales, and left to them the option to cut or not to cut. The Order was, in fact, now incapable of enforcement. But, as always in such cases, the critics were not, as the Minister must be presumed to have been, in the best position to judge the strength of public feeling.

The difficulties that the scheme had encountered were not of the kind that officials could not have been expected to foresee. With the best intentions, they had been too much in a hurry, their consultations too limited. True, they had secured the co-operation of the leaders of the trade; but it was not these who had to face a public alert for any signs of unfairness. It was the individual dairyman and above all the roundsman; and a deputation from the roundsmen's trade unions had warned the Minister, before the Order was made, that it would not work. Perhaps most important of all, the scheme relied on the goodwill of roundsmen and dairymen who would lose financially—in commission or profits—if it were successful. (In this it differed from the previous restriction of 10 per cent., which was only a means of distributing total supplies more fairly.) Admittedly rough-and-ready, it might have been made to work well enough as an avowedly temporary measure, had more care been taken with timing and publicity. As with eggs a little later on, the Ministry had yet to find its touch in matters of this sort.

III

Although the Restriction Order finished up in a thoroughly unsatisfactory and confused state (legally speaking) by reason of the various informal amendments and rulings that the Minister, Milk Marketing Board officials, local Food Offices, and the Milk Division in Colwyn Bay had one and all been constrained to give during April 1941, it was neither revoked nor amended during the summer, but remained formally in force for six months. Officials preferred to bend their energies to the construction of something to put in its place for the coming winter; something loosely referred to as 'milk rationing'. The Minister himself, speaking in the House of Lords on 28th May, threw out a hint of what was coming:

¹ The amount of milk going for manufacture during the six months the scheme was nominally in force was 127 million gallons—18 millions less than the figure budgeted for if there had been no scheme at all. Fortunately, large supplies of Lend/Lease condensed milk were promised in time for the lean season.

'... milk, which I believe that I will ration whether I have to from force of necessity or not'.¹

From the analysis of rationing procedure that follows later in this volume,² it will be evident that strict rationing of milk, in the way in which other foods were rationed, was impossible. In the first place, as Beveridge had pointed out long ago, rationing connoted a system of controlled distribution, capable of delivering the rationed food to the place where it was wanted in the quantities stipulated. In the second place, because the process of authorising the amount of food that a trader was entitled to receive could be neither instantaneous nor continuous, no inconvenience to him or his customers should occur from these amounts being at all times more or less out of date; in other words, he should be able to maintain a stock that could be added to or drawn upon as occasion required to meet fluctuations in demand.

For milk neither of these conditions was or is capable of fulfilment. Supplies vary from day to day, and the depot system, even in the hands of a single central control, could not balance them within the fine limits that strict rationing would require. Still less was an accurate adjustment of producer-retailers' supplies possible; it would be difficult to say which would impose a more onerous obligation on a milk controller, the collection of their small surpluses or the making-up of casual deficits. There could, that is to say, be no guarantee of supply in support of a universal milk ration. At the retailer's end, the extreme perishability of milk meant that stocks were very limited in size; he must, therefore, be allowed more than his paper requirements, to take care of new customers, new priorities, travellers, and other casual demands, to say nothing of sourage and spillage. Under the permit system then in operation for rationed foods, these requirements had to be set as long as twelve weeks ahead; another reason for issuing too much as the only guarantee against shortage.³ Either waste or a breach of the law would result if the rationing regulations prohibited him from selling the inevitable surplus. Milk, in fact, exhibits most clearly the fundamental looseness of a system of rationing based on the consumer-retailer tie; but the stricter system whereby a coupon is surrendered for each transaction is even less applicable to a commodity bought daily and delivered to the door.

The Ministry of Food was not, as a rule, given to analysing administrative problems in this way, and so it took some time to reach the conclusion that an attempt to ration milk were better not made.

¹ *Official Report*, col, 331.

² Below, pp. 543 *seq.*

³ Permits for rationed food ran at this time for eight weeks, and were based on information that, on the day they came into operation, was already four weeks old. Twelve weeks is, incidentally, a long time in the cycle of milk supplies.

Indeed, a detailed rationing scheme was drawn up during May 1941 and submitted to the trade, the Milk Marketing Boards, and to other Departments. By July, various objections to a rigid scheme had become apparent; though the administrative obstacles were still underrated, the likelihood that a black-market in unconsumed rations would develop, and the political trouble that might arise from trying to collect surpluses from producer-retailers, were now recognised. Moreover, the Standing Committee on Medical and Nutritional Problems had objected to any unnecessary restriction on milk consumption by adults, such as might be imposed by a fixed ration in time of temporary plenty. Officials now proposed an alternative that would at once restrict the use of milk by adults and encourage it by children and adolescents; a guaranteed priority ration for all up to the age of 18 at a reduced price, i.e., the extension of the National Milk Scheme. The cost of this might be met, it was suggested, by raising the price either of the non-priority or the priority milk, as was thought best; in either case a suitable adjustment could be made to ensure that there was no appreciable change in the Cost-of-Living Index. But the Minister, while accepting the priority ration, was against any change in the National Milk Scheme that might expose it to criticism:

'I believe', he wrote on 26th July, 'it to be a national asset and I should like it to be retained for the purpose for which it was devised. There is a special case for securing adequate supplies of milk for nursing mothers and for children under 5: that case has been accepted and, even after the war, will stand the criticism that the "economisers" will be forced to bring against all war-time measures.

'On the other hand, if we burden the scheme with all the excellent desires of people who want milk for all classes of adolescents, we shall, in the long run, lose the lot. . . .'

By then, time was running short if the 'Scheme of Supply', as the new quasi-rationing scheme, shorn of its subsidy element, was called, were to come into effect in the autumn. There still remained another hurdle to be got over. One of the key features of the scheme, taken over from the original rationing proposals, was the registration of consumers with retailers, so that the central control on the supply side could allocate milk more or less equitably between them. Officials, however, had some difficulty in convincing the Minister that it would not be sufficient to register priority consumers alone, and allocate non-priority milk on a datum line of past performance. In the end he was told frankly that so to put responsibility on the trade would not work:

'It is no exaggeration to say that practically every approach which you have made to a trade to manage its own affairs, e.g., Food

Manufacturers, Fishing Industry, has resulted in loss of time and failure . . . the Milk Distributors will not accept responsibility. They insist that it rests firmly on the Government; and surely they are right. With falling production, the Government have deliberately increased demand. They must accept responsibility for deciding who is to go short'.

When the Parliamentary Secretary announced in the House of Commons, on 6th August, that milk would not, after all, be rationed, but that the public would be required to register for it, this point had not been settled. Instructions to the trade went forward to local food offices with the injunction that they be held until the 13th, when the Minister, who had gone for a week's holiday, would be back and could give or withhold his approval; fortunately the need to countermand them did not arise.

IV

Such had been the hurry in the last stages of preparing the scheme that officials had not found time to warn the trade what was coming; indeed, but for a last-minute intervention by one of the Trade Advisers, a broadcast announcement would have been made on the morning of the 14th, before dairymen should have received the Food Office instructions. Not for the first time, the Ministry was reproached by the trade for not consulting them fully; with reason, inasmuch as the rationing scheme of May had never been formally withdrawn. The Central Milk Distributive Committee had two main comments on the new proposals. They thought, first, that the Ministry should itself announce the approximate quantity of milk that the non-priority consumer would get and to this, with some reluctance, the Ministry agreed. (It had hoped, by not doing so, to avoid the outcry that would result from the allowance being so small.) The second point was more important. One of the trade's grievances,¹ since the shortage of milk had developed and the normal channels of distribution been upset by movements in population and changes in demand owing to the National Milk Scheme, had been the high cost of 'balancing' supplies by means of accommodation premiums. Broadly speaking, this had operated to the advantage of firms like United Dairies, possessing a large number of depots and operating in the London area where demand had fallen off, and to the disadvantage of the Co-operatives and the independent dairymen. In the spring and summer of 1941 the Co-operative Movement had threatened to refuse to pay any accommodation premiums and to give up supplying milk under the National Milk Scheme.

¹ Confined to England and Wales. In Scotland the Boards were able to redistribute supplies readily.

One of the attractions of milk rationing to the English retail trade, and particularly to the Co-operatives, had been that it logically carried with it the abolition of accommodation premiums. (Scottish retailers, who did not have to pay them, could see the disadvantages of rationing more clearly.) For if the Ministry were to prescribe a ration for all that the dairyman was bound to deliver, it would be itself morally bound to guarantee his supplies at a uniform price. As early as June the Ministry had agreed to work out a scheme for this purpose; and had got so far, by July, as to propound a scheme whereby depot proprietors (No. 1 wholesalers), instead of being remunerated on the amount of milk handled, would be formed into a pool and receive an agreed handling charge from the Ministry. This was a necessary consequence of the Ministry's undertaking, under the rationing scheme, to direct the movement of depot milk to where it would be required. The result would be that No. 2 wholesalers, i.e. those buying from depots and re-selling to retailers, would be relieved of accommodation premiums that were, of course, passed on down the chain. But the retailer would not be freed from such premiums in so far as they were exacted by the No. 2 wholesaler; the Ministry sought to help him, in August, by prescribing maximum wholesale prices, but these proved impossible to enforce. The problem was a difficult one, for—as the Ministry was now discovering—not all retailers performed identical functions. It was one thing to prevent wholesalers from holding up retailers to ransom, another to say that they should not be paid by the retailer for performing services, such as breaking bulk and bottling, that he would otherwise have to perform for himself. Or, to put it the other way round, a large retailer who distributed milk over a wide area, and himself undertook certain quasi-wholesale services ought (the argument went) to be able to buy his milk more cheaply than the smaller man who did not.

The Central Milk Distributive Committee evidently suspected that the Ministry's abandonment—as they saw it—of milk rationing was inspired by a wish to avoid complying with their request for a uniform price on sales to the retailer. The Ministry assured them, on the contrary, that it would sympathetically consider any plan of this sort that they might care to bring forward. (It could scarcely do less, since at the end of June it had assured a Co-operative deputation that 'the trouble [of accommodation premiums] would probably be at an end by 1st October'.) But it emphasised that the preparation of such a scheme must take time. Even the depot pool, agreed upon in July, could not take effect until a costings investigation had been made; as an interim measure, depot proprietors would continue to draw their income from the old sources,¹ except that the 'Milk Fund' would

¹ Namely, the 'transit risk allowance' paid by the farmer; the rebates granted by the railways on milk consigned in bulk (the farmer having been charged the rate for churn lots); and miscellaneous premiums.

meet any premiums, within the Milk Marketing Board's scale, that had previously been paid by individual wholesalers.

The ground was thus roughly cleared for the introduction of the Milk Supply Scheme—roughly only, since the administrative preparations were set on foot so late. Except that the non-priority allowance was not guaranteed—was, in fact, a means of balancing total supplies—the arrangements from the consumer's point of view, and from the caterer's, were similar to those under true rationing.¹ All consumers had to register with a dairyman, whose requirements were calculated by reference to the three categories:

- (i) expectant mothers and children under five (allowed one pint a day)
- (ii) children and young persons under eighteen (half a pint a day)
- (iii) all other consumers (the 'non-priority' allowance for the time being).

Certain types of invalid were allowed priority also, on production of a medical certificate. The total thus obtained, *plus* an allowance for contingencies of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., was entered on a *Certificate of Requirements* (Form M.K.2) issued by the Local Food Office. The Form M.K.2 corresponded, in rationing proper, to a *permit*. But, just as it was not an offence to buy more than one's milk allowance, so the M.K.2 did not forbid the retailer to acquire more milk than the amount stated on it nor constitute an entitlement to a specified quantity. (Compare the classic statement: 'Postmasters are neither bound to give change nor authorised to demand it'.) He was, however, tied to nominated suppliers; and the Ministry's Regional Milk Supply Officer² was charged with the duty of adjusting his supplies, so closely as might be possible, to the quantities on the M.K.2, by finding new supplies or diverting surplus milk as occasion required. The retailer was, moreover, obliged to make a return of his transactions to the Ministry, month by month.

The scheme was designed, that is to say, to provide the Ministry with a basis on which to plan the movement of milk in accordance with need. But new machinery, in England and Wales, was also needed; for the Milk Marketing Board had met with so much opposition in exercising the powers of diversion, conferred on it in the autumn of 1940, that they had remained almost a dead letter. As a Ministry official put it, 'The buyers of milk do not mind very much what the Ministry does with it, but they do not like the idea of their businesses being under the control of an organisation of producers. We propose to solve this deadlock by the establishment of a branch of

¹ See Chapter XXXII below.

² who was also the Regional Officer of the Milk Marketing Board.

the Ministry'.¹ This, the *Milk Movements Branch*, was recruited from the No. 1 wholesalers and the Milk Marketing Board, and was wholly 'expert' in its composition; unlike the rest of Milk Division, whose location in Colwyn Bay was responsible for much of the poor liaison between the Ministry and the distributors, the branch was established in the Milk Marketing Board's headquarters at Thames Ditton in Surrey. It began work there in the second week of September 1941; the appointment of voluntary Milk Movements Officers in each of the Milk Marketing Board's regions was not completed until some weeks later.

The depots thus became the king-pin of war-time milk control, just as they had been in 1918. It was inevitable that this should be so, for in no other way could a sufficiently flexible central direction of supplies be created from the peace-time organisation. But such a development ran contrary to the peace-time policy of the Milk Marketing Board, which was to encourage the sale of milk by direct contract between farmer and buyer. The Board's hostility to depots had occasioned complaints to the statutory Committee of Investigation on more than one occasion.² It was wholly natural, therefore, that the Chairman of the Board should now express apprehension for the future:

'I do not want', Mr. Baxter wrote on 20th August 1941, 'the Milk Marketing Board to be faced with a position at the termination of control in which the buyers may be of the opinion that this new principle is approved of by the Board and regarded as a permanent feature. . . . It is not.

'Again, I presume that great care will be exercised to see that no direct contracts are transferred to the depots unless it is found that there is no other alternative to meet the supply position. Every gallon of milk passing through a depot imposes a heavier cost on the producer. It also imposes a heavier cost on the retailer. The only beneficiary is the depot proprietor. . . .'

Here was the first small cloud on the horizon; the storm was to come a year later over the Ministry's new price structure. But officials, intent on the distribution scheme, hardly saw the cloud; Mr. Baxter's letter evoked no comment and received a purely conventional reply.

* * * * *

During this second year of war, the emphasis of policy had shifted;

¹ The suggestion of such a branch originated with Mr. J. H. Maggs, of United Dairies, in a letter to Lord Woolton on 24th June 1941, pointing out, among other things, that while the Scottish Milk Marketing Board was able to perform wholesale functions efficiently, the English Board had neither the experience nor the facilities to do so. This fact is the key to the whole war-time milk problem.

² Above, p. 181.

producers' prices were no longer, as they had been in 1939-40, a principal focus of official attention. When, however, the time had come, in the first months of 1941, to announce the prices for the summer season, agreed on in August 1940,¹ the need to encourage production next winter was felt urgently. Prospects for feeding-stuffs were regarded as bleak—this was the time of the 'Livestock Policy Conference', with its forecast of catastrophic falls in the output of milk—and the rationing scheme for them was as yet an unknown quantity. The Ministry of Food felt, and the Treasury on reflection agreed, that there would be merit in announcing then and there the level of prices for the season October 1941-March 1942; the increase over the base year, allowing for changes in costs and a further fall in yields, worked out at 11½d. per gallon (compared with 7½d. for the winter of 1940-41). The Boards accepted this figure as reasonable; but the National Farmers' Union, always ready as it seems to show its members that Codlin was the friend rather than Short, claimed that it had not been fully consulted, and extracted from the Ministry an undertaking to adjust prices retrospectively if producers could show that average costs during any six months' period had exceeded those in the datum year 1938-39 by more than the average increase in producers' returns. This undertaking was criticised by the Treasury as guaranteeing the farmers 'cost-plus', and by the Ministry of Agriculture as establishing a precedent that might have to be extended to other commodities. (It was used, at the end of 1941, by the Milk Marketing Board to secure an extra ½d. a gallon for the winter of 1941-42; the increase in the national minimum farm wage, at the same time, added another 1½d. for January-March 1942.) With the adoption of general price stabilisation in April 1941, and the 'concordat' of July between the Agricultural Departments and the Ministry of Food, the latter ceased to have primary responsibility or interest in milk producers' prices; though it might, and did, urge upon the former its views of what these should be, in the interests of its overriding aim—higher and ever higher production.

¹ Above, p. 201.

CHAPTER XV

The Completion of the Control Edifice

I

THE SCHEME of Supply formally came into operation in mid-October 1941, and shortly afterwards Milk Movements Branch had its first test, when slight shortages of milk occurred in the North of England. Supplies to dairymen were at first considerably more than the quantities shown on the Certificates of Requirements (Forms M.K.2), inasmuch as these had been worked out in terms of a weekly non-priority allowance of two pints a head. Early in November the first steps were taken to reduce supplies towards the 'M.K.2 quantities' by decreeing cuts, first of 5 per cent. and then of 15 per cent., in the total milk allocated to dairymen, on the same lines as in the previous winter. From 23rd November, the most a retailer was entitled to was the quantity shown on his M.K.2. As some compensation for the loss of liquid supplies, a tin of evaporated milk per non-priority consumer per month was issued through dairymen from November onwards.

So far as the larger towns, receiving milk through wholesalers and large multiple retailers, were concerned, the task of achieving these reductions equitably was comparatively easy. Elsewhere it was more difficult; the retailer in, say, a country town, drawing his supplies directly from the farm, might have surpluses that (even supposing he reported them) could not readily be diverted. More important, producer-retailers in Food Office areas whose buying population, as shown by consumer registrations for sugar, was less than 30,000, had specifically been exempted from surrendering, or even notifying surplus milk; moreover, the Ministry had undertaken to remedy any deficiencies below their authorised quantities in liquid milk, instead of the evaporated milk that other dairymen might have to accept. (This evaporated milk was in addition to the general issue already mentioned.)

The inequities to which this exemption led had been partly responsible, in mid-November, for a deputation to the Minister from the Co-operative Movement, which had consistently pressed for a full rationing scheme. Retail societies complained of unfair competition from producer-retailers; in the city of Stoke-on-Trent, for instance, there were said to be six hundred of these who were letting their customers have unlimited supplies. The Co-operative Wholesale

Society complained that, in spite of the assurances given by the Ministry, it was still having to take one-third of its requirements in accommodation milk. There was some question of whether it, as a 'No. 1 supplier', would be entitled to repayment of premiums paid to other 'No. 1's'; but apart from this financial point (which was ultimately resolved in the C.W.S.'s favour) a matter of principle was involved. Why could not the Ministry or the Milk Marketing Board (it asked) exercise its powers to re-allocate direct farm contracts to the C.W.S. in accordance with the latter's legitimate requirements? The answer, given (it was said) in a moment of frankness by a member of Milk Movements Branch, in response to a complaint that accommodation supplies from another large firm to a C.W.S. depot had been diverted direct to retail societies without consultation, was that this large firm 'had got to be humoured'; in other words, that power to divert milk to where it was wanted really depended on the consent of the 'haves'—the firms in possession of contracts, and specifically, depot proprietors engaged in supplying the London market. In essence, the Scheme of Supply was a device for diverting milk from London and the South, where consumption was traditionally high, to the industrial North, where war-time demand had risen; and for this to be done promptly and without friction, the willing co-operation of firms like United Dairies was indispensable.

It was in order to reduce its dependence on the goodwill of existing contract holders that, as early as September 1941, the Ministry of Food had re-discovered the idea with which the Food (Defence Plans) Department had originally set out—namely that the contract system should be swept away for the duration of war, and the Ministry become the sole purchaser of milk. For reasons of its own, the Milk Marketing Board was moving towards a similar proposal—though with itself as sole purchaser. During the remainder of 1941 exploratory discussions were opened up between these two, together with the Ministry of Agriculture and leading members of the trade. The militant attitude of the Co-operative rank and file was at once a spur and an embarrassment. Dissatisfied with the Ministry's answers to their complaints, they were, their leaders warned it, likely to come out publicly in support of just the proposal towards which officials were moving. Co-operative support for Ministry purchase of milk, after it had been decided on, was indispensable; beforehand, it might be fatal. A Co-operative National Conference was summoned for 3rd January 1942; in the hope of damping down the delegates' indignation, the Ministry accelerated the preparation of its new Order to deal with producer-retailers.

This—the Milk (Diversion) Order—applied to England and Wales only, and came into force on 31st December.¹ It provided that every

¹ S.R. & O. (1941) No. 2126.

supplier of milk must complete monthly a form of return¹ showing (a) his supplies of milk during the week previous to that in which the return was made (b) his estimated requirements during the week following the return. He was, that is to say, to furnish to the Regional Milk Supply Officer the evidence upon which diversion of surplus milk could be made. In approving the making of the Order, the Ministry's Orders Committee had expressed the view that it would be 'largely unenforceable', because it did not oblige suppliers to keep and retain a record of transactions. But neither the Orders Committee nor the Milk Division foresaw what was actually to happen. There were fears within the Division that Regional Officers might be overwhelmed by the mass of paper returns—15,000 in the North-Western Region alone. No one expected that large numbers of dairymen would either not make the return at all, or would do so too late for the Regional Officer to take any action on it. As all suppliers, and not only those having surpluses, were obliged to complete the return, much energy had to be spent by the regional offices in dealing with information of which no use could be made. The fact was that the Order had been put out hurriedly and under external pressure, without due calculation of the administrative and legal difficulties. Also, as a Ministry official holding an inquest on it pointed out, the Order ignored the varying conditions under which dairymen obtained their milk; only producer-retailers and those buying on direct contract would, in fact, require the intervention of the supply officer to divert surpluses. Dairymen buying by wholesale need only be instructed to reduce their purchases to the required level. It was therefore proposed to revoke the Diversion Order; to require suppliers to report surpluses, and to make a return of supplies and requirements whenever called upon to do so; and, for the first time, to require retailers to limit their sales to the quantities shown on the current Certificate of Requirements.

By the time this conclusion was reached, in July 1942, the Order was already in abeyance. For (as it turned out) the long-term fall in milk production had reached its bottom. On 29th March non-priority supplies were raised to 3 pints a head a week; in April and May production leapt ahead, and throughout the summer it continued well ahead of the 1941 figures. Manufacturing capacity was stretched to the utmost; almost regretfully the Division was forced, on 23rd May, to lift all restrictions on retail sales for the next five weeks. The next return, due on 6th June, therefore became otiose and a press notice was hastily issued telling traders that they need not make it. The two following returns were similarly dispensed with, though the Order remained legally in force.

¹ The form was to be issued by local Food Offices. It required the dairyman to categorise his supplies into (i) his own production, (ii) supplies bought on contract from a farmer, (iii) other supplies, e.g., those bought by wholesale. It also had sections for milk sold wholesale or diverted.

II

At the end of May, also, a White Paper on milk policy marked a milestone in the long and difficult negotiations that the Ministry had been conducting with producer and distributor interests over war-time milk marketing in England and Wales. To preserve the basic principle of the new system—Ministry ownership of all milk sold, other than producer-retailers', at an early stage in distribution—had required the utmost tenacity. Opposition from the distributors to the abolition of the contract system had been less strenuous than officials had feared. Mr. J. H. Maggs had confessed himself unable to see any advantage to the Ministry; the existing Milk Movements Branch could, he thought, accomplish all that was required in the way of diversion, provided that measures were taken to limit, first the amount of milk passing on direct contract and secondly the number of sources from which any single dairyman could obtain accommodation supplies. Somewhat later, in January 1942, the Creamery Proprietors' Association endorsed and enlarged upon his views: 'nothing can be accomplished by the transference of contracts which cannot equally well, in fact better, be achieved by the extension of wholesaling and the diversion of milk'. Within the Ministry itself there were trade experts who questioned the need for abolishing contracts and thought that the consequence of so doing—the complete reorganisation of transport from farm to first destination—would be onerous and expensive. They denied that the contract system was of itself an obstacle to controlled movement of milk, whether in aid of the supply scheme or of transport economy. The real obstacle was the different financial consequences of these movements to the firms concerned; these could be eliminated by changes in the controlled price structure, including a system of Ministry rebates.

On the plane of mechanism—the means required to adjust supplies to requirements—it is difficult not to feel that the sceptics were right. But officials were not free to deal with the problem on the plane of mechanism. One has only to contrast Mr. Maggs' proposals with the views of Mr. Baxter, already quoted, to see that the political aspect of milk marketing was, as ever, paramount. Once the Milk Marketing Board had espoused the abolition of contracts, the Ministry of Food would have had to find better reasons for keeping them than the opposition of creamery proprietors, even had it found their arguments convincing. In point of fact, though, the possibility of making a clean sweep had an irresistible appeal: 'Quite frankly', wrote the senior official most intimately concerned with the negotiations to a colleague,

'I had not dared to hope that we should get rid of this incubus, and I am very grateful to the Milk Marketing Board for having themselves put forward the proposition that individual contracts should be abolished. . . . I do not think that we ought to be discouraged at the difficulties of the task if we feel that the gain from eliminating contracts outweighs the disadvantages they impose upon us'.

Another official was even more emphatic:

'... it is becoming more and more difficult... to maintain the polite fiction that we are only dealing with wartime conditions, by superimposing on the peace-time structure temporary measures of control. . . . It is unthinkable that we should revert to the wasteful system of *laissez-faire* after the war. We shall, I think, have to get authority from Ministers to tell the industry that there must be central control on milk supplies after the war and that . . . such control will have to be exercised, if not by the Government itself, then by some body so constituted that it will use its powers in the public and not any sectional interest. A firm assurance of this sort would rule out the possibility of the Milk Boards being left in complete control of the situation'.

The abolition of contracts was seen, that is to say, as a move towards a post-war new deal for milk. That being so, it could not be allowed to take place in a way that would strengthen the Milk Marketing Board's control over distribution. The Board's proposal that it, having bought the milk from producers, should allocate it to distributors as the Ministry of Food's agent therefore would not do. The Ministry itself must openly take part in the process of allocation. The simple solution—the elimination of the Milk Marketing Board from the buying and selling of milk—was politically out of the question. As a compromise, the Ministry of Food proposed to intervene between the Board and the distributors, and itself to become at one stage the owner of the milk.

As the compromise was acceptable to the Ministry of Agriculture, one might perhaps have expected it to go through without difficulty. The Milk Marketing Board, however, put up strong resistance, in which it was joined by the National Farmers' Union.¹ Word was put about that the Ministry of Food was endeavouring to reduce the Board to impotence, at the behest of organised distributors; the House of Lords showed signs of anxiety. At first, the Ministry of Agriculture joined with the Ministry of Food in putting up a firm front against the agitation, but when it continued, from February

¹ The N.F.U. Milk and Dairy Produce Committee passed a resolution viewing 'with misapprehension [*sic*] any further transfer' of the Milk Marketing Board's functions to the Ministry of Food.

1942 right into May, the former began to waver. The confident assertion by the Board that the new scheme, and in particular the transport arrangements, would be cumbersome and unworkable, caused the Minister of Agriculture himself to have doubts; doubts that would have been strengthened, had he known that some of the Ministry of Food's own accountants were sceptical about the financial aspects of Government ownership. (Their objections were met by making it momentary and 'notional'.) Meanwhile, the creamery proprietors, some of whom had never liked the proposal to abolish contracts, had actually made overtures to the Milk Marketing Board in the hope of defeating the scheme altogether. The distrust, however, that each felt for the other was even greater than that for the scheme; the overtures came to nothing. The rest of the milk trade had been lined up with the Ministry of Food for several months; and when, in mid-May, Mr. Hudson was at length persuaded to let the scheme go forward, Ministry officials were jubilant.

III

The political difficulties had destroyed the hope, set forth in the Milk Marketing Board's original proposal, that the new scheme might come into operation in April 1942; but it seems likely that the time required to prepare it had in any case, as usual, been underestimated. Both on the side of producer and distributor the formal changes in the manner of remuneration were to be marked. The farmer was to get a flat price, subject only to deductions for sub-standard quality and premiums for specially designated milk such as 'Tuberculin-tested'; regional differences, already reduced to a mere penny a gallon by the operation of the Milk Marketing Board's compensation scheme, were to be abolished. His responsibility for the cost of transport would cease at the point of 'first delivery', e.g., a depot, instead of at the buyer's premises or home railway-station. In consequence, those old bones of contention, the Standard Freight Deduction and the Transit Risk Allowance, would disappear; but so too would the 'level delivery' and 'special service' premiums that certain producers had received.

As for distribution, the former price structure was to be turned inside out. Hitherto there had been a prescribed inclusive margin between the first-hand price and the retail price, out of which any intervening charges for wholesaling, processing, and balancing, had to be met by the retailer, generally in accordance with a scale prescribed by the Board. Now, the retailer was to buy his milk—no matter how supplied—at a uniform price; any intermediate charges

being met by the Ministry of Food at rates to be determined. Depot proprietors, whose remuneration had hitherto been outside the margin, would be brought into this arrangement on similar terms. Transport costs would now be pooled, an adjustment to the producer's price being made to allow for his diminished responsibility in this respect; bulk transport rebates hitherto claimed by depot proprietors would be credited to the Ministry instead. The new arrangements appeared to be tidier, simpler, and more suited than the old to a system of controlled distribution; with them, milk became more closely assimilated to the common pattern of Ministry-owned food-stuffs. The separation of traders by function—retailer, wholesaler, depot proprietor—appeared the more attractive because of the Ministry's intention, in agreement with the trade, to introduce 'rationalisation' of retail deliveries, to save transport. By 'costing' the functions separately, the financial economies from retail rationalisation, as they became apparent, could be intercepted for the Ministry's trading account through a reduction in the margin.

This, however, was looking ahead. For the moment, officials had two preoccupations. The first, and less difficult, was the negotiation of fresh arrangements for the haulage of milk from the farm after 1st October. This had been one of the sore points in the discussions with the Milk Marketing Board, which had claimed to be the legatee of the producers' liability for transport charges, and as such to take complete control of transport under the new scheme. The claim was, moreover, compatible with the extended powers given to the Board in 1940;¹ but the Ministry had not then been so conscious of the need to hold the scales between producer and distributor. Now, it felt that even for the Board to act as its agent in diverting milk under the Supply Scheme, still more in rationalising milk collection from farms, would jeopardise this balance. Only under pressure, and having regard to the Board's *amour-propre*, did the Ministry agree that the Board should 'assume the responsibility of delivering producers' milk to the point of first delivery in order to meet the supply requirements of 'the Ministry of Food', and that the Board, therefore, should enter into a contract with milk hauliers. The Ministry specifically reserved to itself the right 'to require the Board to give specific directions to a particular producer' to send his milk to a particular destination, but at the same time it gave the Board the mollifying assurance that it would be 'disappointed' if this right ever had to be exercised. Agreement on procedure was at length realised in mid-August; the formal contract with the haulage interests was signed shortly afterwards.

Far more difficult, and accomplished only at the expense of acute

¹ p. 202, above. The position was complicated by the fact that the Ministry had no alternative, practically speaking, but to work through the Board's machinery.

public controversy, was the translation into practice of the new 'functional' structure for prices and margins. The basis from which negotiations with the trade had to start was, of course, a costings inquiry; and such an inquiry had, in fact, been set on foot the previous summer, in response to a claim from the distributors for a higher margin (i.e., over and above the original 'extra penny'.) By March 1942 the results of the inquiry were available; but while they appeared to provide reasonable grounds for determining payments for the 'depoting' and wholesaling functions, this was not so for retailing. The selection of retailers had, in fact, been curious. It consisted of four provincial Co-operative Societies, one medium-sized firm in Southampton, ten smaller firms in London and South-East England, and the 'big three' London firms (Express Dairies, United Dairies, and the London Co-operative Society). It was thus heavily weighted by firms (a) whose costs were normally high, (b) whose expenses had been raised by loss of turnover consequent upon population movements. Moreover, the calculation of a weighted average in terms of gallonage was tantamount to taking the costs of the 'big three' alone, who in no way constituted the norm of distributors. In short, though some indirect inferences could be drawn from the figures, they were all but useless as a starting-point for determining a national retail margin. But, as a senior administrative official remarked when the Finance Director for Milk pointed this out to him, 'it is quite impossible for the Ministry to face distributors now and admit that ten months have been wasted by Finance Department in a fruitless inquiry which must now be repeated'; in other words, the Ministry had now got to make, like the Perry Committee before it, the best shot it could at the figure.

It was, and remains, a moot point whether a national retail margin was desirable. The Ministry's objection to the existing system was that it led to local anomalies and was, in fact, untidy. But it had the merit of accommodating the peculiar requirements of the metropolis. Milk for London arrives mainly in rail or road tank wagons, consigned from country depots to a few selected central destinations. Thence it passes to a town depot, controlled by a wholesaler or multiple, and so to the premises of the retailer or branch of the multiple from which distribution to households begins. (Pasteurisation and bottling may be undertaken by the retailer or the wholesaler.) The extra handling and transport over a wide area adds to distribution costs and demands a higher margin, which, under the existing arrangements, was retained entirely by the big firms who performed these services themselves, or was split (usually on agreed standard terms) between wholesaler and small retailer. It may be, as some have claimed, that the growth of this expensive system had been fostered by the higher margin; at all events it was a long-established fact with

which the Ministry of Food had to deal. Nothing strictly comparable developed in the provinces, where dairymen commonly collected milk from the farm by motor lorry and relied on wholesalers for 'balancing' quantities only.

Apart from the question of locality, the prescription of an inclusive margin had another advantage; it avoided the problem of defining, for the purpose of remuneration, the functions performed by each link in the distributive chain. The Ministry, in response to clamour from the section of the trade that was the victim of excessive accommodation premiums, had agreed that every retailer should pay a uniform price for all his milk (except for a small allowance— $\frac{1}{4}$ d.—in respect of milk bought direct from the farm). This was tantamount to assuming that every retailer, *qua* retailer, was performing substantially the same functions; a simplification, to say the least. From the first, the principle proved incapable of being stretched to cover the extreme cases of the big multiple and the small dairyman who bought his milk ready-bottled from a wholesaler; but in between these there were sufficient variations of function to produce many anomalies.

When it proposed to fix flat rates for the remuneration of the 'retail' and 'wholesale' functions respectively, the Milk Division was, therefore, proposing to pay for something that could not be satisfactorily defined, on the basis of a guess. The 'functions' were not functions, but more or less arbitrary categories. The observations of the Ministry's Margins Committee, by now well versed in anomalous projects of this sort, would have been interesting. But, for no reason it has been possible to discover other than the extreme urgency of a decision, the Margins Committee was by-passed, just as the objections of the Finance Director had been. It is true that the guess was not likely to be a wild one, and could be amended in the light of the more representative costings investigations that were to be a condition of the 'new deal'. It is also true that the existing inclusive margin was responsible for anomalies in the remuneration of different types of trader, and that they are inseparable from any system of controlled prices. But there is all the difference, at any rate politically speaking, between maintaining accustomed anomalies and creating a set of new ones. It was just this that the Ministry had undertaken to do in replanning the price structure; the chief architect of the proposals admitted as much in putting them forward for the approval of higher authority. 'If', he wrote, 'there is a substantial minority which can show that the proposals entail hardship for it then I would not propose to press the scheme'. The question was promptly asked whether in that case the scheme was worth putting forward at all. The decisive argument for so doing was apparently not its merits, but the fact that it would serve as a reply to the trade's request for a higher margin: 'we shall not be allowed to do nothing'.

The part of the new functional, or rather categorical, system of margins that caused most heart-searching was how to treat the large distributors who performed wholesale functions in respect of their own branches. The problem was akin to that of the multiple grocer, who had been dealt with in different ways by different Commodity Divisions. Where multiples enjoyed the double margin, i.e., bought at the first-hand price, no difficulty of definition arose. Where, as with bacon and eggs, they were deprived of part of it, the term multiple had been defined by reference to certain physical and financial attributes, such as the possession of central distributing depots, or the immunity from the credit risk borne by a wholesaler. The investigating accountants for milk, however, had proposed that the remuneration of wholesalers proper should vary with the daily gallonage they handled—1½d. a gallon for quantities between 750 and 1,999 gallons a day, 2d. for gallonages above 2,000. For sales through the wholesaler's own retail shops, or the shops of associated firms, ½d. a gallon might be deducted.

The proposal to pay the firm with a larger turnover at a higher rate was said to be in accordance with ascertained costs; and it will also be noted that, even so, a multiple would always receive a little less per gallon than the combined amount of a wholesaler's and retailer's remuneration. This difference was to be increased during negotiations with the trade, by the concession of a flat rate of 2d. to all wholesalers regardless of turnover. But the Ministry was aware that the very existence of a 'self-wholesaling' allowance related merely to gallonage might be construed as giving the big firms more for being big. It made strenuous efforts to find another criterion for determining the grant of the allowance, but in the time available was unable to do so. (A suggestion that the grant be camouflaged as one to holders of a pasteurising licence was rejected as transparent, but eventually became added to the qualification for the smaller 'self-wholesaler' with a gallonage less than 1,500.) In the course of negotiation with the trade, the 'self-wholesaling' allowance became rather more obviously open to attack than before, being graded upwards by steps of ½d. from ¾d. to 1½d.:

<i>Daily Gallonage for Datum Period</i>	<i>Rate of Allowance Pence</i>
750-999	¾
1,000-1,249	1
1,250-1,499	1½
1,500-and over	1½

Certain other concessions were made by the Ministry to get the scheme going, but, at Treasury insistence, it stipulated that these should last only for six months, and then be reviewed in the light of a costings investigation. Depot proprietors were to get 1.3d. for the

first $1\frac{1}{2}$ million gallons, 1.25d. for the second $1\frac{1}{2}$ millions, and thereafter 1.1d., giving an average of just under $1\frac{1}{4}$ d. instead of the $1\frac{1}{8}$ d. the Ministry had originally proposed.¹ The retail margin was to be 11d. in London and $10\frac{1}{2}$ d. elsewhere, thus departing from the original proposal of a national margin; this was to be contrived by reducing the retail price outside London by 4d. a gallon for two months in the year. There were a variety of other stipulations relating to bottling charges by wholesalers, carriage allowances, and other matters not affecting the main principles of the new structure. Agreement on all these matters was achieved in the nick of time—a week before the scheme was due to come into operation.

It had originally been intended that the new arrangements should result in the distributors receiving no more in total than before. (The Treasury had hoped that they would get less, but was told that it must wait for the new reforms, coupled with the rationalisation of retail deliveries, to have their effect.) That being so, it was to be expected that some readjustment of the margins earned by different types of distributor would result. The subject is too complex for full treatment here, but some specimen comparisons may be of interest:

<i>Class of Retailer</i>	<i>Old Margin</i>	<i>New Margin</i>
	d.	d.
1. Small Direct Buyer, Town under 10,000 pop.	9 $\frac{1}{2}$	10 $\frac{1}{2}$
2. Small Direct Buyer, Town 10,000–25,000 pop.	11 $\frac{1}{2}$	10 $\frac{1}{2}$
3. 'Self-Wholesaler', Town 10,000–25,000 pop.	11 $\frac{1}{2}$	10 $\frac{1}{2}$ –11 $\frac{1}{2}$ *
4. 'Self-Wholesaler', Town above 25,000 pop.	12 $\frac{1}{2}$	10 $\frac{1}{2}$ –11 $\frac{1}{2}$ *
5. 'Self-Wholesaler', London	12 $\frac{1}{2}$	11 $\frac{1}{2}$ –12 $\frac{1}{2}$ *
6. Small Dairyman buying from Wholesaler, London	10 $\frac{1}{2}$	11

* According to size, and whether buying from farm or depot.

The figures, except in the last instance (the small metropolitan dairyman) are not simply comparable, because the old margin, unlike the new, might be diminished on account of 'balancing' costs. The loss to the 'self-wholesaler' in the large provincial towns (No. 4) may have been more apparent than real, since it was probably this class, including many Co-operative Societies, that had suffered most from high accommodation premiums in the winters of 1940–41 and 1941–42. Part of the balancing costs were, of course, being recovered from those producers who had hitherto received level delivery premiums—an anachronism now that all milk fit for liquid consumption was guaranteed the same price. Except in so far as the 'big battalions' gained in this matter of balancing costs, the figures afford little evidence that their absolute position would be improved under the new scheme. Relatively, of course, it was improved, as the smaller direct buyers no longer got the equivalent of a double margin, and only those in the areas of small population received any offset.

¹ The point at issue was whether $\frac{1}{8}$ d. or $\frac{1}{4}$ d. a gallon was the appropriate rate of profit. See below, p. 259.

IV

There was thus plenty of ammunition for would-be assailants of the scheme, the most redoubtable of whom was none other than the General Manager of the Milk Marketing Board, now resigned from the post of Director of Milk Supplies. Mr. Foster's position had for some time been one of great difficulty. Ever since the establishment of the Milk Movements Branch and the decision to embark on schemes of transport economy on the one hand, and on the other the 'concordat' with the Ministry of Agriculture which limited the Ministry of Food's sphere of influence on questions of supply and producers' prices, there had been a tendency for the centre of gravity in the Milk Division to shift away from the problems upon which he could make the most valuable, or at any rate the most acceptable, contribution to the Ministry's work. The suggestion that the Milk Marketing Board should become the sole purchaser of milk, if it did not originate with him, at any rate had his active support. But when the Ministry itself proposed to take a hand in the arrangements, and to limit the influence of the Board, Mr. Foster went, in effect, into opposition. In March 1942 he actually took part (as General Manager) in a joint deputation from the National Farmers' Union and the Board to the Minister of Agriculture against the proposals of his own Department, and, moreover, appears to have expressed scepticism about the Ministry of Food's ability to reform distribution. These sentiments promptly found their way, in the form of an official minute of the meeting, back to the Ministry of Food; thereafter, it was only a matter of time before Mr. Foster should cease to be Director of Milk Supplies. The final break came over the price structure. As the Parliamentary Secretary later explained in the House of Commons,¹ once the Ministry had decided to become the purchaser of milk from the Board, Mr. Foster's double rôle became 'inconvenient', and he was therefore invited to become Adviser on Milk Supplies. But so heartily did he, and the Board, disapprove of the new price proposals, that he preferred to resign altogether.

The fundamental objection of the Board, and of producers generally, to the new price structure was that it removed the incentive to market milk through the most direct channels. So long as the costs of wholesaling—whether by a separate firm or not—had to be met by the retailer out of his margin, there would be a tendency for him to seek ex-farm supplies, probably paying the farmer a 'level delivery' or other premium. The policy of the Board had been to encourage

¹ *Official Report*, 19th November 1942, cols. 529-530.

this tendency, and to discourage the passing of milk through depots, except perhaps for the London market, where conditions were admittedly exceptional. Quite apart from the producer's financial interest in discouraging roundabout methods of distribution, there was obvious advantage in getting the milk to the consumer as fresh as possible. This policy would, it argued, be nullified if the Ministry were to pay for the wholesale function by way of a gallonage rebate. Retailers would cease to bother themselves with the burden of dealing with direct farm milk, and seek wholesale supplies instead: extra transport and handling would result, and in the long run the consumer or the producer would suffer.¹

These objections were reinforced by the decision to pay the 'self-wholesaling' allowance on a gallonage basis. This the Board stigmatised as 'unsound and unfair':

'The function of retail distribution is the same, whether undertaken by a producer-retailer or a distributor—the fact of size should not enter into it. Where the function is the same, as for instance in the purchase of milk from the farm, the processing of that milk at the dairy, and the delivery of the milk to the consumer, the remuneration should be the same. . . . It ought not to be possible for a scheme to apply in which two distributors operating in the same district, and performing the same service, receive different margins'.

The exact terms of this criticism should be noted. It did not preclude the differentiation of margins geographically, so as to meet the case of London. Nor did it object to payments for functions, such as pasteurisation, that might not be performed by all distributors. The rock of offence was payment by size; and on this the Ministry's case was weaker than it could admit. To say, as an official did in reply to Mr. Foster, that the costings report had 'established' that 750 gallons was 'the right measure of the wholesale-retail function'—a term the critic had described as 'eyewash'—was straining the evidence of that report far beyond what it could bear. The sample of firms that had been investigated was too small and too unrepresentative to warrant any such firm conclusion. But even the most comprehensive investigation could do no more than establish a general correlation between gallonage and the performance of quasi-wholesale functions. By the nature of the case it could never be possible to draw a line above or below which these functions were, or were not, invariably performed. On the general point that the new price structure would encourage unnecessary movements of milk, the Ministry had its answer ready: 'Each dairyman must obtain his milk in accordance with our directions and the right will not lie with him of selecting the source from

¹ Hence the headlines in two successive issues of *The Farmer and Stockbreeder* (15th and 22nd September 1942): 'Lord Woolton Puts Milk Clock Back', and 'Lord Woolton Stops Milk Clock'.

which he obtains it'. In other words, direct control of milk movements would make it unnecessary to invoke financial inducements to see that milk moved in the most economical way. As to that, the proof of the pudding would be in the eating.

CHAPTER XVI

The Rationalisation of Collection and Distribution

I

THE WHITE PAPER of May 1942¹ had set out, besides an outline of the new price structure for England and Wales, the Ministry of Food's proposals for bringing about economies in the transport of milk. Those concerned with retail distribution had been agreed to, during the spring, by the trade and the National Farmers' Union (on behalf of producer-retailers). In all towns of over 10,000 population, dairymen would be required to form a war-time association, in order to prepare a scheme for rationalised distribution with the advice and assistance of the Ministry. Each participant was to be guaranteed, for the duration of a scheme, a share of the trade equal to that he enjoyed at the outset. The Minister would ensure this, and enforce the scheme on the public, by 'freezing' the registrations of consumers with their allotted dairymen. He would also enforce approved schemes upon recalcitrant minorities among the dairymen, and himself cause them to be introduced in places where none was forthcoming from the trade. Plans for the formation of war-time associations must (said the White Paper) 'be presented to the Minister within three months of the 1st of June'. On 3rd June it was announced that a former G.O.C., Western Command, was to be appointed Director of Milk Distribution and put in charge of rationalisation schemes.²

Behind this show of determination and hustle, which was certainly effective in getting the willing members of the trade to set up war-time associations, there was hidden uncertainty about what should be done with the unwilling. The idea embodied, by the use of the word 'required', in the White Paper was that membership of a war-time association, carrying with it the obligation to accept a rationalisation scheme, should be made a condition of a dairyman's retail licence. But the White Paper had been drafted, and its provisions agreed on with the trade, by officials who were unaware of the pitfalls of licensing policy and procedure. The Director of Milk Distribution

¹ Cmd. 6362.

² He resigned in October 1942 and was succeeded by a member of the retail dairy trade.

was soon to realise that the schemes he was trying to forward could not readily be provided with teeth. In the first place, retail licensing was the prerogative of Local Food Committees, who could not reasonably (it was thought) be directed to withdraw from dairymen all existing unconditional licences and replace them with conditional ones. The practice followed with other traders subject to transport economy schemes would at once be called in question; there had already been trouble about the dairyman's right to deliver groceries in areas where grocers had been put under delivery restrictions. Secondly, membership of a war-time association meant paying a subscription, which if compulsorily imposed might conceivably be interpreted as being a covert tax, and therefore *ultra vires* the Minister of Food. The Divisions of the Ministry concerned with retail distribution and licensing were reluctant, therefore, to go beyond the issue of a circular to Food Executive Officers that envisaged the withdrawal, after due warning, of the unconditional licence of a dairyman refusing to join a war-time association, and its replacement by a licence that imposed membership. But, as the Milk Division pointed out, this did not cover the case of a dairyman who joined an association but refused to carry out a rationalisation scheme.

By November 1942 it seemed clear that the latter constituted the real obstacle to progress; that recalcitrant minorities within war-time associations could not be readily coerced. 'We *must*', wrote Milk Division, 'have power to revoke licences if dairymen will not play the game', to which it was replied that successful prosecution must, in accordance with the Ministry's general policy, precede revocation. Although the power to revoke unconditionally existed, it had never yet been used against a retailer who had not been prosecuted for a food offence. As the Minister, asked for a ruling, himself wrote, 'I do not believe that the public would be prepared to accept the bureaucratic control of a Minister taking away a man's licence without him being adjudged guilty in a court of law'. As yet, however, there was no specific statutory authority for rationalisation schemes, under which a prosecution would lie; the Ministry's Legal Adviser was unable to recommend recourse to the courts in the hypothetical case of a trader who should refuse to comply with the terms of a 'conditional' licence.

The matter became urgent when a Carlisle dairyman refused to join the war-time merger company that, it had been agreed between the other traders, was to distribute milk in the city from 1st January 1943 onwards. It was quickly decided to serve on him a Direction, under Defence Regulation 55, to comply with the scheme; he was subsequently convicted of non-compliance and fined £50 and costs. But the Carlisle scheme was exceptional in every way; the normal scheme for exchange of deliveries was neither so drastic nor so clearly

defined, and it might be difficult to prove non-compliance in every case where a Direction might have been served. As the Scheme of Supply Order¹ forbade dealings between milkmen and consumers not registered with them, and also empowered Food Control Committees to transfer registrations, offenders against rationalisation schemes could (it was thought) be prosecuted under that Order. (Not in Carlisle, where registrations were not transferred and the Company acted as the milkmen's agent.) On second thoughts, however, the lawyers held that a prosecution might not succeed, for Food Control Committees had not in fact been concerned with rationalisation schemes and it might be straining the law too far to assert that transfers made by Food Executive Officers, acting under Headquarters instructions, were made on behalf of Committees. Accordingly the Scheme of Supply Order was amended, in March 1943, to make it legal for the Minister, as well as Food Control Committees, to transfer registrations.

The legal sanctions to enforce compliance with a rationalisation scheme were thus complete. The question remained whether, and if so how, dairymen were to be compelled to join, or remain members of, a war-time association if they were otherwise complying with the scheme. The only practical point at issue was one of the subscription to the association, which defaulting dairymen would escape. In fairness to the others, Milk Division would have liked to compel them to come in; after all, the White Paper had said as much a year before. But the legal objections were insuperable. As the Legal Adviser remarked:

'I gather . . . that the Minister has already decided . . . to take this course. I must therefore assume that he has considered the dangers inherent in this policy from the legal point of view unless he is in a position to maintain that compulsory membership of war-time associations of dairymen is necessary for maintaining supplies and services of milk. Unless the Minister is prepared to go to this length in defending his action against attack, whether in the Courts or in Parliament, he may in my view find himself in a most embarrassing position. . . .

'It is one matter to compel a trader to carry out the provisions of a scheme. . . . It is quite another to compel an individual to enter into contractual relationships with other traders. . . . I am given to understand that they [the war-time associations] are unincorporated bodies, that their powers and duties are exceedingly nebulous and have no relation whatsoever to the carrying out of the local scheme for rationalisation of deliveries. . . .

'The fact that money is involved is an added danger. Small contributions have before now raised large political and legal issues'.

¹ S.R. & O. (1942) No. 2061.

Very reluctantly, administrators fell in with this view. At the end of July 1943, local officials were told that the Ministry would not go beyond exhortation in persuading dairymen to join associations, and that any who objected to such a condition having been inserted in a retail licence might have the condition withdrawn. No sort of publicity, however, was given to the decision. By this time a combination of persuasion and bluff, helped perhaps by the successful prosecution at Carlisle, had brought most laggardly areas and individuals into line. In May 1943 it was reported that 500 out of the 581 areas scheduled for rationalisation had schemes already working. In the end only six towns—Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Lytham St. Annes, Glossop, Dalkeith, and Portsmouth—remained obstinately unrationalised, the Minister having decided in 1944 that it was too late in the war to attempt coercion.

II

The latitude allowed to dairymen's associations in drawing up schemes had meant that rationalisation, if more acceptable to the trade than it might otherwise have been, took forms less radical than some enthusiasts within the Ministry had been hoping for. In the spring of 1942 there had been much talk of a sort of euthanasia for the small distributor, and of 'concentration' in the milk trade (regardless of the provisions for reinstatement in the White Paper on Concentration). 'Merger' schemes like that at Carlisle—the model for which was drawn up by the National Farmers' Union—were commended to dairymen by Milk Division in the covert hope that they might bring about such radical changes in the physical organisation of distribution—for instance, by sending out a whole town's milk through one or two central depots—as would be, practically speaking, irreversible after the war. But dairymen elsewhere¹ fought shy of mergers, preferring to adopt zoning schemes that preserved a trader's identity and assured him at least the livelihood he was getting before rationalisation was introduced. Hence, of course, the length of time schemes took to prepare, more particularly in the larger towns.

The inclusion of the Co-operative Societies in rationalisation schemes was another matter in which early hopes had been disappointed. At one stage it had been suggested that the obstacle presented by the dividend to the exchange of Co-operative and non-Co-operative customers might be got over either by allowing the former to continue to receive the dividend after compulsory transfer, or by an agreement on the part of the Co-operative Movement to

¹ Chester-le-Street and Hetton were the only other areas to follow Carlisle's example.

discontinue it, so far as milk sales were concerned. Neither of these proposals was, however, acceptable; the Co-operative Movement was unwilling to forgo its right to serve its members wherever they might be found. It claimed that as four hundred Co-operative Societies were delivering one-third of the country's milk (compared with some seventy thousand private traders for the remaining two-thirds), the scope for rationalisation was not large; where overlapping between societies occurred (as, for instance in Glasgow and parts of Lancashire), Co-operative Headquarters would insist that they must eliminate it as a condition of claiming exemption from local schemes.

There was force in the Co-operative contention, inasmuch as their customers (outside London) mostly lived in densely-populated working-class areas. But the argument that weighed mainly with the Ministry was the political one, and this cut both ways. To deprive Co-operators of their rights might arouse outcry; to force consumers to take milk from the 'Co-op', or else do without, would certainly do so. No sooner had rationalisation started than the Ministry found itself up against this political problem. For the Co-operative Movement, having relinquished, under the decision that registrations should be 'frozen', the right to expand by attracting new customers, swiftly found means to do so by buying businesses, captive customers and all. As early as the end of April 1942 the Ministry had been warned that this was their intention, but the warning appears to have gone unnoticed. In September at any rate, Milk Division, faced to its apparent surprise with actual cases where customers protested at being bought up by Co-operative Societies, hurriedly caused a Press notice to be issued, to the effect that customers so aggrieved would be allowed to transfer to a private trader. In the interests of fairness, it added that where a private trader bought another's business, customers might opt to transfer to the Co-operative Society serving in the same street.

At once it became evident that this might be going too far for the health of rationalisation schemes, as well as evoking protests from firms (Co-operative and other) who had already contracted to buy businesses in the expectation that customers would be held in captivity by the Ministry. Co-operative Societies, being exempt from zoning schemes, would be able to operate all over a town and canvass for new custom whenever a business changed hands. On 10th October, therefore, another Press notice was issued withdrawing the option to transfer to a Co-operative Society. The Co-operative Union at once protested that this was unfair discrimination, and threatened to raise the matter in the House of Commons. Officials would have preferred to meet this complaint by a universal 'freeze', more particularly as the option looked like creating practical difficulties. At Brentwood, for example, the London Co-operative Society had

bought the rationalised 'block' of rounds allotted to a particular trader and thus became the sole operator in that block; how was a private milkman to be found to serve objectors? Meanwhile, the Co-operative agitation continued and expanded to take in other grievances, such as the alleged mal-distribution of supplies. At length officials hit on a formula that should meet all reasonable Co-operative demands, namely, that the test for option, whether the purchaser of a business was Co-operative or private, be membership of a Co-operative Society. Co-operative members, hitherto registered for milk with a private trader, would be tied to a Society buying that trader's business; non-members might contract out. The reverse would apply, i.e., Co-operative members alone would be entitled to transfer, where a private trader was the buyer. The formula did not dispose entirely of problems like the one at Brentwood, but it promised to limit their extent. Fortunately, it was acceptable to both Co-operative and private interests.

This provision only extended to those who were members of Co-operative Societies at the time a business changed hands; a consumer could not secure a change of registration for milk merely by joining a Society. Newcomers to a district were allocated to the Co-operative or to the private trader according to their previous affiliations. There was, however, one unavoidable crack in the regulations, which was enlarged by human ingenuity into a loophole. It consisted in the fact that only one member of a household was, normally speaking, strictly able to claim to belong to the 'Co-op', and there was a limit beyond which the Ministry could not go in presuming the loyalties of other members. In 1944, for instance, it found itself ruling that the family of a member should be treated as members, but not lodgers or married daughters. Similarly, a newcomer to a household might, in accordance with the removal rules, be allocated to a milkman other than the one serving the rest of the household. As a result, two milkmen, Co-operative and private, might be delivering at the same house. The Ministry had, as early as December 1942, given discretion to Food Executive Officers to allow such newcomers, at their request, to be registered with the trader already supplying the household.

For the sake of uniformity, the Ministry's Rationing Division had frozen all milk registrations, and not only those in areas rationalised or intended to be rationalised; there was no general re-registration for milk when the new ration book for 1942-43 was issued. There was however this difference between 'rationalisation' and 'non-rationalisation' areas, that in the latter, consumers were allowed an option to change their registrations, for milk as for other foods, when a business was sold. But the more restrictive rule applied, not merely from the time when a rationalisation scheme was formally completed, but from the time the war-time association began its work; necessarily so,

since the rationalisation scheme would otherwise have been based on shifting foundations, but none the less open to misconstruction by the public.

There was in Oxford a housewife, by her own account a prominent member of the community, who belonged to the Co-operative Society, but was registered with a private trader for milk. In November 1942, that is to say before the concession to Co-operators came into force, this trader's business was bought by another with whom the housewife had previously parted company; she was much aggrieved at being refused permission to transfer to the Co-operative Society. In March 1943 she took advantage of the arrival of a new domestic servant to register her with the society, so that two dairymen now delivered to the house. (Unless the newcomer was previously a Co-operator, which is not clear, the local Food Office seems to have been at fault in allowing this.) Next, she applied once more to be allowed to transfer, and was of course refused, whereupon she got her Member of Parliament to take her case up with the Minister; on the grounds not so much of the latter refusal, when the rationalisation scheme was fully in operation, but of the former, when it was still incomplete.

The Minister was inclined to sympathise with the request that the whole household be now allowed to change over; 'aren't we' (he asked) 'sticking to the rules regardless of common sense?' Officials, though they were willing to encourage a further economy in deliveries, however small, and even though the instigator had been guilty of sharp practice in herself creating the anomaly from which she now sought relief, felt that they must consult the trade, with a view to making a general concession in cases where two milkmen had come to serve one household. The Central Milk Distributive Committee and the Co-operative Movement agreed, but suggested that the local wartime association be consulted in every case. What had begun as a surrender to the importunate thus acquired the appearance of a further yielding to the call for transport economy. The Oxford war-time association, whose chairman was the retailer away from whom transfer had been sought, saw the matter differently, and argued that no economy would result; it was, however, overruled by the Minister, and in September 1943 the Oxford housewife was allowed her way.

An even more complex case, involving two Ministries, occurred at Sunningdale, an area of less than 10,000 inhabitants that had undergone partial rationalisation of deliveries in consequence of the introduction of a scheme in an adjacent area (Egham). A prominent local citizen, a member of the Rural District Council, complained in April 1943, through an M.P. friend of his, that as a result of rationalisation he was being forced to take supplies of T.T. milk that were (a) dearer than those from his previous supplier, (b) not bottled in accordance with the Regulations under the Milk and Dairies Act. The Ministry of Health was responsible for the latter, and in June an inspector visited the headquarters of another Rural District Council, in whose area the offending dairy was situated, and reported that in

the opinion of the Local Authorities, the evidence for a prosecution would be insufficient. In July, the Ministry of Food's Regional Milk Supply Officer investigated the position and reported that while there had undoubtedly been irregularities, these had now ceased. About the same time, the complainant's request for a transfer of registration was refused by his local Food Control Committee which decided that it was bound by the decision taken in Egham on behalf of the Minister. Meantime the M.P. in question, a resolute opponent of 'bureaucracy', was waxing sarcastic about the way in which the case was being 'muddled about' by two Ministers; not altogether fairly, since it was Parliament that had brought about, or at any rate acquiesced in, the division of responsibility for milk supply and milk cleanliness.

On 7th August, the complainant finally succeeded in bringing his dairyman to court; he pleaded guilty to infringing the Milk (Special Designations) Order and was fined £15 and costs. There was some debate in the Ministry of Food—which had hitherto taken the line that no change of registrations should be permitted—whether this altered the position. As with the Oxford housewife, there were those who feared that to allow any change would have awkward repercussions. But the day was carried by the argument that permission could be reasonably limited to those (and they must be rare) who had actually been the victims of illegal behaviour, for which they had instigated a successful prosecution.

These exceptions have been detailed because of their intrinsic interest and because they prove the very rigid rule that the Ministry applied. Consumers might object to being allotted to a 'combine'; they might complain of unsatisfactory quality of milk, of the attitude of the roundsman, of late or irregular deliveries, of a refusal to supply half-pint bottles. None of these was acceptable as a ground for change, except where genuine hardship (for instance, to invalids dependent on regular supplies) could be proved. A preference for raw milk over milk pasteurised or otherwise heat-treated might not be indulged. The Ministry did, indeed, try to persuade individual retailers to meet their customers' wishes, particularly in the matter of special types of milk; and it eventually made wilful refusal by a retailer to supply tuberculin-tested milk a ground for change; though in this case *delivery* of milk would only be made if the new retailer was already serving the zone in which the customer lived. So too a change might be made if it were proved to the satisfaction of the Local Food Control Committee that the retailer was 'taking advantage of his position'.

Admittedly the rule, for which there was no parallel in any other commodity control, might be onerous in particular cases, although it was claimed that most grievances arose at the outset of a rationalisation scheme:

'We have tried to deal kindly but firmly with the applicants and we have carefully explained to them the reason which has made it necessary to rationalise retail deliveries. In the majority of cases we have succeeded in placating these people and when the scheme has been running for some time they seem to be satisfied with the arrangements'.

The most difficult to defend were, first, the refusal to allow customers to change even if they undertook to collect the milk themselves,¹ and secondly, the application of the same rule in 'non-rationalisation' areas. The former was, of course, no more than a means of buying the acquiescence of the trade in rationalisation; the latter, a convenience for administrators who would have found it awkward (but not, surely, impossible) to apply varying rules in districts that might be adjacent.

III

Public resentment at being denied a choice of milkman may have contributed to the troubles that rationalisation brought upon the Milk Supply Scheme. In September 1942 the new Order² had duly come into force, by which the Certificate of Requirements (Form M.K.2), was to set the upward limit to a dairyman's legal sales. Existing M.K.2's were, of course, based on the registrations of July 1941, plus any extra registrations a trader had acquired since that date; they were, therefore, inflated by customers he might have lost, but who could not be removed from his register, and also by those children who had, as they grew, passed from a higher to a lower scale of entitlement. They needed to be brought up-to-date if the demand for milk, and hence the non-priority allowance, were to be properly assessed, and also if enforcement proceedings were to be successfully based on them. In place of the general re-registration, ruled out by the 'freeze', the Ministry devised what it called a milk 'census'. During a week early in October, the dairyman was to collect a counterfoil (the 'Spare One') from the ration book of each of his customers, upon which the latter had been asked to write name, address, national registration number, and the date of birth (if under 18). Having checked them against his own records, he was then to send them to the local Food Office, which would make them the basis for his new M.K.2.

¹ Except in Inverness and Wakefield, where the Co-operatives had voluntarily joined the zoning schemes, and objectors on political grounds were allowed to collect their milk from a private dairy.

² S.R. & O. (1942) No. 1804.

This manœuvre was not a success. Despite lively publicity, many members of the public failed to lodge counterfoils at all; others lodged them with the wrong retailer; the records in Food Offices became further confused during the clerical work consequent on rationalisation schemes. In February 1943 Rationing Division admitted that 'the control of liquid milk supplies is in a state of some confusion . . . it is not clear either with whom consumers are registered or what is the correct permit quantity to be allowed to a retailer'. Some attempt was made to squeeze out the inflation in permits by arbitrary reductions, but these operated unfairly between area and area and more particularly between purchasing dairyman and producer-retailer. Moreover, the legal position of the Ministry was by no means watertight. The lodging of the 'Spare One' counterfoil did not, of itself, constitute a valid registration entitling the consumer to milk; that still went back to 1941, or to a subsequent birth, removal, or obligatory change of retailer under a rationing scheme, and a consumer could not legally be deprived of milk for failing to comply with the census. Furthermore, it appeared¹ that the Certificate of Requirements in its existing form could not legally be construed as a 'permit or authority to sell milk', and that therefore a retailer could not be convicted of a breach of the Order, made as recently as September 1942, on the strength of having sold more milk than the amount shown on his Certificate. The Certificates that had just been issued were legally useless; but the task of withdrawing and re-issuing them in proper form was daunting. An Order² was therefore made decreeing that they were to be regarded as permits. At the same time, it was agreed to make further changes in the non-priority allowance by means of formal Directions, signed on behalf of the Minister.

Another proposal, viz., to make the consumer's continued registration with a retailer legal only if a 'Spare One' counterfoil had been lodged, was not pursued. Instead, officials decided to make the issue of the new ration books in July 1943 into 'a method of registering for milk without anybody noticing it'. In order to get a new book the consumer would have, as usual, to surrender a 'reference leaf' embodied in the old book. He was now to be told to write the name of his present milk retailer on the back of the reference leaf (with his own age if under 21). The retailer would not be called upon to do anything beyond helping to stimulate his customers into action.³ This 'affirmation' was, however, hardly more successful than the 'census'. It is true that the Ministry got some sort of name and address from everybody. But—particularly in some large provincial cities—these names and

¹ As the result of a proposal to prosecute a Bristol dairyman for admitted overselling, in the first week after the renewal of restriction in the late summer of 1942.

² S.R. & O. (1943) No. 233.

³ For the effect of this on the general procedure for issuing ration books in 1943, see below, p. 512.

addresses all too frequently turned out to be the wrong ones. At Bristol, for instance, twenty per cent. of the reference leaves were thought to be 'doubtful'. Out of sixteen such leaves, received by the Bristol Food Office from an adjacent area, eleven named retailers who disclaimed all knowledge of the consumers; one a retailer who had not served the consumer for the last eighteen months; the remaining four belonged to people who merely slept outside the city and took their milk at their business addresses from Bristol retailers, and these alone were correctly filled in. There were consumers who nominated a retailer not licensed for milk, or who, buying milk over the counter, nominated not the shop but the supplier whose name was on the bottles; there were lodgers who did not know their milkman's name, and made the best guess they could. Middlesbrough Food Office, in November 1943, reported that forms were reaching it in respect of removals, enlistments, and deaths, not five per cent. of which contained the milk retailers' names. Not only, in these circumstances, did the writing of new M.K.2 certificates take months; there was still grave doubt about their accuracy when written.

As a last resort the Ministry turned to the trade for help. Retailers and their war-time associations were invited, in their own interests, to check their records of registrations against the reference leaves, so that an 'agreed M.K.2' could be issued for each retailer. The Ministry even agreed that retailers might borrow the reference leaves from the Food Offices for this purpose, provided that local officials were satisfied that the documents would be in safe keeping. Trade representatives agreed; but the response from individual firms was patchy. Some claimed, no doubt rightly, that they had not the staff to undertake a check; this was especially true of the large distributors with tens of thousands of registrations. (Very often their records were in street or 'round' order, whereas in the Food Office counterfoils were sorted alphabetically.) Although, therefore, this check by the trade achieved much, there were still 'black spots', and it cannot be said that Milk Division achieved everywhere that 'solid M.K.2' for which it had so long pleaded.

The summer of 1943 had revealed a defect in the milk supply scheme which, though inherent, appears to have escaped notice earlier on account of the very looseness that officials were striving to remedy. Whereas in 1942 the plentiful supplies of the early summer had impelled the Ministry to lift the control of sales, thereby making it more difficult to get back to restriction later, in 1943 a formal limitation was kept in being throughout the flush period (though the non-priority allowance, for several weeks, was virtually nominal at 4 pints a head). Trouble soon arose at holiday resorts, where milkmen were unable legally (and often in fact) to supply visitors, because they would thereby exceed permitted sales. At Llandudno the complaint

was particularly prompt, because a regional inspector from Milk Division had recently been threatening retailers with prosecution for overselling. Rationing Division, which received the complaint, met it by authorizing the Food Executive Officer to issue temporary M.K.2's at his discretion to cover the requirements of visitors; in August this instruction was made general.

Holiday resorts, however, constituted only an extreme case. The whole concept of 'overselling', as applied to milk, had obnoxious features which naturally aroused trade opposition. For the M.K.2, issued as it had been at infrequent intervals, could not generally and necessarily be claimed to represent the current requirements of a dairyman's registered customers. Firms priding themselves on up-to-date records and scrupulous observance of the rules were indignant when warned, or even prosecuted, for the technical offence of exceeding the 'M.K.2 quantity'. Some prosecutions at Morecambe in the autumn of 1943 brought matters to a head. The Central Milk Distributive Committee asked for, and obtained, assurances that a dairyman would be given full credit for any changes in the legitimate demands on him before a decision to prosecute was taken; in other words, that the mere fact of an excess sale would not expose him to penalties. At the same time the Ministry undertook to issue new M.K.2's at intervals of eight weeks, or at any time to a dairyman who could show that his requirements had risen by five per cent. or more.

IV

Trouble with the trade over retail rationalisation had been reduced to a minimum by the adoption of the 'gallon-for-gallon' rule from the outset. No trader lost business by participating in a rationalisation scheme, and many were enabled, by the freezing of registrations, to sell out at highly remunerative prices to the 'combines'. No such clear-cut principle had been laid down for the other task the Ministry had set itself, the rationalisation of farm collections to save transport. The statement that had been agreed between the interested parties, governmental and non-governmental, in August 1942, confined itself mainly to procedure. Rationalisation schemes would be prepared, in the first place, by the regional officers of the Ministry and the Milk Marketing Board jointly, after due consultation with those affected; and would then be submitted to a Joint Rationalisation Committee at Thames Ditton, which would itself consult Joint Advisory Committees in the milk marketing regions. Finally, they would require formal approval by the Minister of Food. All this, while it should ensure a fair hearing to anybody aggrieved by a scheme, left unstated

the extent to which objectors would be heeded, or the criteria that the Ministry would apply when putting schemes into force.

The main issue was the fate of depots under rationalisation. The Board interpreted the Ministry's decision to become the sole buyer of milk as *carte blanche* to the Joint Rationalisation Committee to eliminate all unnecessary movements of milk through depots. Not merely, that is to say, should overlapping collections of milk by depots be removed, by exchange of farmers between depot proprietors, but no milk that could be handled by a direct buyer should be allowed to go into a depot at all. Milk Division was unwilling to go as far as this; depot milk was readily mobile and could therefore be switched at will to even out supplies; the requirements of the manufacturing programme for cheese and condensed milk, in the flush season, might counsel the retention all the year round of depots not otherwise essential for liquid milk distribution. But the Division did propose to withdraw supplies of milk from depots that it considered redundant or unsatisfactory, quite apart from transport economy; more particularly the so-called 'Feeder Depots', that, having no brine-cooling facilities, merely bulked the milk and passed it on either to a nearby town dairyman or to a 'Main Supply Depot' for further treatment. Many of these feeder depots were butter or cheese factories that had only latterly entered the liquid milk market. Thus, at the outset of the rationalisation schemes, the Board side and the Ministry side of the Joint Committee could move in harmony and settle individual cases on their merits; it was, in fact, quasi-political obstacles to rationalisation that brought the fundamental difference between the two sides once more to the surface.

What was being proposed and carried out, from September 1942 onwards, was a kind of concentration scheme for depots that, however, lacked some of the attributes of a concentration scheme proper. There had been no drastic reduction in supplies, producing a situation in which concentration might be the only alternative to uneconomic working and the possible bankruptcy of the weaker concerns; that is to say, there was no strong incentive for the trade to welcome or assist in concentration. There was no considerable scope for economies in labour or space. As yet, there was no arrangement in being for the compensation of firms whose depots were closed or deprived of some part of their supplies; the creamery proprietors had undertaken to put forward proposals, but discussions on these did not begin until January 1943, and were not completed until a year later. Perhaps unfortunately, the scheme was never brought before the Ministry's Concentration Panel,¹ which, from its experience with other industries, such as soft drinks, would by this time have surely counselled all concerned to proceed warily.

¹ Vol. I, p. 324 *seq.*

After closing a number of small depots without incident, the Division encountered its first serious opposition in (as luck would have it) the constituency of the Member for Ripon (Major Christopher York), the most fervent critic of the new price structure for milk. There were in Nidderdale two depots; a larger at Birstwith, and a smaller at Darley, that before the war had been a butter factory. The Ministry's regional officers, concluding that the Birstwith depot could handle all the milk produced in the district, determined that the Darley depot (Fernbeck Dairy) should be declared redundant, and the milk from the 82 farmers supplying it be transferred to Birstwith. Mr. Palmer, the proprietor of Fernbeck, was to continue to act as haulier. Mr. Palmer appealed, and failing to get satisfaction from the Ministry, went to his M.P.: the latter visited the depots with a Ministry official, and was thereafter quoted as having agreed to the closure. (The visit lasted less than two hours.) Thereupon Mr. Palmer turned to a Mr. Hall, the Chairman of the local branch of the National Farmers' Union, and a former Labour candidate for the Ripon Division. Mr. Hall called together the producers, who agreed that, as from 1st May, when the redundancy notice came into force, they would withhold their milk from sale; and this they did. News of their action spread to Dentedale, where a similar closure had taken place on 1st April; the producers there threatened a similar strike from 15th May, unless the depot were reopened. Resolutions of sympathy began to be passed by other branches of the National Farmers' Union, and the national Press began to take an interest in the strikes.

The Ministry sent down a representative who, being known in Dentedale, was able to persuade the producers there, and in consequence the Nidderdale producers, to call off the strikes in return for a Committee of Inquiry on the spot. This was undertaken at the end of May; in Nidderdale, the farmers' leader, Mr. Hall, took part in it and signed the report jointly with the Ministry representatives. Producers were now hotter against the Birstwith dairy than before; they complained that churns were returned unwashed, and this the Committee was able to confirm by observation. Moreover, the dairy (owing, as it later transpired, to a breakdown in the machinery) was found to be incapable of dealing with the extra milk; indeed its 'own' milk had had to be sent direct from farms to Leeds and Bradford. Milk was being rejected as sour by Birstwith—something that (it was said) had never happened at Fernbeck. (There were those who felt that this was a back-handed compliment.) The best solution, the Committee thought, would be to close both depots and arrange for all the milk to go direct; but failing that, Fernbeck dairy should be reopened. The other depot at Dent ought to remain closed, because it was unsuited to handle liquid milk, but might be allowed

to make Wensleydale cheese in the manufacturing season.

As an interim measure, the milk that had hitherto gone to Palmer's depot was sent direct into Leeds (on Palmer's lorries) while the Ministry's regional officers were instructed to prepare a full rationalisation scheme for the area, to provide for the closing of both depots. Meanwhile the report of the Committee of Inquiry had been put about very widely by Mr. Hall; a copy of it reached Major York, who concluded that he had been misled by the Ministry officials with whom he had visited the two depots. Notwithstanding that their leader had concurred in the report of the Committee of Inquiry, the Nidderdale farmers resumed their agitation for the reopening of Fernbeck Dairy. The whole case had by now become linked, in the eyes of the Ministry's critics, with the price structure and the supposed domination of Milk Division by the 'combines'. Lord Beaverbrook took up the cause of Mr. Palmer—'a little dairyman . . . compelled to hand over all his trade to a big firm'—in the House of Lords.¹

By the end of September the rationalisation scheme was stated to be ready, and was approved by the Minister on assurances from officials that no more trouble might be expected. These assurances proved to be sanguine. The Nidderdale farmers threatened a renewal of the strike, claiming that the closure of Birstwith was only a manoeuvre to avoid reopening Fernbeck; the owners of Birstwith not only appealed in accordance with the standard procedure, but threatened 'political and legal action' about disparaging observations that the Committee of Inquiry had made about their depot; Major York renewed his representations to the Ministry. Early in November, moreover, Milk Division discovered that the scheme approved by the Minister was in fact no more than a forecast by the regional officers of part of a larger scheme not yet complete; it was not an independent plan that could be put into force at short notice. Not only that, but the trade representative on the Ministry's advisory committee for the region indicated that on technical grounds he could not support the proposed closing of the Birstwith depot.

Before this last blow had fallen, higher authority within the Ministry had already decided to retreat. The agitation had brought about a fresh review of the conduct of the case, and this review reached an unpalatable conclusion:

'We must eat humble pie and retrace the steps which we have wrongly taken—the closing of these small depots in the Nidderdale area was a mistake and was not within the policy of the Government. The closing, so far as I can understand, was decided upon because it was thought that they were unnecessary links in the chain of distribution. It was not done to save transport to any substantial extent'.

¹ *Official Report*, House of Lords, 5th August 1943, cols. 1120–21. Lord Beaverbrook appears to have thought that Mr. Palmer was a retailer.

It only remained, therefore, to capitulate, saving as much face as possible: as Lord Woolton¹ was reported to have said, 'That does not necessitate our throwing our bodies under the chariot wheels'. On 6th December yet another Ministry emissary went to Yorkshire, and at a meeting with the interested parties, announced that the *status quo* would be restored pending the introduction of a complete rationalisation scheme; unless, that is to say, the proprietors of closed depots preferred to remain so and be compensated, which, of course, they did not.

The Ministry hoped that it might avoid re-opening the cases of all the depots that had already been wrongfully closed; and (thanks perhaps to the coming into operation, early in 1944, of the compensation scheme) this hope was in the event justified. Even before the decision to allow the Yorkshire depots to be reopened, a ruling on rationalisation policy generally had been obtained from Lord Woolton, while he was still Minister of Food. Broadly speaking, this affirmed for milk the policy that had long applied to other foods, of utilising existing trade channels and not 'eliminating units in the chain of distribution simply on the grounds that in a rationalised system of distribution such units might be dispensed with'. It followed that the 'gallon-for-gallon' principle should be applied in future schemes for farm collections, as in those for retail deliveries. The position both of individual buyers, and of different classes of buyer regarded as a whole, ought not, so far as quantity was concerned, to be changed by rationalisation.

This *volte face*—for so it seemed to the Board, and indeed to members of Milk Division—was naturally a disappointment to those who had seen in the Ministry's earlier actions a means to bring about permanent reforms. Milk, they said, should pass from farm to consumer by the cheapest and most direct route; there was far more to rationalisation than merely to obtain economies to further the war effort. The Board's feelings were so strong that it prepared a written submission in the vain hope of inducing the Minister to change his mind. For the moment all further rationalisation schemes were held up, for want of agreement between the two sides of the Joint Committee. One scheme, in the Liverpool and Manchester area, caused especial difficulty because it was designed to fall in with other schemes already in force and prepared on the former basis. If it were now to follow a gallon-for-gallon rule—and if, in particular, a depot at Congleton, deemed redundant, were not to be closed—a proper tidying up of the milk supplies to the two cities would be impossible. A compromise between Board and Ministry, to include the closing of this depot, was therefore agreed upon.

¹ Just appointed Minister of Reconstruction; consulted by officials pending the return of the new Minister (Col. Llewellyn) from the United States.

The whole North-Western Region had proved to be one of the toughest to rationalise, largely because of the objections of the 'direct buyers', and particularly the large retail Co-operative Societies, to being allotted new and (as they claimed) inferior sources of supply in place of those they had themselves sought out. It was the old problem of quality under control; to the Ministry, all milk that reached a minimum standard was marketable, and variations above that standard (except for 'designated' milks) were ignored. Inevitably, therefore, those buyers who had been most careful in the past to pick and choose their farmers—and naturally those who had no 'manufacturing outlet' for inferior milk were among these—found themselves penalised by a rearrangement that gave each buyer a limited collection zone. Naturally there was outcry, and allegations that the rationalisation schemes were being run in the interest of the creamery (i.e., depot) proprietors; it was said that all the best milk was being diverted to them (and thereafter spoilt on its indirect way to the consumer) while direct buyers with pasteurising plants were given the 'rubbish' to clean up as best they could. (How much truth there was in these allegations may best be judged by the fact that the Creamery Proprietors' Association was pressing for representation on the central Joint Rationalisation Committee.)

The Co-operative Union went further, claiming that its understanding of the original proposals was that they applied only to wholesalers and depots, and it maintained this position in spite of denials by the Ministry and the Chairman of the Central Milk Distributive Committee, himself a retailer. In August 1943 a conference of Co-operative Societies in the North-West passed a resolution unanimously condemning the Ministry for inadequate consultation, and this was supported by private traders in the area. When at the beginning of 1944 the Ministry began to move forward again, the agitation, which had been quiescent for several months, immediately revived; and it continued, by correspondence and deputation, into May. In consequence, the introduction of the 'tidying up' scheme in the North-West was repeatedly postponed; it finally came into operation on 1st August 1944.

By that time, the Ministry was able to use the improved war situation as an argument against undue vigour in enforcing schemes. Indeed, Lord Woolton had minuted officials generally as early as October 1943 that the position was easier, and that 'We should not, in order to save a comparatively small amount of transport, cause serious dislocation of the operations of people whose businesses are serving the needs of the nation . . . let us use our common sense and avoid any rigid regimentalism'. 'We have perhaps tended to forget the Minister's statement', wrote a member of Milk Division in August 1944. The Board, on the other hand, remained firmly of the opinion

that 'gallon-for-gallon' rationalisation was inadequate. Rather than provide further controversy by proposing to abandon further schemes, therefore, Milk Division contented itself with urging on regional officers the need for fullest consultation with affected parties. Schemes continued to be introduced right into 1945, and it was not until after the end of the war in Europe that the Joint Committee agreed that no further compulsion might be applied. By then the process was all but complete.

The results of the rationalisation of farm collections were in absolute terms impressive, even though the savings from individual schemes were seldom so great as were forecast when they were prepared. The total vehicle-miles per day were officially estimated to have been eventually reduced by 75,000, of which 30,000 is the measure of the savings *before* the reforms of October 1942; in petrol, 2½ million gallons per annum. About twenty per cent. of the vehicles employed in milk collection before the war are said to have been made redundant. Many long hauls, particularly to London, Liverpool, and Manchester, were cut out. In October 1945 Milk Division reported, moreover, that a 'considerable volume of opinion' in the trade was in favour of continuing the schemes permanently.

CHAPTER XVII

The 'Safe Milk' Proposals; Developments in the Price Structure, 1943-45

I

THE APPARENT indifference to quality that caused so much complaint about rationalisation schemes was, of course, a reflection of war-time exigencies and shortages, not Government policy. One of the corollaries of the new price structure was the establishment by the Ministry of Agriculture of a national milk testing service, to 'prevent', as the White Paper of May 1942 put it, 'milk of poor keeping quality passing into bulked supplies or reaching the liquid market direct'. Milk passing through depots, it was stated, would 'so far as possible' be pasteurised either there or at a later stage in distribution. The emphasis here was on keeping qualities rather than safety in the medical sense; but the overt assumption by the Ministry of Food of responsibility for supply was bound to carry with it responsibility for safety also. Milk, in the felicitous phrase of Sir Alan Herbert, is a 'bacilliferous beverage'; the consensus of medical opinion had long been that it could only be made safe by heat-treatment. Even milk from tuberculin-tested herds, though free from the tubercle bacillus, might contain germs of undulant fever and other complaints, or pick up typhoid or other contamination on its way to the consumer.¹

Heat-treatment of milk had, of course, grown up along with the large urban distributors, as an incidental to the transport of milk over long distances. The particular appeal of the producer-retailer or small purchasing dairyman, on the other hand, was that he offered milk 'fresh from the cow' and not an anonymous and hygienic liquid. Universal heat-treatment would take away from the small man this goodwill element; for it would mean, in practice if not in theory, that he would have to bring his milk to the pasteurising or sterilising plant, serving a particular district, and receive back milk that might or might not be his, for sale to his customers. Indeed there is no doubt that many who supported compulsory heat-treatment did so partly on the very ground that it would divorce dairy-farming and retailing, and thus pave the way for a general tidying-up of milk distribution.

¹ A correspondent in the *British Medical Journal*, reporting his efforts to produce clean milk, put the problem frankly: '... cows are by nature particularly unclean animals with their splashing excreta'.

Producer-retailers for their part had fiercely, and successfully, resisted the move towards compulsory pasteurisation embodied in the Milk Industry Bill.

Broadly speaking, therefore, the case for compulsory heat-treatment was scientific and medical; the case against it, political (leaving aside a minority who, as the Scientific Adviser put it, 'invest "natural" foods with mystic virtues'). During 1942 those in favour were reinforced, first by the publication of the researches of Professor G. S. Wilson¹ into pasteurisation and then by the appearance of the Report of the Medical Research Council's *Committee on Tuberculosis in Wartime*² (of which Professor Wilson was a member). The Committee drew particular attention to the danger to children from bovine tuberculosis spread by milk; a danger increased because so many had left large cities, with a generally safe milk supply, to live in small towns and country districts dependent on raw milk. They recommended 'as great an extension of pasteurisation as possible'; failing which people should be officially advised to boil raw milk. The question of raw milk in schools demanded special attention; 'we are seriously disturbed at the not infrequent practice . . . of giving children raw, potentially infected milk as a priority food'.

The Report on Tuberculosis came at a time when the Ministries of Food and Health were already discussing ways and means of extending pasteurisation; and it was at once seen to provide both reason and occasion for a forward policy. In October the Ministry of Food drew the attention of the English distributors to the Report, and elicited from them a promise of support and technical co-operation at a meeting with the Minister on 30th November. The Minister of Agriculture, recalling past history, counselled caution. 'This proposal will raise the father and mother of a row . . . we had better look well before we leap'. Indeed, Lord Woolton had barely met the distributors before a group of anti-pasteurising M.P.s put down a motion opposing a policy 'involving the consumption of half-boiled milk'.³ It began to be put about that this, like the new price structure, was an example of 'the feeble, almost criminal machinations' of the 'Combine Ministry'.⁴ Local branches of the National Farmers' Union began to pass resolutions of alarm, and the Union's Milk Committee sought an interview with the Minister of Food.

This interview, Lord Woolton and his advisers realised, must be turned to advantage if the Ministry's policy were not to be nipped in

¹ G. S. Wilson. *The Pasteurisation of Milk*. 1942.

² Medical Research Council: Special Report Series, No. 246 (H.M. Stationery Office).

³ Including one doctor M.P. who, implied the *British Medical Journal* in a leader on 19th December, should have known better.

⁴ Major York, M.P., in a letter to the *Dairy Farmer*, November 1942.

the bud. The farmers' leaders were promptly invited, like the distributors, to put forward concrete proposals for dealing with milk-borne disease, and thus debarred, tactically speaking, from going into mere opposition. At once they made an important concession—that all *bulked* milk, intended for distribution in large cities, required heat treatment; and they were persuaded by the Minister to withdraw the lower population limit (250,000) that they had originally proposed for compulsory heat treatment. Departments had already agreed that tuberculin-tested milk should be exempt. There remained what was known as Accredited Milk, that is to say milk from cows that regularly undergo veterinary inspection, produced under approved standards of hygiene. This type of milk (said the Ministry of Health) 'in no way gives safety' against tuberculosis, and there was some reluctance to yield to the farmers' request for its exemption. But the farmers could claim that, on paper at any rate, any infected milk from an accredited herd could be traced back to its source; and though the experts doubted whether this was possible quickly or at all in practice, officials felt that (since the amount of accredited milk sold by or on behalf of a single cow-keeper was not likely to be large) it would be wise to accept the compromise.¹

Meanwhile Departments had agreed upon a draft Order for submission to the Lord President's Committee. This would simply have empowered the Minister of Food to impose the heat-treatment provisions by Direction in any local government area. It was explained that the Minister would not schedule any area until he was satisfied that the plant there was adequate to treat all the milk. In 'rationalisation' areas, the war-time associations might help to draw up 'heat-treatment' schemes; indeed, the link with rationalisation was now brought to the fore as a justification for obligatory heat-treatment. The Minister (it was argued), having denied consumers the right to choose their own milkman, must ensure that the milk was safe. The Lord President's Committee was told that 'within a very short time' compulsion could be applied in areas with more than half the population of England and Wales covered by rationalisation schemes (say 16.4 out of 28.7 millions). Its extension to the remainder would depend on the supply of plant, a point on which the Committee asked for further information. How long would it take to provide the plant and at what cost to the war effort? Inquiries by the Ministry of Production evoked an encouraging answer; the 'great majority' of the installations required (some 360) could be delivered during 1944; the labour for manufacture totalled less than 200, that for operation about 2,000. In June 1943 the Lord President's Committee and the War Cabinet approved the scheme and the text of a White Paper on the Quality of the Nation's Milk Supply.

¹ In Scotland the equivalent of accredited milk was standard milk.

In the course of discussion, the proposals now set out in the White Paper¹ had undergone considerable accretion. The heat-treatment plan was preceded by a preamble laying stress on the importance of raising standards of dairy farming, followed by an announcement of further measures the Government was to take towards that end, including the assumption by the Ministry of Agriculture of responsibility (in England and Wales) for the conditions, such as buildings and equipment, under which milk was produced, the introduction of a uniform system of herd inspection, and the payment of a higher premium for tuberculin-tested milk. Thus, 'heat-treatment' was made to appear a logical part of a wider scheme of improvement, instead of the urgent piece of prophylaxis it had been to the Committee on Tuberculosis. At the instance of the Lord President's Committee, moreover, it was even more firmly tied to retail rationalisation in the text of the White Paper.

The tie was to acquire legal force in the new Defence Regulation that, Ministers had decided, should be issued instead of the Order originally proposed.² Parliamentary Counsel, on being asked for a draft for submission to the Legislation Committee, immediately questioned whether the proposal could be dealt with by Defence Regulation at all. Its effect on the efficient prosecution of the war must be negligible; it could not be said to maintain supplies essential to the life of the community: 'We have to say that the "supply" in question is a supply of "safe" milk. The weakness of this is that, desirable as "safe" milk is, we seem to have got on somehow without it up till now and it is difficult to say therefore that it is essential'. If, however, the heat-treatment of milk could be said to be an 'incidental or supplementary provision expedient for the purposes' of the main Regulation 55, i.e., that by which the rationalisation schemes were ultimately sanctioned, then the new Regulation would be less open to attack.

The English Law Officers, to whom the point was referred, were willing to proceed on the broader ground that safe milk, to quote the Solicitor-General, 'can truthfully be said to be one of those by which at the present time the well-being of the community is maintained'. But when the Draft Regulation, after consultations with Departments, technical experts, local authorities, and the trade, was at length ready for the Legislation Committee, the Lord Advocate took the opposite view. The Committee asked that a proviso be inserted in the Regulation, limiting its application to areas where a rationalisation scheme was in force. The supporters of compulsory heat-treatment naturally disliked this very much, for it meant that it

¹ Cmd. 6454 (published in July 1943).

² Defence Regulation 55G (S.R. & O. (1944) No. 65). For the use of Defence Regulation rather than Order, cf. the case of food standards, which was being put through at the same time (Vol. I, p. 317).

would lapse with rationalisation—one of the first restrictions that might be relaxed after an Armistice. They tried to get round the difficulty by making the proviso apply to areas in which at any time there had been a rationalisation scheme; but dropped this when Parliamentary Counsel pointed out that it was a flagrant evasion of the Legislation Committee's intentions. There was (said Counsel) a great deal of feeling, both in the Committee and elsewhere,

'that it is *not* right to seize excuses arising out of war-time for doing things by Defence Regulation with a view to consolidating the departmental position against the onslaughts of the protagonists of the liberty of the subject (especially the subject with a vested interest) which may be expected to revive in peace-time'.

An appeal from the Minister to the Chairman of the Legislation Committee (the Deputy Prime Minister) for release from the obnoxious proviso failed; the Regulation as made, on 20th January 1944, contained a clause in the exact sense the Committee desired. If the policy was to be made permanent, a Bill would need to be promoted in good time, so as to ensure no break in continuity with war-time legislation. It would obviously be unfortunate if the trade and perhaps local authorities were to be encouraged to spend money on heat-treatment plant, only to have the whole scheme lapse when the emergency came to an end.

In the event, the Regulation was to be a dead letter, for not a single area was ever scheduled under it. At first, progress reports from Area Milk Officers to the new Quality Milk Branch at Thames Ditton were encouraging; but movement from the preliminary stage of collecting information to the stage of active promotion of schemes was disappointingly slow. Reviewing the position in May 1945, nearly two years after the publication of the White Paper, Milk Division concluded that the system of working through the war-time associations would not do. 'We have progressed to a point at which the realisation has been forced upon us that we shall never reach our destination if we continue on our present lines'. Not merely had the associations proved themselves incapable of producing schemes that could be put into force without the closest scrutiny and amendment by Ministry Headquarters—for which task the staff was far too small; many of them had not produced a scheme at all. Lancashire, with its many producer-retailers, was particularly recalcitrant. 'The fundamental mistake has been the assumption that the members of an association have a common interest in the shaping of the schemes'. Unlike retail rationalisation, which secured to every participant his existing gallonage, compulsory heat-treatment (it was argued) favoured the larger dairymen, who alone could put up the capital

required; the smaller men could not be expected to co-operate in preparing for their own ultimate extinction.

In the light of this fundamental criticism, the material factors making for delay—the difficulty even of providing replacements for plant worn out or damaged in flying-bomb attacks, let alone new plant, the still greater difficulty of providing new buildings to house it—appear secondary. (It is true that awareness of them may have cooled what local zeal there was.) At any rate, the removal of these difficulties with the Armistice would not, it was thought, enable progress to be made along the lines of the White Paper. Moreover, active interference by the Ministry in local plans, without which most of them would never come to fruition, was now seen to have dangerous implications. The Ministry would, in effect, be inviting particular persons or firms to incur capital outlay, and would be morally bound to cover them against loss. So long as control of milk movements, with its accompanying 'functional' basis of remuneration, continued all might be well; but what thereafter? In sum, the tactical short cut had turned out to be a blind alley, and a perilous one at that. The way for the Ministry to reach its objective was to drop the war-time associations, give up the link with rationalisation, which anyway was unsuited to be the basis for a permanent scheme, and 'concern itself only with the administration of the law, leaving the distributors to make their own arrangements for complying with it'. Even the scheduling of areas, bit by bit, might be dispensed with in favour of an 'appointed day' when all must conform.

In its positive suggestions, this analysis looked forward to a post-war era free from restrictions either on the sale or movement of milk or the purchase of capital equipment; it did not indicate even by implication an alternative course of action that might have been taken in 1943-44. As to that, it seems clear that compulsory heat-treatment was not by any means attainable during the war years; with the best of intentions, its supporters had misled themselves, Ministers, and the public. As so often in the work of the Ministry, patient, even brilliant, negotiation of political and interdepartmental obstacles had not been matched by realistic calculation of administrative difficulties, and the securing, at great effort, of a favourable decision of policy had been followed by anti-climax. The *British Medical Journal* was wrong when, in August 1945,¹ it spoke of 'departmental bad faith', 'callous inertia', and 'lethargy'; on the contrary, officials had worked bravely and hard at a task that wiser, if not better, men would never have embarked upon. Yet, from the reformers' point of view, the miscalculation, since it alone secured the decision of policy, may have been no bad thing; the means were

¹ *British Medical Journal*, 4th August 1945. On 11th August *The Economist* had a paragraph headed 'The Milk Scandal'.

ill-chosen but (as events were to prove) there was to be no going back on the end. (Even the accusations of bad faith may have had their uses here.)

In the short run the 'safe milk' policy may actually have hindered the spread of heat-treatment in the smaller towns, for, having used compulsory rationalisation as its pretext, the Ministry could not very well extend it to areas in which there was no early prospect, on paper, of making all milk 'safe'. Nor was there any half-way house between compulsory rationalisation and no rationalisation at all, for a zoning scheme, even if voluntary from the distributors' point of view, still had to be enforced on the customer by 'freezing' registrations. (Registrations in non-rationalised areas were of course frozen with the customers' 1941 choice.) Having, therefore, previously agreed on the extension with the various interests, the Ministry was constrained to drop it. There had been a tendency for heat-treatment to increase where rationalisation schemes had been introduced, because of the fillip they gave to the absorption of smaller businesses by larger, that were usually 'pasteurisers'. It is of course a matter for surmise to what extent this tendency would have made itself felt in the areas with less than 10,000 inhabitants.

II

Intermittent sniping at the new price structure, and particularly the 'self-wholesaling' allowance, went on throughout 1943. The critics' claim, voiced, for instance by Lord Beaverbrook in September,¹ that the Ministry had raised the average cost of distribution was not firmly based. Calculations by the Milk Marketing Board and the Ministry independently showed that, in terms of pence per gallon, there had been virtually no change between the last year of the old prices and the first year of the new. The story would have been different had not the Ministry, on the basis of the first six months of 'continuous costings', reduced the retail and self-wholesaling allowances; from 1st April 1943, the former was to be 10½d. instead of 11d., and the latter went down at all stages by ¼d. These changes meant an annual rate of saving on the 'Milk Fund' of no less than £2¼ million.

For the winter of 1943-44, the Division propounded further savings; the remuneration of depots, it thought, might be cut by ⅓d., i.e., to the average of 1⅓d. that had been proposed the previous year, and the minimum qualification for the 'self-wholesaling' allowance be raised from 750 to 1,000 gallons a day. At this point, however, the Minister himself intervened. He felt that the form of this allowance—

¹ *Official Report*, House of Lords, 21st September 1943, Col. 44.

rising in stages according to the gallonage handled—was not only difficult to defend politically, but contrary to the principle, applied by the Ministry in the case of depots, that large-scale operations are more economical than small. There should, he thought, be a flat rate of allowance; and he was also unwilling to raise the gallonage qualification on the basis of so small a sample of costings—50 retailers. After discussion, it was agreed to propose a new arrangement; the payment of a flat rate of 1¼d. a gallon on every gallon above 750 a day, instead of on the whole amount handled. This arrangement appeared more logical, as relating the grant of the allowance directly to the performance of the so-called 'self-wholesaling' function; the theory being that 750 gallons was the most that could be distributed from a single set of retail premises. But in avoiding the sharp changes in remuneration at certain daily gallonages that had characterised the former arrangement, the new one discriminated more severely against the smaller 'self-wholesalers', as the following table shows:

Daily Gallonage	Allowance per gallon (averaged over total)		
	April-Oct.	Nov. onwards (proposed originally)	Nov. onwards (adopted)
	d.	d.	d.
875	.5	nil	.179
1,125	.75	.75	.417
1,375	1.0	.75	.568
5,000	1.25	1.05	1.063
10,000	1.25	1.25	1.156

It is not surprising, therefore, that the trade accepted it only under protest; a protest that might have been more vocal, had they realised that the new proposals would save the Ministry a further £500,000. As for the depot proprietors, they resisted the Ministry's proposals purely on the ground that the proper profit per gallon handled ought to be ¼d. and not ½d. However, when the Ministry counter-proposed that they should receive profit not on gallonage, but on the basis of 12½ per cent. on the capital employed in carrying out the depot function, they made haste to agree with a compromise margin averaging 1.2d. a gallon. This saved a further £120,000 a year.

It soon became apparent that the change in the 'self-wholesaling' allowance was a technical error. When the Ministry came to revise the margins again for the 1944 summer season, it had before it, for the first time, a year's results from a really representative sample of the trade—127 retailers and 37 wholesalers. These related to the year ended 30th September 1943, before the change in the 'self-wholesaling' allowance; for the purpose of determining the new margins, the Ministry had first to compute what the profits might have been, assuming the then levels of costs and margins. As it desired to get rid of the slight difference between London and provincial retail margins,

which had called for troublesome seasonal manipulation of the provincial retail price, a uniform retail margin of 10½d. a gallon was used in these computations.

The results were disconcerting. Most classes of distributor were clearly doing quite well; other things being equal, they might expect to earn, on this adjusted basis, an estimated average net profit varying from 1½d. a gallon in the case of the large London private distributors to 2½d. in that of the provincial Co-operative Societies. The London Co-operative Societies, however, showed a small paper loss of about ½d.; the provincial 'self-wholesalers', the class worst hit by the change in their allowance, a profit of about three-fifths of a penny. Now the 'standard profit' allowed for milk retailing, both in the pre-war inquiry by the Food Council and the Perry Report, was 1d. a gallon; there was not much authority behind this figure, but it had come to be adopted for want of a better. The problem before the Ministry, and the Treasury, was how to get the profits of the generality of distributors down without putting some medium-sized provincial dairymen out of business. It was the familiar problem of the marginal distributor, but with this difference, that there was in question not a particular individual, but a whole class whose earnings were below standard, and that there was no reason to suppose, therefore, that inefficiency or any remediable cause was responsible. Moreover the dairymen in question distributed nearly one-seventh of the total milk sold in England and Wales, apart from producer-retailers' milk. (The London Co-operative Societies were held to be a different case, in that they were not dependent wholly or largely on milk sales.)

No solution was found. The Ministry took the view that these provincial dairymen were the limiting factor on downward adjustments in the retail margin, and that, indeed, their actual margin should be increased from its annual average of 10½d. by introducing a national margin of 10½d. The Treasury, on the other hand, suggested that the national margin should be not more than 10d., and that the needs of the provincial dairymen should be met by 'manipulating' the self-wholesaling allowance; for instance, by reverting to the older arrangement by which it was paid on total gallonage. Each farthing on the retail margin was worth about a million pounds to the Exchequer; 'I hope that in view of what is at stake you will not be too fastidious over possible accusations of inconsistency'. But the Ministry, having after long effort got the allowance on what it hoped was a defensible ground, was unwilling to give up this position 'to carry out a piece of financial juggling'. There was no evidence that the higher costs of the particular section of the trade it was desired to help were connected with the 'self-wholesaling' function; and unless the allowance could be justified in terms of that function, 'the whole basis of

our argument is gone'. The allowance was still under attack in the House of Commons, and the Minister had in fact challenged its Parliamentary critics to produce an alternative. The last thing he could do at such a juncture was to *increase* the allowance.

In the end the Treasury gave way; hoping that once a national margin was achieved and the 'self-wholesaling' controversy settled, a further move might be possible. These hopes were to be disappointed, for in the negotiations with the trade the Ministry was persuaded to agree to a special rebate of $\frac{1}{4}$ d. a gallon to be paid to Metropolitan dairymen, in the first place until 30th September 1944; and this rebate was to become embedded in the price structure.¹ As for the retail margin, it remained at $10\frac{1}{4}$ d. for less than the full year for which it was supposed to be fixed; in July 1944 the Trade Board rates of wages and overtime rates were increased. Estimates from United and Express Dairies, verified by the Ministry's Costings Division, indicated that the cost of distribution would thereby be raised by rather more than $\frac{1}{4}$ d. a gallon; and in the face of this the Treasury was constrained to agree that the margin be raised everywhere to $10\frac{1}{2}$ d.

III

The pill was bitter, for ever since the Perry Report, now four years old, the Treasury had been cherishing hopes that, some day, soon, the cost of milk distribution was really going to be brought down drastically. It had welcomed the new price structure because it promised to provide, for the first time, a proper yardstick for costs that would make their reduction possible. The $\pounds 2\frac{1}{4}$ million saving that had been effected in April 1943 was, the Treasury had pointed out at the time, 'no more than the withdrawal of the additional half-penny which we allowed you at the last moment' in order to secure acceptance of the new structure the previous September. When, it had asked on other occasions, was the rationalisation of retail distribution going to yield the dividend the Ministry had promised? Ought not the considerable increase in liquid milk sales to be reflected in a decreased cost of distribution per gallon?

The short answer to these questions is, of course, that it was the costs of the marginal distributors that, for milk as for anything else, determined the remuneration of all; and that the attempt to split the margin between different functions, separately costed, only helped to

¹ It was extended in the first place *ad misericordiam*, on account of the flying-bombs and rockets, and was not abolished until 1949.

the extent that a firm's costs depended on the number of functions it performed. On the average, for instance, it was true that the costs of 'self-wholesalers' were higher than those of 'pure' retailers. But when one comes to particular cases, the costs of firms who got the self-wholesaling allowance, as revealed by the costings investigation, showed, if anything, a wider range than those of firms who did not. In other words, under the 'functional' price structure, the margin a firm received bore no relation to its individual costs, because these were determined by other circumstances besides function, as defined by the accountants. For instance, it may very well be that the high costs of some private provincial self-wholesalers were connected with the low costs of their Co-operative competitors, in the sense that the latter served compact blocks of working-class consumers while the former's trade was in middle-class suburban areas with a low population density. Whereas before the new price structure came in the two types of trader were working on an equal nominal margin, it might now happen that the more costly of the two, having a lower gallonage, qualified for a lower allowance from the Ministry. A glance at the table on page 230 will indicate that the trouble over the smaller provincial self-wholesalers, which brought the downward movement in margins to a premature end, was from the first latent in the new price structure. The increased insistence on the 'functional' aspect of the allowance was bound to bring it to a head.

One may put the point another way by saying that a price structure of the kind common in British food control, which allots traders' margins by classifying them into arbitrary categories, is likely to lead to anomalies that can only be made acceptable by a general overpayment. It was misleading of the Ministry to claim, and misguided of the Treasury to believe, that the economic problem of milk distribution could be not only illuminated but solved by the ingenuity of cost accountants.

But what (it might be asked) about retail rationalisation? If, as was commonly believed, the blocking-up of rounds represented a major working economy, surely its effects would be visible in the costings? Would not they, moreover, be most marked for the high-cost distributors, and so have an effect on the margin? There was, of course, a substantial saving in roundsmen's time through rationalisation, which found expression in a reduction of the number of rounds: by a quarter, on the average, in London, rather less elsewhere. (These are only rough estimates, as the information in the hands of the Ministry was not complete.) Round expenses, however, are only a part of total distributive costs; 4d. a gallon would, according to the Director of Costings, be a high figure for them. It follows that 1d. a gallon would be the maximum average saving from rationalisation. This figure is supported by some calculations made by the investigating

accountants from samples in which the reduction in rounds was known:

11	Larger London Distributors	showed an average saving of	1.367d.	per gallon			
6	Smaller "	"	"	"	"	"	1.397d. " "
7	Larger Provincial	"	"	"	"	"	0.462d. " "
7	Smaller "	"	"	"	"	"	0.855d. " "

(These calculations excluded the Co-operative Movement, and also any distributors with seven rounds or less; they, it was thought, would save time rather than money from rationalisation.)

Savings of this order of magnitude were, of course, readily offset by general inflation; and, in fact, the majority of firms investigated showed higher costs in 1943-44, the year in which rationalisation was completed, than in 1942-43. Savings made, especially in London, before rationalisation, probably had a greater effect; as the trade was never tired of pointing out, the margin had only been increased by 1d. between 1939 and 1942. At the same time it is true that, but for rationalisation, the large London distributors would have been making almost no profit—would, in fact, have been in the same position as their Co-operative competitors outside rationalisation schemes. In the provinces, on the other hand, rationalisation made little or no contribution towards bridging the gulf between low-cost Co-operative and high-cost private distributors, because the former were, so to speak, 'naturally' rationalised to an extent that the latter could not hope to match.

The financial results of retail rationalisation are, as one might expect, paralleled by its savings in physical resources. In February 1944, when the process was complete, they were estimated at the following:

Full-time employees	8,850
Part-time "	1,900
Hand vehicles	2,450
Horse "	1,900
Petrol "	2,600
Petrol Consumption	39,100 gallons per week

The savings, however, were geographically very uneven. Of the full-time employees saved, nearly a quarter were in Greater London. The proportion saved in the provinces ranged from one-third in Carlisle, and one-quarter in Wolverhampton, down to little or nothing in Manchester, Newcastle-on-Tyne and some other towns. It seems likely that, as with other industries, officials were slow to detect the point at which diminishing returns set in, or perhaps felt that sacrifices should be uniform even though vain.

IV

A further complication in the price structure, incidentally enhancing some dairymen's margins, arose out of the 'safe milk' proposals. When

these had first been discussed with the trade they had asked that the Ministry provide a special allowance to cover the cost of heat-treatment. Such separate remuneration was in accordance with the 'functional' principle of the price structure, and it had been recognised in the White Paper of May 1943, which promised that producer-retailers would be able to get heat-treated milk without charge. A proposal to pay an allowance of $\frac{1}{4}$ d. a gallon ($\frac{1}{4}$ d. to 'self-wholesalers'), coupled with a corresponding reduction in the retail margin, had been mooted in the summer of 1943, only to be dropped because (it seems) the machinery for dealing with claims could not be got ready in time for the winter season. Thereafter Ministry opinion turned, for a time, against a separate allowance as being an unnecessary complication, not only during the war but after. (The number of different allowances was certainly becoming formidable; besides those already discussed there were a 'station collection' allowance and an 'exceptional transport' allowance.) When the margins were revised in March 1944, the decision not to introduce a heat-treatment allowance was defended also on the grounds that the small retailers, for whose benefit it had been intended, were on average doing better than the 'self-wholesalers', and that the establishment of new heat-treatment plant had better be covered by an extension of wholesaling, i.e., by retailers clubbing together to form 'federal' plants which would then qualify for the wholesale allowance of 2d. a gallon. In effect, the Ministry used its maintenance of the 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. retail margin¹ as a reason for not giving the heat-treatment allowance. However, it undertook to discuss, not only this allowance, but the possibility of putting the self-wholesaling allowance on a basis that would put an end to Parliamentary criticism.

The discussions with the distributors opened in May 1944, and moved rapidly towards agreement, mainly because the Ministry abandoned, as logically untenable, its previous contention that the cost of heat-treatment was adequately provided for in the existing retail margin. It acknowledged that as the margin was avowedly based on the total average costs of a sample of retailers, some of whom sold their milk raw, the figure allotted to heat-treatment (about $\frac{1}{2}$ of a penny) must under-represent its cost to those who undertook it. The logic of this was not altogether sound, inasmuch as the 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. margin then in force represented considerably more than average costs plus the 1d. notional profit. On the other hand, the question had to be looked at in the light of the intention, then thought to be early of accomplishment, to compel large numbers of small dairymen to 'heat-treat' their milk; its cost to them was likely to be considerably higher than the normal, which was thought by the accountants to be about $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a gallon.

¹ p. 260 above.

The Ministry therefore proposed to fix the heat-treatment allowance at $\frac{1}{4}$ d. a gallon, to reduce the wholesale and retail margins by $\frac{1}{4}$ d., and to allow the wholesaler heat-treating on behalf of a retailer to recover the allowance from him. Following a lead from the Central Milk Distributive Committee, which claimed that the 'self-wholesaling' allowance included a sum to cover heat-treatment,¹ the Ministry decided that no extra payment need be made to self-wholesalers. In discussion with the trade these proposals were modified, so as to become an additional payment of $\frac{1}{4}$ d. a gallon, once only in the course of distribution, on all heat-treated milk by whomsoever handled.

Thus the retailer of raw milk suffered no cut in his margin. The 'self-wholesaler' received 1d. plus $\frac{1}{4}$ d. for heat-treatment, instead of an inclusive 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.—a change slightly to the advantage of the smaller man, since the $\frac{1}{4}$ d. was paid on total gallonage instead of the excess above 750 a day. At the same time the Ministry moved towards a more genuinely functional basis for the self-wholesaling allowance, by agreeing to examine any claims, from traders handling less than 750 gallons daily, to be performing self-wholesaling services in respect of part or all of their milk; provided that the Central Milk Distributive Committee would satisfy themselves first that the claimants had a strong *prima facie* case. This concession followed an investigation, by the Director of Milk personally, of certain specimen claims on the spot, from which it appeared that few, if any, were likely to be justified. The opportunity was also taken to get rid of the obnoxious term 'self-wholesaling'; henceforth the allowance was to be termed a 'special handling' allowance. These changes came into operation, along with the 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. retail margin to cover increased wages awards,² on 1st November 1944, and continued until March 1946.

V

Early in 1945 the Director of Milk instituted an inquiry into the whole price structure, which inevitably passed in review the whole of the Ministry's control of milk movements in England and Wales. It resulted in two separate reports, which reflected 'Milk Marketing Board' and 'Ministry of Food' views. The former claimed that the main features of the price structure—the uniform retail buying price and the 'functional' basis of remuneration—were both gratuitous and unsound, the more so since the rigorous control of transactions in

¹ The Ministry denied this, forgetting that one of the qualifications for the 'lesser self-wholesaler' had been the possession of a pasteurising licence. See above, p. 229.

² p. 261 above.

milk, envisaged at the time it was introduced, had proved to be impracticable. Unnecessary movements of milk—‘double depoting’ and ‘double wholesaling’—had been encouraged; the impossibility of defining the ‘functions’ accurately had led to anomalies and abuses:

‘Two large dairymen in London . . . both have customers for homogenised and kosher milk. One processes the kosher milk for both of them, the other does all the homogenising and both receive wholesale remuneration on the quantities they transfer to the other. . . .’

‘If one dairyman in a town puts in a heat-treatment plant he receives an additional $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per gallon. If he absorbs his smaller competitors in order to make the plant an economic unit he may qualify for a special handling allowance. But if two or three dairymen club together to install a heat-treatment plant, they can increase their remuneration by $2\frac{1}{4}$ d. per gallon with the full approval of the Ministry.’

‘One distributor receives milk from farms, cools, bottles, and delivers it to consumers, but if his sales are less than 750 gallons per day he has performed only the retail function. Another has diverted part of his farm supplies to a (second) dairyman whose customers have collected it from him loose and untreated. The combination of two dairymen who have performed less service than the one dairyman have been paid for performing more “functions”.’

A tacit assumption that (it was said) lay behind the uniform buying price, namely that a retailer ‘performs the same function whether his milk comes to him from farms or from a wholesaler’, was attacked as false. In introducing it the Ministry had paid too much attention to one particular class of dairymen; those who, being able to handle ex-farm supplies, had been aggrieved by having to turn to other dairymen for accommodation at a premium. Their grievances could have been met (it was claimed) without unduly favouring another class, those who had always bought all their milk from a wholesaler. The premium paid by these ‘sub-purchasers’, before the uniform buying price was introduced, corresponded to services performed for them by the wholesaler, which the direct purchaser had to perform for himself. Apart from balancing, breaking bulk, and such physical services, there was the important matter of ‘credit status’; many small dairymen were not credit-worthy, and it was right that they should pay more, via a wholesaler, for their supplies than those fulfilling direct contract requirements. Here too the new system lent itself to abuse:

‘Unless a dairyman’s credit is good and he pays his account regularly he is unable to obtain supplies from farms. Previously the loss of farm contracts was a serious financial embarrassment to a dairyman. Now, the price structure enables him to obtain supplies from a wholesaler at substantially the same price. Several dairymen have changed

to wholesale supplies for this reason. In one case a dairyman buying 1,000 gallons a day from the Ministry was unable to pay promptly for his supplies. His farm supplies were stopped and transferred to a wholesaler from whom he obtained supplies already processed at substantially the same price. Out of the profits of this business he had undertaken to pay £1,000 per annum off his debt to the Ministry. The change of farm supplies is costing the Ministry £3,000 per annum in wholesale remuneration'.

The 'self-wholesaling' or 'special handling' allowance was itself an admission that the uniform retail margin was unsound. Such a payment was essential in view of the varying costs of distribution. The Ministry, however, had been wrong to concede the allowance merely on size; the larger firms might have higher costs, but they did not require so high a profit on turnover as the smaller firms for an equal return on capital invested. Nor was it right to pay the allowance merely on the evidence of double handling, i.e., at a central depot and subsidiary distributing depots. Different businesses operating under comparable economic conditions, say in the same town, might have adopted different distributive methods, but should not for that reason be remunerated differently. So too it was wrong that dairy-men buying all their supplies ready-bottled should qualify for the 'special handling' allowance on grounds of turnover, or that those selling milk loose should get the full retail margin.

Many of these anomalies could, it was suggested, be got rid of (a) by restoring the old local differentiation of margins; (b) by confining the payment of allowances to definable functions, such as 'depotting', heat-treatment, or providing balancing supplies at the behest of the Ministry. Other services by a wholesaler to a retailer should be treated like bottling, i.e., paid for by the latter out of his margin, at prescribed rates. Thus, it was claimed, the incentive to unnecessary wholesaling would be removed; the anomalies of the special handling allowance would disappear; and the price structure would no longer lie open to the manipulations of dairymen, who would be classified once and for all into 'purchasers' and 'sub-purchasers'. This classification might, it was admitted, present difficulties; but decisions once made would not be affected by changes in the internal organisation of businesses.

These criticisms were not in the main disputed by the majority report which accepted the main principles of the price structure. The authors of the latter—one of whom had played a leading part in devising the structure—took the line that the anomalies were unimportant compared with the advantages, and were perhaps mainly due to weakness in administration rather than inherent defect. They recommended certain changes of which an increase in the heat-treatment allowance to the $\frac{1}{4}$ d. a gallon originally proposed, with a cut in the

retail margin, and the placing of the 'special handling' allowance on an entirely functional basis, were the more important. (They were effected for the season 1945-46.) For them, and for the Ministry in post-war years, the chief obstacle to the restoration of an inclusive margin was that it would cost money; the margin would have to be set to cover the costs of the most expensive form of distribution, viz., wholesaler *plus* sub-purchasing retailer, and this would mean over-paying the others.

As the original hopes that the new price structure would enable a general reduction in distributive margins had come to nothing, one might argue that it had been in effect no more than a redistribution of income between different classes of dairymen, and that the process might be repeated without incurring the financial consequences that were feared. On paper, certainly, it should have been possible to devise a combination of 'functional' and 'regional' margins on the lines that the critics desired. The difficulties in the way were less technical than political. The very effort that had been made to make the reforms of 1942, and to sustain them against opposition, was now a bulwark against further change, especially now that the time of high endeavour was past. A feature like the uniform buying price was not merely a technical contrivance; it was a pillar of good relations with the trade, an earnest of the Ministry's intention to hold the balance fairly between Board and distributors.

There had been adduced no very convincing reason in 1942 why the changes in the organisation of the milk industry for war-time purposes should have meant the extinction of the traditional differences between town and country margins, in favour of a uniform system negotiated on the basis of national average costs. The presumption, one might have thought, would have been the opposite, if only because costs have a tendency to adjust themselves to past rates of profit. It is true that, with the spread of heat-treatment and the rise in rural wages on the one hand, and the cutting down of expensive services like the second delivery on the other, the balance between town and country distributors' costs had by 1945 swung the other way. Nevertheless the abrupt break with the past that took place in 1942 was made for its own sake—as part of a conscious revolution in milk marketing—rather than on its own intrinsic merits. For that very reason, it was the more difficult to assail; as the critical report already quoted ruefully remarked, 'the functional basis will leave a permanent mark on the industry'.

VI

Had they cared to do so, the critics of the 'functional' price structure

might have pointed to Scotland, where the pre-war marketing schemes and 'overall' margins were found to be compatible with Ministry control of milk movements. The simplicity and smoothness with which the three Scottish Marketing Boards were made instruments of Government policy contrast notably with the eventful history of control in England and Wales. In some ways the Scottish problem was inherently simpler. Its sheer size was less; the distances milk had to travel from producing areas to consuming areas were smaller; the very fact that Scotland, under war conditions, became a net importer of liquid milk (from England and Northern Ireland) made control there, though not in the supplying countries, less exacting. In Scotland, moreover, the Boards had been able, in the six years of their pre-war existence, to stake out for themselves a commanding position in the physical marketing of milk, and that (as it seems) in co-operation with the distributors.

In England and Wales the position was very different. There, a milk market on a national scale, organised primarily to meet the needs of the metropolis, had been in existence for a generation before the Milk Marketing Board was set up; and the Board's main, one might almost say its sole, purpose was to protect the financial interests of the producers. To a Food Controller, wishing to move milk about the country in pursuit of a war-time consumption policy, the key institution was not the Board but the depots, as the first Ministry of Food had realised. Provided that a due proportion of total supplies continued to pass through them, they could, as Mr. J. H. Maggs had pointed out in 1941, accomplish all that the Ministry's policy might require. This claim had been borne out in practice, for it was on depot milk that the Ministry was to rely, throughout the period of control, for balancing supplies between one part of the country and another. Its formal ownership of milk passing direct to the retailer from the farm was virtually without influence on the destination to which the milk was sent (except for rare once-for-all changes under rationalisation schemes). Indeed, the breaking of the financial links, in the form of 'level delivery' or 'special service' premiums, between farmer and direct buyer had little or no effect on the goodwill value of existing connections between them. Each side, as was natural, preferred to go on dealing with those it had come to rely on.

Once it had been decided to guarantee the farmer's price, the Milk Marketing Board's principal function was gone 'for the duration'; the sole justification for keeping it in being was to allay fear and suspicion among its clients. Had the state of pre-war preparations permitted, the original plan to suspend the milk marketing scheme completely, while retaining for Ministry purposes the Board's technical and accounting staff, would have undoubtedly been the right one to follow. It was not merely that the Board was, despite claims to the

contrary, unfitted to organise the milk industry on the Ministry's behalf, as the Ministry of Agriculture had originally pointed out. More than that, the Government had already, by the Milk Industry Bill, expressed its conviction that the balance of power in the industry was tipped too far in favour of producers. The defeat of the Bill emphasised the truth of that conviction. To preserve the Board in war-time was to preserve a situation so unstable, and so explosive, that it could not be a foundation for war-time control.

By the end of the first year of war the Ministry had realised the limitations of the Board and the need to maintain a proper balance between it and the distributors. Thereafter that balance was scrupulously maintained; but just because so many concessions were made to the Board's *amour-propre* (for instance, in making it, and not the Ministry direct, the purchaser of milk ex-farm under the new structure), the Ministry was forced to make countervailing concessions to distributive interests. The want of ruthlessness in rationalising farm collections, of which the Board complained, the 'gallon-for-gallon' rule applied to depots, were in a very real sense due to the Board's insistence on preserving its influence in the industry. The Ministry was hampered in dealing with each of the antagonists by the fact that its every action might be construed as surrender to the other.

This need to act as arbitrator goes far to account for the complexities and compromises of milk control in England and Wales, but their existence does not alter the fact that the Ministry substantially achieved its objects. A rough justice in distribution was attained, at any rate in the cities; all priority demands were met, despite the fact that they continued to expand;¹ the cost of distribution was held down to an extent that, for all it disappointed the reformers and the Treasury, was unparalleled for any other food.² What is more remarkable, the Ministry had re-asserted and largely carried through, in the name of war-time welfare, a number of reforms that had either suffered from the war (the Cheap Milk and Milk-in-Schools Schemes) or had been wrecked by the defeat of the Milk Industry Bill (compulsory heat-treatment, retail rationalisation). Moreover, it had deprived the Milk Marketing Board of the power that had incurred most criticism from investigating bodies like the Cutforth Commission—the power to determine prices.

Some of these reforms were essentially permanent in character; compulsory heat-treatment, for instance, made no sense if it were not to be perpetuated after the war. Others, like retail rationalisation and the new price structure, could not but leave permanent effects behind them.

¹ In one post-war year, priorities had to be cut down in order to prevent the 'non-priority allowance' from falling below 2 pints per head per week.

² In 1944-5 it was still only about 1d. a gallon more than in 1938-9.

'The real transition which the industry will be going through after the war', wrote a senior official in March 1945, 'is not merely that of a return to peace-time conditions. It will be a transition determined by the emergence of new social requirements, some of them accelerated by the war, but all of them visibly in being before the war and already engaging the attention of Governments and parliament'.

The most tricky problem of decontrol, as it was seen in 1945, was provided by the price structure in England and Wales. Whatever merits it might have were inextricably bound up with the Ministry's central direction of milk movements, that is to say with a scarcity that it was the avowed aim of production policy to end as soon as possible.

'It is desirable . . . that as soon as circumstances permit, a return should be made to normal trading conditions with a normal price system. The war-time price structure is wholly unsuited to conditions of independent trading, and should be replaced in due course by an over-all distributive margin. That the Ministry should continue to act as paymaster of the industry, through a system of functional allowances, when milk no longer moves under its direction, would be an incongruous arrangement. . . .'

Here, however, a further complication arose. Milk to the ordinary consumer had come to be subsidised, in the name of the Cost-of-Living Index. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to devise an 'overall distributive margin' that did not cost the Exchequer more than the 'functional' one, whose economy was, indeed, its principal recommendation. Thus the whole problem of decontrol, for milk as for other foods, was bound up with the subsidy.

It was perhaps fortunate, therefore, that, with supply and demand still some years off a likely balance, decisions about the future of the industry need not be taken in haste. It was too much to expect, in the light of the past history of the industry, that the comparative peace of the last war years would prevail in it for long; as early as the end of 1943 the contending factions had begun to jockey for post-war position. But the years of control had placed the Government in far more favourable circumstances to deal with them. Its knowledge was far greater; it need no longer rely on second-hand or partisan sources of information. Such questions as the possible extent of distribution economies were no longer matters of idle speculation; the answer to them was, for all practical purposes, known.¹ What was equally important, the aims of milk policy were no longer in dispute, nor did they differ between war and peace. The problem was less, therefore,

¹ Nevertheless, the minority of signatories to a post-war Report on Milk Distribution could still claim that nationalisation of milk deliveries could produce economies of the order of 4d. a gallon, without saying where these economies were to come from.

one of decontrol than of providing permanent means for the Government to fulfil its social obligations regarding milk. It looked, in 1945, as if the 'milk enthusiasts' had entered into their kingdom at long last.

B:
**Emergency and Communal
Feeding**

CHAPTER XVIII

Emergency Preparations

I

SOMETHING has already been said about the rejection,¹ in the plans of the Food (Defence Plans) Department, of the more apocalyptic forecasts of what a war would be like; so that it was decided, as a general rule, not to prepare to replace completely the normal means of distribution. (There were exceptions—fish, potatoes, and later, the 'consumer depot' scheme, but only the first of these got beyond the paper stage.)² The Department had, nevertheless, been charged with making provision against air attack,³ and this aspect of its work, in which the period of preparation was continued well into the first year of war, falls roughly under three heads. In the first place, the administrative framework of the Ministry of Food allowed for the continued functioning of control should the machinery of central government break down. Secondly, various devices were adopted for the distribution of vital foods. Thirdly, certain specialised emergency measures, mainly complementing the work of other Departments, were taken.

The responsibility for individual foodstuffs in emergency had been divided in time, so to speak, between Commodity Divisions and Divisional Food Officers. Nearly all the former⁴ appointed men experienced in the trade as Area Officers to supervise local supply and distribution. These officers would normally report to their Trade Directors; Divisional Food Officers were limited to a watching brief. A memorandum circulated to them in February 1939 emphasised the national character of all commodity schemes, and warned them against making local variations except in emergency. In the spring of 1940 plans were drawn up by individual Commodity Divisions for action should normal war-time distribution break down and communications be severed between Area Officers and Headquarters. They must then look for direction to the Divisional Food Officer, as vested for the time being with the Minister's powers. These emergency

¹ Vol. I, pp. 33-4, 48, 153-155.

² Above, p. 5 *seq.*

³ Vol. I, p. 11.

⁴ Area Officers were appointed for the following commodities: flour, bread, yeast, bacon and ham, butter and cheese, eggs, oils and fats, meat, sugar, potatoes, animal feeding-stuffs, condensed milk, tea; and for cold storage. The boundaries of different Commodity 'Areas' coincided neither with one another nor with those of Food Divisions or Civil Defence Regions.

schemes were closely linked with the hasty dispersal of the principal commodities that the Ministry was trying to arrange at that time, and their success would have entirely depended on stocks happening to be in the right place. The schemes themselves varied considerably, and it was remarked of those for bacon, butter, and sugar, that no means for their co-ordination seemed to exist. Of these three, the sugar scheme was the most flexible, providing for the distribution to affected areas by wholesalers from emergency stocks controlled by the Divisional Food Officer; the butter scheme, however, envisaged a complete departure from the normal channels of trade, by supplying to retailers through one instead of a number of wholesalers. Special emergency reserves of tea, which was normally distributed from London, had been placed in the charge of Divisional Food Officers.

More elaborate arrangements were made for bread and milk, both of them essential especially in emergency,¹ and both peculiarly vulnerable because of their dependence on gas, electricity, water, and transport. The *Emergency Bread Scheme* was started in May 1940, when an Area Bread Officer was appointed in London to co-ordinate schemes for neighbouring Divisions. Area Bread Officers were next appointed in other Food Divisions with shadow staffs of assistants. These appointments were honorary: the scheme was purely a trade concern and was supervised from Ministry headquarters by a Director of Emergency Bread Supplies with long experience in the trade. Bread Officers knew how much every bakery in the area could turn out, and other details, like flour and water storage capacity and the situation of wells; these had been secured by means of questionnaires sent out by the Bakers' and Confectioners' Advisory Committees set up in each Food Division just before the outbreak of war.

The basis of the Emergency Bread Scheme was a system of large and interlocking mutual assistance pacts, overlapping Divisional boundaries, upon which a Bread Officer could call if bread was needed in emergency. It was impressed on local Bread Officers that they were expected to provide bread no matter what the difficulties. If outside help was needed, they should communicate with the next senior officer in the organisation or with the Divisional Office; if this was impossible, they must use their own initiative. They had also the responsibility of fulfilling Service contracts, for which alternative suppliers had to be arranged in case of breakdowns. The Army, which had a number of field bakeries, was able to give some reciprocal help to civilians in emergency.

Closely linked with the Bread Scheme was an emergency yeast organisation, which had its own commodity officers throughout the

¹ Bread consumption was later reported to have increased by from two to six times in bombed areas.

country. Yeast supplies were specially vulnerable, for the whole supply came from a very few factories. Shadow factories were therefore equipped in Scotland, largely at the expense of the Ministry of Food, and a week's supply of yeast was maintained in cold store, the Ministry contributing half the cost. An emergency fermentation scheme was also prepared in case yeast supplies were nevertheless interrupted. Bakers were instructed by leaflets and lively diagrams how to 'stretch' yeast by the 'old dough' and other methods; courses of instruction were arranged at technical colleges, and bakers were asked to use an emergency method one day in each month.

The aim the Bread Scheme set itself was to maintain uninterrupted bread supplies in emergency, so that the customer should be unaware that there had been anything unusual about the way in which the loaf had reached her door; and the Scheme was so successful in practice that it was able to boast that this ideal had been achieved. A reason for its success, apart from efficient organisation, was the large surplus capacity that existed in the baking trade, partly used in normal times for making fancy breads and cakes.

The emergency *milk* scheme also depended on mutual assistance pacts, and, in London, on a regional emergency scheme, operating from the premises of London Wholesale Dairies Ltd., which covered the large distributors and wholesalers who handled the bulk of London's milk. The size of the main London distributors enabled them to maintain the supply and processing of milk in spite of heavy damage to railways and processing depots, which was at its worst in September 1940. The large firms were able, for example, to maintain their own gangs to repair their premises and the electric cables serving them; damage to power and water supplies was found to be the chief cause of dislocation to milk distribution, but repairs were made at high speed. Mutual assistance pacts between the smaller dairymen were found less helpful in practice. When small dairies were knocked out in air raids, it often happened that their business was looked after or permanently taken over by one of the large concerns.

II

The key position in these emergency arrangements was occupied by that survivor from the first period of food control, the Divisional Food Officer.¹ He now, however, was to find himself a part, in prospect, of a larger whole—the Regional System of Civil Defence, under which Great Britain was divided into twelve Regions—ten in England, one

¹ Formerly called 'Food Commissioner'; now (1953) 'Regional Food Officer'. See Vol. I, esp. pp. 52-54.

each in Scotland and Wales. The letters of appointment issued to those selected as *Regional Commissioners* in April 1939 stated that if communications with the capital were severed they should take temporary charge of government affairs in their regions, and should look to the regional representatives of other departments for assistance. Divisional Food Officers were informed that they would be the senior regional representatives of the Ministry of Food in their respective Food Divisions, which with certain exceptions were coterminous with the Regions.¹ In normal times Divisional Food Officers would be responsible only to the headquarters of the Ministry of Food; for periods of emergency when communications with the central government were cut, the respective functions and the relationship of Regional Commissioner and Divisional Food Officer were carefully defined. Then, the Regional Commissioner would—it was said—become ‘Prime Minister’ for his area of jurisdiction, with the Divisional Food Officer as ‘Minister of Food’, and might require the latter to take any action he thought necessary. If the Divisional Food Officer thought any order given by the Regional Commissioner to be contrary to the policy of his Minister, he might either accept personal responsibility for its execution or request written orders transferring responsibility to the Regional Commissioner. The actions of either, if *ultra vires*, might subsequently have to be validated by an Act of Indemnity.

The only positive restraint laid on either Divisional Food Officer or Regional Commissioner was in the matter of ‘national’ bulk stocks: so long as communications with the Central Government were intact these stocks were entirely under the control of the Ministry of Food, and if communications were severed they might not be removed from store unless the Regional Commissioner were fully assured that the needs of other Regions would not be impaired. On the other hand, the only legal functions permanently delegated by the Minister to Divisional Food Officers were powers to requisition and to prosecute for breaches of food regulations. The delegation of further powers that might be required in emergency was considered at the end of 1939, but thought unnecessary. In June 1940, however, when the threat of invasion made breakdown of central government appear a very real possibility, the Home Defence Executive proposed the immediate delegation of further responsibility to Regional Commissioners, who would take command of other regional representatives and would become the equivalent of local ministers for all departments. The Ministry of Food, which had already established a tradition for independent action among its Divisional Officers, objected that this proposal would lead to chaos in food administration, which was

¹ Eastern Region and Wales were each divided into two Divisions, Scotland into five, and Northern Ireland was designated a separate Division.

essentially a matter for central control unless circumstances made this impossible, and the Minister himself came independently to the same conclusion when the subject was raised at Cabinet Committee meetings at that time. The proposal was dropped, and as the prospect of invasion was never again so imminent, it was not renewed.

Early in 1941, however, Meat and Livestock Division drew attention to certain measures for the collection and slaughtering of animals that might be essential in emergency; for these, new Orders would be necessary, and it was realised that the same might apply to other commodities. The Minister had expressed a preference that in emergency any delegation of powers should be to Divisional Food Officers rather than Regional Commissioners, and it was eventually decided that they should be empowered to make Orders under the Defence Regulations, in strictly limited conditions of place and time.¹

No regular arrangement existed for liaison between Regional Commissioners' and Divisional Food Offices. The instructions for Divisional Food Officers prepared before the war provided for the appointment of regional liaison officers on their staffs, but working in Regional Commissioners' offices, to keep them informed on food matters. In January 1940 the post was abolished, but in July of that year Divisional Food Officers were allowed at their discretion to revive it in view of the urgent need for close contact between the two offices. An enquiry two years later disclosed a variety of liaison arrangements, with few regularly-appointed liaison officers. At the end of 1940, unsatisfactory liaison between Divisional and Regional offices was said to be a cause of slow or inadequate reporting to the Ministry of air raid 'incidents' and damage to food interests, and relations between local representatives were difficult, notably in the North-West;² but there is little evidence of any failure to cope with the effects of air-raids at the Divisional level because of faulty liaison with the Regional Office. The Divisional Food Officers proved to be fully capable of dealing with their problems without calling on outside assistance.

III

Liaison between different parts of the Ministry of Food itself presented more difficulties in practice. Towards the end of 1940, several

¹ The place was limited to the boundaries of the Division; the time according to the receipt of notice from the Minister that emergency powers might now be assumed, except in the case of the complete severance of communications with headquarters.

² It may be worth noting that the only direct, though abortive, threat of interference by a Regional Commissioner with Ministry of Food affairs also occurred in the North-Western Region, in 1941, when on the appearance of food shortages the Regional Commissioner attempted to attach food supplies on their way to other Regions.

Divisional Food Officers complained that they did not know enough about food stocks within their Divisions to enable them to deal with emergencies, and suggested that Area Commodity Officers should be placed under their direct control; but Commodity Divisions strongly opposed any idea of relinquishing central control of commodities as long as they could keep in touch with their representatives.¹ The Ministry's Inspector-General, reporting at the beginning of October, had singled out the physical separation of Divisional Food Offices and the various Area Offices as the main cause of difficulty, and proposed that they should be gathered under one roof. Divisional Food Officers were accordingly made responsible for providing office accommodation for Area Officers and specially recommended to try to find premises as near as possible to their own headquarters; but in May 1941, after a series of heavy air raids on several provincial cities, the situation was little better. In Liverpool the Deputy Divisional Food Officer 'urgently required the assistance of the Meat Officer but could not get him on the day following the blitz . . . he had a job to find the Bread Officer. . . . The Bacon man he has not yet seen'. Area Commodity Officers of the Southern Division were stationed at Reading (at the opposite end of the town to the Divisional Office), Southampton, Guildford, Oxford, High Wycombe, and London. A year later, Area Commodity Officers responsible for the North Wales Division were scattered between Liverpool, Ellesmere Port, Manchester, Wrexham, Southport, and Chester; only three were in Caernarvon. An establishment committee, considering the matter, thought it unwise to make any frontal attack on the independence of Area Officers (many of whom had set up their offices to suit their personal convenience), but agreed that opportunity, for example a new appointment, should be taken to bring them into closer contact with the Divisional Offices. Meanwhile, the appointment of Statistical Officers at Divisional Offices helped them to keep in touch with the commodity situation.

In some Divisions, the relationship of Divisional and Area Officers continued uneasy throughout the war, exacerbated to some extent by the anxiety of headquarters to emphasise that central control must be maintained to the last possible moment. In June 1942 strong feeling was aroused among Divisional Food Officers by a circular from headquarters that seemed to over-emphasise the discretionary powers of Area Officers. At the beginning of 1943 an invasion exercise revived the question, and some Divisional Officers expressed a wish to take charge of the area commodity organisation as soon as an invasion warning was received and before 'regional government' was instituted;

¹ 'Any measure of stock control in the hands of Divisional Food Officers would be tantamount to stock dissipation' is a comment typical of the views of Commodity Divisions. See also Vol. I, pp. 53, 158.

but Commodity Directors, after three years' experience, now felt more confidence than ever in their ability to handle invasion conditions throughout the country as long as they could keep in touch. They were asked to ensure that Area Officers would have sufficient discretionary powers to act on their own responsibility in difficult circumstances. The Divisional Food Officer's function would remain advisory only, until he had been either instructed, or compelled by the complete breakdown of communications, to assume control.

Before the war, Area Provision and Grocery Committees had been formed from representatives of the wholesalers, to organise the trade for emergency. They were officially regarded as the 'opposite numbers' of the Divisional Food Officers, with whom they were meant to be closely associated and whose areas of responsibility coincided with their own. They were not to interfere in the normal working of commodity schemes, but for emergency conditions they were expected to have ready groups of wholesale businesses prepared to render mutual assistance to any of their number affected by enemy attack; transport could be pooled, duplicate records and lists of customers could be maintained so that distribution to retailers could be continued, and a register kept of premises earmarked for use as emergency warehouses. Little progress was made with these plans. In May 1940 it was admitted by the chairman of the London Area Provisions Committee that groups differed widely in their efficiency; many indeed still existed only on paper. He suggested the creation in the Ministry of a post of Adviser on Wholesale Distribution. This suggestion was turned down at the time, but revived in 1941, in the light of a winter of air raids. The state of the wholesale trade was felt to be precarious, in view of its geographical concentration and the heavy damage it had already suffered. Experience in air raids had shown that the mutual assistance pacts were ineffective, mainly because they had been too narrow in their membership; in Plymouth and Coventry, for instance, nearly all the firms in the pacts had been affected in the raids, and the Divisional Food Officers had to arrange for food to be sent in from outside the area. Wholesaling was from this point of view the weak link in the chain of war-time food distribution; but no very practical suggestion was found for strengthening it.

The idea of mutual assistance pacts was taken up by the *retailers* early in 1939, but it was tolerated rather than welcomed by the Food (Defence Plans) Department, which was unwilling to guarantee the return of registered customers transferred in emergency to another supplier. A memorandum was eventually issued a day or two before the outbreak of war, agreeing to the voluntary registration of groups of retailers at the local Food Office, and guaranteeing that Food Control Committees would arrange for the transfer of customers and

rationed supplies from a trader whose premises had been destroyed to another member of the pact. They could not, however, guarantee that custom for unrationed goods would be restored. Retailers' mutual assistance pacts eventually came into existence in most towns, but in the more serious raids they had a similar fate to those of the wholesalers.

IV

One of the tasks undertaken by the Food (Defence Plans) Department at the time of the Munich crisis had been to supply 'iron rations' for those moved under the Government's evacuation scheme;¹ and it continued to be responsible for these during the vicissitudes of the evacuation plans in the year before war broke out. The Health Departments, which had taken over from the Home Office the task of framing evacuation schemes, were only gradually able to complete a fully revised programme, covering the whole country; and during the early months of 1939 there was a good deal of chopping and changing of piecemeal arrangements, which brought much fruitless work upon those charged with the provision of food. By about mid-summer, however, the plans were fairly advanced (though revisions continued to be made right up to August) and the Food (Defence Plans) Department was able to begin the deployment of its ration stocks.

In July the supplies of canned meat and milk were despatched to arrival stations or the most convenient storage places near by; on 17th August final instructions went out to local authorities; and on the 24th the signal was given for the despatch of the other items—chocolate, biscuits, and carrier bags. They were all in position in time for the beginning of evacuation on 1st September, in spite of last-minute changes in, and additions to, scheduled movements; but only by dint of unremitting effort on the part of all concerned—suppliers, railway companies, reception officers, and last but not least, the staff at headquarters, who (it was said) had been strained almost to breaking-point coping with a stream of enquiries from reception officers, the investigations with suppliers and railway companies, and arrangements for additional rations. (There were just four serious mistakes in despatch to be put right.) The organisation might, officials thought, have broken down if the rate of evacuation had increased, instead of slackening, after the first few days, and would certainly have done so if air raids had begun at once and had disrupted transport and communications as well as encouraging evacuation. They recommended that another time the units for supplying

¹ Vol. I, pp. 42-3. For evacuation problems generally, R. M. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, in this series (H.M.S.O.)

officially evacuated parties, as well as voluntary refugees, should be the public assistance committees, which in any case were encouraged to buy in the unused supplies of meat, milk, and biscuits, after the official evacuation was over.

Disposal of these surplus supplies was the task that confronted the new Ministry of Food once the evacuation was officially declared at an end; for only half those scheduled to be sent away had presented themselves.¹ The Ministry of Health agreed to the withdrawal of rations from reception areas on the understanding that no individual rations could be arranged for any future evacuation, and all cases of canned meat and milk that remained packed or could be repacked were recalled to store,² along with the chocolate, which could if necessary be melted down and used again. The biscuits, however, could not be returned to the factories, for manufacturers had undertaken to carry stocks on the understanding that the Government would buy them in the event of war; they were unsuitable for resale because they would not keep. The enthusiasm of many reception officers in breaking bulk and putting out food in the carrier bags (many of which were lying about in most unsuitable storage conditions) had complicated the problem of disposal. Public assistance authorities eventually bought fair quantities of broached cases or loose tins of meat and milk, and local authorities were advised to dispose of the biscuits as best they could.³ The Ministry's biggest losses were incurred over the perishable biscuits and the chocolate, much of which was actually given away in the reception areas on the advice of local Food Officers.

It took till mid-April 1940 to dispose of the surplus, and the liquidation of outstanding accounts took even longer. A report on the clearing-up process put forward the view that the whole scheme had been 'wasteful and unnecessary. During and after evacuation we had ample evidence from . . . local reception officers that the evacuated persons went straight into billets and that the persons with whom they were housed provided meals for them'. The best safeguard, it was argued, against shortage of food in reception areas was to stock-up wholesalers and retailers in advance, and perhaps to set up emergency dumps of food under the control of the Divisional Officer. This last suggestion pointed along the path the Ministry was to follow in its later emergency provision.

The direct participation of the Food (Defence Plans) Department in the evacuation scheme was exceptional; its liability in other pre-war emergency feeding plans was limited to helping with bulk food

¹ The biggest response, representing half the total, had been from the London area.

² These were later used for provisioning emergency dumps. See p. 296 below.

³ Some authorities also sold meat and milk to private buyers without permission. Wherever possible, the sales were cancelled.

supply in case of need. Thus the feeding of air raid victims or refugees, like other forms of help, had been entrusted to the Public Assistance Authorities and, as Professor Titmuss has shown, was strongly flavoured with the poor-law. As a first step, the London County Council was invited by the Ministry of Health to draw up a provisional scheme for its area, and in April 1939 produced a plan for the establishment of forty-three emergency 'feeding stations' throughout the county, based on public assistance institutions, and able to provide hot drinks and simple snacks¹ for a hundred and fifty thousand persons in twenty-four hours. In June, fifty-four other public assistance authorities in 'evacuation' areas and bordering districts were asked to work out schemes, on the London model, for the provision of food and a few hours' shelter for the destitute of their own localities.

As for refugees from bombed districts, it was recognised that they would create problems of feeding and accommodation outside the affected areas, but so reluctant were officials to recommend any measures that might encourage disregard of the Government's 'stay put' policy that it was not until 2nd September 1939 that a hundred additional public assistance authorities in neutral areas were asked to set up shelter and feeding stations, intended primarily for the relief of refugees from raided districts. Financial responsibility for these was accepted by the Exchequer as part of the expenses of the government evacuation scheme; on the other hand, provision for the distressed within their own district of residence was made a local obligation. This distinction between 'natives' and 'immigrants' thrust on local authorities, that expected to have to cater for both, the hopeless task of trying to differentiate between expenditure on behalf of each. They were reluctant to use their own rates for preparations before war broke out, despite a Ministry of Health promise of assistance should the burden become excessive, and government authority for expenditure on behalf of 'evacuees' was difficult to obtain, both because of the difficulty of establishing a claim, and because of official fears that too lavish a provision of comforts might encourage the homeless to spend too long in the rest centres.

After the outbreak of war, there was no appreciable enlargement of the scale of preparations at the rest centres. The Ministry of Health continued to emphasise that all who reported to the centres should be encouraged to return home as soon as practicable, and although preliminary arrangements were made to deal with evacuation in the event of heavy bombardment, the risk was not thought sufficient to

¹ These arrangements were supervised by an interdepartmental Committee on Relief in Kind in War-time. A report on the L.C.C. scheme presented to the Committee contains the following details of the scope of the feeding arrangements: 'The most essential need will be to arrange for supplies of boiling water to be readily available so that a hot drink can be provided. With this, tinned food and bread and margarine will provide a meal for adults . . . boiled potatoes can be added. . . . For children, bread and margarine, jam and biscuits should be provided'.

justify the making of fully elaborated plans. Arrangements should be made for selecting buildings and obtaining staff and food supplies, but no expenditure should be incurred until the schemes were needed to be put into operation.

The Food (Defence Plans) Department had played no part in these plans other than to undertake that Divisional Food Officers should replenish food supplies of public assistance authorities in case of difficulty, or when extra supplies were required at short notice. Public assistance committees were normally expected to make their own provision in the ordinary course of business. Early in 1940 an attempt was made by the Ministry of Food to assess their requirements, but the only result was a collection of diet-sheets showing what was provided for inmates of public assistance institutions. Divisional Food Officers were therefore left to make contact with individual authorities to find out their requirements. Uncertainty, however, whether rest centres would be able to cope with the type of food problem that heavy air raids might produce appears in a request from the Ministry of Home Security in March 1940. The Ministry of Food was asked to lay down at strategic points special emergency dumps¹ of rations of canned meat, canned milk, and biscuits, sufficient for over two million people, in case of large-scale uncontrolled movements of panic-stricken refugees. They would be shepherded by the police into centres—the words in the original draft were ‘concentration camps’—where they would be ‘handed a minimum subsistence and returned as soon as possible to their normal areas of residence’. (The attitude of mind revealed by language of this sort cropped up again later, when the question of refugees from invasion was being discussed.)² These dumps, it was emphasised, were intended as a ‘last line of defence’ under the control of Divisional Food Officers, and must on no account be broached to help out public assistance authorities in operating the ordinary Relief in Kind scheme; later on, they were re-organised and supplemented by the Ministry of Food as a final barricade in its system of security stocks.

V

One or two other precautionary activities in the first year of the war remain to be mentioned. It was not until the end of 1938 that the Food (Defence Plans) Department, at the suggestion of the Ministry of Health, began to look into the problem of *poison gas*, as it affected

¹ These were additional to four dumps, containing canned food for one million people, that had been provided for the London area in June 1939; they were partly made up of surplus rations remaining unbroached from the official evacuation scheme described above.

² pp. 310-311, below.

food. Hitherto the Department, hard pressed as it was, had simply assumed that the Air Raid Precautions Department (which in 1937 had issued a booklet on 'The Protection of Foodstuffs against Poison Gas') would deal generally with gas contamination. It was reluctant, even now, to take on the extra work of devising a gas protection scheme, but was moved to undertake it by the consideration that a Department responsible for war-time food supplies could not contemplate with equanimity the prospect of an Air Raid Precautions inspector having the power to order the destruction of a complete cargo of wheat or meat that might have been splashed by a gas bomb falling in the neighbourhood. Little was done before war started, but at the beginning of October 1939 a leading biochemist was appointed as Chief Adviser on Food Decontamination,¹ at the head of a small staff at headquarters, and it was agreed, with the approval of the Ministry of Health, that local authorities should be asked to appoint officers from their food inspection staffs as food decontamination officers and to train food treatment squads to work with decontamination squads. Divisional Food Officers were asked to appoint liaison officers to supervise local authority schemes and arrange for mutual assistance between neighbouring towns.

During 1940 the Ministry instituted a small leaflet campaign to instruct the general public and food traders on the protection and decontamination of food; it also provided a course of lectures to gas officers at towns throughout the country and issued a memorandum on their equipment and duties. A year after war began, however, it was found that local authorities had done little but appoint gas officers—usually from their staff of sanitary inspectors—and nothing to train food treatment squads. The obstacle to progress, as usual with schemes devolved upon local authorities, had been the absence of a clear-cut agreement on the provision of funds. A small Treasury grant had been secured for the provision of protective clothing for gas officers, but up to the end of 1940 local authorities had received no assurance that the cost of special equipment, metal-lined transport, and the rent of premises for the decontamination of foodstuffs, would be reimbursed by the central government. The Ministry of Health refused to commit itself on the propriety of such expenditure, which, it said, must be decided by the District Auditor—perhaps to the disadvantage of the local authority; and the Ministry of Home Security would not agree to extra expense beyond what had already been approved for general decontamination work. A similar attitude had been taken up within the Ministry of Food, and had been responsible for the turning down of a number of schemes calling for special expenditure, submitted by local authorities in response to the Ministry's own instructions to gas officers.

¹ He later became Chief Scientific Adviser to the Ministry.

In November 1940,¹ however, the Ministry, admitting that it was 'in danger of being caught unprepared for dealing with gas contaminated food', applied for Treasury approval for the charging to its own funds of all approved expenditure on local authority schemes. It was finally arranged that the Ministry of Home Security would guarantee local authority expenses but that the Ministry of Food would approve schemes; to make up for past delay, however, local authorities were asked to complete their schemes immediately and submit details later to the Ministry, with the assurance that 'reasonable' expenditure on food decontamination would be passed in claims for general air raid-precautions expenditure sent to the Ministry of Home Security. After the removal of the financial obstacle, local authorities were able to proceed, and by June 1941 most were reported to have schemes either in being or in preparation. The Ministry of Food salvage organisation was in existence by then and could be made responsible for the disposal of decontaminated food.

Early in 1941 emergency measures were taken to protect bulk supplies of foodstuffs against contamination. As there was a serious shortage of tarpaulins, which gave complete protection, 20,000 sheets of waterproof material giving partial protection were ordered from the Ministry of Supply; it was later arranged for stocks of tarpaulins and other coverings to be put in the charge of buffer-depot managers.

During 1939 there had also been some rather desultory activity over securing air-raid protection for important food premises. A list of ten vital points² and of ten areas containing important food premises³ had been submitted to a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence; some of these factories were visited by inspectors from the Committee, who recommended such measures as the provision of blue lighting schemes, the protection of piping and the covering of windows, but no Treasury aid was at first proposed, and in May 1939 it was said to be unlikely that any action had been taken.⁴ The Food (Defence Plans) Department had not, like the Service Departments, the power of making grants to cover Air Raid Precautions as part of the cost of contracts, or of influencing the location of industry in peace-time, nor had it any inspecting or advisory staff; so it had some vital factories on its list brought under

¹ At this time responsibility for gas decontamination had just been transferred to the branch handling salvage.

² These included margarine factories, oilseed crushing mills, oil refineries, oil hydro-generation plants, and yeast factories.

³ These included flour mills, cold stores, sugar refineries, granaries, and were mainly in port areas. The number of food key points was kept comparatively small because the basic food industries are highly concentrated and manufacturing capacity in the hands of a few large units.

⁴ One recommendation, that sand should be distributed over the wooden floors of flour mills, was said to be 'not warmly received by the millers'.

the umbrella of the Ministry of Supply Act of 1939, which contained provisions requiring government contractors to protect their plant, and made available Treasury grants towards capital expenditure on passive air defence.

On the outbreak of war the list of vital factories, now known as 'key points', was turned over to the Ministry of Home Security, which used it as a basis for negotiating with other Departments for the allocation of 'active defence equipment' (anti-aircraft guns and balloon barrages), for priority service in post-raid repairs, and for the provision of passive defence measures, including camouflage; the carrying-out of recommended defence measures was left, however, to the Departments sponsoring the undertakings concerned. Food key points thus became, under the pre-war Act, the business of the Ministry of Supply; the Ministry of Food could influence their defence only indirectly, and, as in other matters, received only secondary consideration from the military and civil defence authorities in imparting information on the general strategic outlook. When the air raids did come, the Ministry of Food appears for a time to have ignored the existence of the Key Points List; it was said, in the middle of 1941, to have failed either to supply adequate reports of air-raid damage to the Key Points Intelligence Directorate of Home Security or to keep the list up to date in the light of damage and destruction or of new building since September 1940. Not only did this affect the reliability of reports on the effects of enemy air attack, which were prepared by the Ministry of Home Security on the sole basis of the Key Points List—on which food key points were only modestly represented—but it handicapped important food undertakings not on the list if they suffered air-raid damage, as key points received priority attention from the National Fire Service and the first-aid repair service of the Ministry of Works.¹ The list of food undertakings scheduled as key points was therefore reviewed and the method of reporting damage was reorganised so that the Directorate, which was also provided with a statement of the productive or storage capacity and stocks held at each key point, should have a more adequate picture of the effect of war damage on the food situation.

The inadequate defence of food processing plant had no serious consequences only because air raid damage was comparatively slight. A report covering the worst period of air attack to the end of 1941 stated that heavy losses had been suffered by flour and provender

¹ As shortages of labour and materials became more stringent, permits for all repairs became more difficult to secure, and Food Executive Officers were informed in June 1942 that any applications for repairs were unlikely to succeed unless backed by their support; for this reason, they were urged to acquire a thorough knowledge of all important food premises in their districts so as to be able to decide between rival claims from importunate owners. They were warned, too, that they would have to compete for attention with the local representatives of other departments.

mills, but need have no serious effect on supplies, as there was still some surplus capacity in surviving mills. Nevertheless, the milling industry was working on a narrow margin of capacity, a fact which might have brought about the raising of the extraction rate in the summer of 1941 for that reason alone; the situation might have been serious if heavy bombing had gone on longer. Comparable losses of oilseed crushing or refining plant would have affected fat supplies far more seriously, as the margin of safety in the industry was smaller. The processing of edible oils, one of the basic food industries, was perhaps the most vulnerable as most of the output came from a handful of firms. Only the manufacture of bakers' yeast, for which there were only seven factories in all, with three responsible for most of the output, was as vulnerable. The refining of imported sugar was just as concentrated—85 per cent. was done in the three Tate and Lyle factories—and nearly 40 per cent. of the output of home-produced sugar was refined in four factories in East Anglia; but there was a great deal of surplus capacity, and in any event sugar can be eaten in the 'raw' state.

CHAPTER XIX

Food and the Invasion Threat, 1940—41

I

THE GERMAN conquests in the West, in the summer of 1940, confronted the Ministry of Food with a brand new 'emergency' peril—the prospect that the enemy might invade the British Isles. Officials found themselves grappling, side by side with Service chiefs, with problems unfamiliar to both; trying to work out means of passive defence that should satisfy military requirements without endangering supplies to the civilian population. It is not surprising that, especially at first, the military and civil elements should frequently have found themselves at cross-purposes, nor that the solutions they sought to an uncertain and protean threat should, from first to last, have something of an improvisatory air. The Ministry of Food's principal contribution—apart from advice—to anti-invasion precautions was the disposition of food stocks. One can distinguish two phases in its policy. At first, a handful of officials allocated to emergency work strove to secure, simply by re-arranging the stocks held for normal distribution, that no part of the country should go short if communications were cut; this phase lasted till the end of 1940. Thereafter, the full-scale emergency organisation that the great air raids had brought into being dismissed as inadequate the whole concept of re-deploying the existing distributive system, and instead brought into being a 'shadow' emergency system, relying on a congeries of special stocks to meet particular needs.

The chief link of the Ministry of Food with the military authorities from May 1940 onwards was a Sub-Committee of the Home Defence Executive, formed from representatives of the three Services and the Ministry of Home Security to consider anti-invasion measures. Its object, stated at the first meeting on 18th May, was to prevent the enemy from maintaining himself and exporting goods back to Germany if he succeeded in landing in this country. This was to be done by 'immobilising' utility services and stocks of raw materials and of food; Army Commands were to be instructed to get in touch with Divisional Food Officers to take steps to prevent valuable resources falling into enemy hands, either by sabotaging factory plant or removing vital parts, or by removing, or if necessary destroying, food stocks. A ten-mile belt of country extending along the coast from

Peterhead in north-east Scotland to Poole in Dorset¹ was to be protected by naval and military defences and rendered useless to the enemy in this way; the Home Defence Executive recommended that special efforts should be made to put flour mills, cold-storage plants, and oil pumps out of action and that food stocks should be dumped in the sea or otherwise rendered unusable.

The Ministry of Food at once made it clear that much of this programme was both undesirable and impracticable. Cold stores could only be put out of action by blowing them up,² and flour mills and oil processing plant could be immobilised, if at all, only with difficulty and by technical experts. Food, as the Salvage Branch of the Ministry was triumphantly to declare later, at the time of the air raids, is practically indestructible; destructive operations would require much manpower, and as they might have to be carried on under enemy fire, could only take place under military supervision. Further consideration of the scorched-earth policy applied to food served only to elaborate the arguments against it: as the country was so small it seemed unlikely that the enemy could be held at bay in the coastal belt for long enough for him to find it worth while to operate factories, or even to exhaust the food supplies he was bound to bring with him; either he would be driven out within a few days or he would conquer the country. In either case, wholesale destruction of food or plant would probably hurt the civilian population more than the enemy.³

The Ministry therefore informed the Home Defence Executive that destruction of food and food premises could only be carried out by the military on their own responsibility.⁴ In spite of this some local commanders were reported to have been over-zealous in carrying out plans for immobilisation. In Kent, for instance, the army was said to have told provender millers to be ready to destroy their own machines, with a sledge-hammer if necessary. Fortunately, no demolitions seem actually to have been carried out.

¹ In July 1940 this *Coastal Belt* was extended to cover the whole coastline of the country. The Thames estuary was excluded.

² It was suggested that food in cold stores might be poisoned by contamination with the refrigerant, and early in 1942 Home Defence Executive proposed to inform army commands that this might be done, but the London Chief Divisional Food Officer was able to stop this in time. It was pointed out at Ministry headquarters that international convention forbade the poisoning of foodstuffs.

³ The Production Executive had meanwhile abandoned the idea of 'scorched-earth' tactics in favour of a plan to immobilise key factories by removing vital parts such as jigs, both to prevent the enemy operating them and to foil his efforts to put them irretrievably out of action; but it was found that food factories did not lend themselves to immobilisation of this kind as they had no small irreplaceable parts.

⁴ At the same time managers of production units were advised through Commodity Divisions to be ready with immobilisation plans, but emphatically warned to do nothing without definite instructions from the local military authorities, authenticated by the local food official. Millers were recommended to have plans prepared by persons acquainted with milling, as the 'proposals of military authorities, etc., have not been found in every case to be the most economical and satisfactory'.

Policy discussion on the destruction of food stocks was prolonged throughout 1941, and Headquarters heard a good deal from the Divisions about the divergent views of local army commanders. In September 1941 the Home Defence Committee stated equivocally that although Home Forces policy was opposed to the destruction of food, circumstances might arise in which this might have to be done; so that the final responsibility must still be left with the local military commander. By this time the Ministry of Food was convinced that 'scorched-earth' tactics were useless in Great Britain. The right course in invasion, it thought, was to distribute food stocks among the people of the locality, and it had set up an organisation¹ for this very purpose. When a Home Forces instruction at length appeared in March 1942, it showed some change of emphasis: 'the general policy is that stocks of food, whether military or civil, will not normally be destroyed and plans to effect their destruction will therefore not be made'; but it was still held that there might be exceptions to this rule.

II

In the spring of 1940 the Ministry of Food, as part of the policy of dispersal, had encouraged wholesalers and retailers in many small towns to build up unusually large stocks;² in addition, seaside and other resorts on or near the south coast had accumulated their normal extra stocks for the holiday season. The German victories meant that coast towns previously scheduled as 'safe' suddenly found themselves in the front line. On advice from the Home Defence Executive, the Ministry at the end of May began to transfer inland its bulk stocks in the 'coastal belt'. Divisional Food Officers were told to advise wholesalers to do the same with stocks surplus to normal working requirements, warning them, however, that this precautionary advice was not to be regarded as an order and that the Ministry would not be responsible for the cost of removal.³

Elsewhere the policy of dispersal continued. On 18th May, one week's supply of the primary commodities was said to be held in

¹ This was the organisation of Voluntary Food Organisers, described below.

² Some in response to appeals by Divisional Food Officers made as late as the second week of May at the request of headquarters.

³ In Kent, however, the idea was enthusiastically espoused by the military authorities and the Regional Commissioner, and the South-Eastern Divisional Food Officer allowed himself to be rushed into giving certain wholesalers urgent advice, accompanied by offers of help which were construed as instructions to remove food immediately into the Southern Division. After the moves had been made the Ministry was asked to reimburse the expenses of transferring stocks that, but for its previous exhortations, might not have been there at all. After an attempt to stand on the general principle that the Government was not responsible for private trading losses arising out of the war, it agreed, under pressure and seeing that its own good faith was involved, to secure Treasury sanction for certain *ex-gratia* payments.

bulk, either in government store or in the hands of wholesalers or manufacturers, in every Food Division, with a few deficiencies that it was hoped would quickly be made good; a further week's supply was thought to be held in retail shops. By early June, the check on the extent of food dispersal had been carried a stage further by subdividing Food Divisions for survey purposes into a total of eighty 'divisional sub-areas', of which London Food Division was treated as one.¹ It was hoped that within a few days every one of these areas would have at least a fortnight's supply of the staple commodities apart from a few deficiencies in fats, and that as food stores in fact numbered nearly 2,000, dispersal had been carried further than the figure of eighty areas suggested. By this time, the hunt for extra storage space had begun, and the plan to establish 'buffer-depots' was announced to Divisional Food Officers on 15th June. It was pointed out in July, however, that although considerable tonnages of foodstuffs, especially wheat, flour, sugar, and canned goods, had been placed in inland stores, more than two-thirds of the total (of about four million tons) remained in the ports and could not reasonably be expected to be much reduced without hampering food processing and the distributive system. Further strategical deployment of normal food stocks was, in fact, impossible.

By July the eighty sub-divisional areas had grown into the hundred zones of the 'zonal stock survey', upon which the Ministry relied to ensure a dispersal of bulk stocks. At regular intervals, returns of the amount of each of the principal foods stored in each zone were to be compared with a standard, representing at first two weeks' and later three weeks' normal consumption. Of itself, this did nothing to ensure that a given level of stocks was maintained, and machinery for that purpose was slow to evolve. In December 1940, when Warehousing Branch was re-organised with a view to establishing a central control of warehousing space held by the Ministry, arrangements were made to keep Divisional Food Officers better informed of stock levels in their Divisions, and the newly created *Emergency Services Division* was made responsible for seeing that zonal stocks should be kept up to the agreed level. A little later the system of statistical reporting, which had been subject to internal delays, was reorganised, so that Commodity Divisions made returns direct to Emergency Services Division. This made possible a much closer check on deficiencies and brought to light the chief weaknesses of distribution; it was revealed in November 1941, for instance, that certain zones had been deficient in fats and flour at the last five surveys, and some might have been in a serious position in emergency as there were no surplus supplies in neighbouring zones.

¹ These were represented as groupings of the consumer areas into which the country had been divided for the abortive consumer depot scheme. Vol. I, pp. 145-6.

By the beginning of 1941 the danger of invasion, though by no means past, was not so imminent as it had appeared in the summer, and the Ministry could reconsider the problem of emergency stocks more coolly; though the need to carry the military authorities with it at every step was still an obstacle to the ready formulation of policy. Emergency Services Division set itself the task of visualising and guarding against gaps and breakdowns that, under strain, might appear in the system of distribution. For this purpose, the country had to be considered as divided into two parts: the inland districts where bulk stores could be placed, and where it was assumed that even during an invasion food distribution could be continued on fairly normal lines; and the coastal belt, where bulk stocks were reduced to the minimum except in fortified places, and where there was sure to be fighting even if the enemy should be held at bay.

It was now realised that the assurance, through continual surveys, that reasonable stocks were available everywhere would not guarantee that the householder could obtain supplies in emergency. Transport down to the retailer was a doubtful quantity; especially in Divisions without many wholesalers, normal distribution might be impossible and Divisional Food Officers might have to arrange to send supplies direct from buffer depots. The military authorities were said to be in favour at this time (March 1941) of immobilising all forms of civilian transport over wide areas in the event of invasion. These problems had to be left to Divisional Food Officers to solve when the time came,¹ but some effort was made to prepare them by arranging for consultative committees of the retail trades which, with the Chairman of the Provisions and Groceries Committees, could be used to help work out plans for emergency distribution. Multiple grocery firms and Co-operative stores were seen to be potentially valuable in an emergency, particularly in Eastern II and South-Eastern Divisions, which might so easily be cut off (it was feared) from their London wholesalers; these types of firm, however, were not included in the Ministry's wholesale co-ordination scheme. As a result, a conflict of opinion on the whole war-time organisation of the wholesale trade now developed between Emergency Services and Wholesale Co-ordination Divisions. The former would have liked wholesale distribution to be brought under the direct control of the Ministry, and an association created that in emergency could direct foodstuffs from the most convenient wholesale store as required.² Such a scheme, had it been practicable,

¹ Perishable commodities would have suffered most from transport restrictions; canned meat and milk in bulk stores and in emergency dumps would have gone some way to help, and the emergency bread and milk schemes were sufficiently well organised to have had a good chance of success.

² 'I cannot believe' (wrote a supporter of this view) 'that a very loosely-knit organisation of independent businesses, which must of necessity have regard all the time for financial considerations, could possibly be expected to deal effectively with such problems'.

might have avoided both the problems of towns like Plymouth where wholesalers suffered badly in heavy raids, and the need for the great number of special 'invasion' reserves that was created; but at the time the Ministry's trade advisers thought it both unnecessary and impossible to force upon the wholesalers, and it was therefore never tried.

A simpler way of insuring against interruptions in distribution was to increase retail stocks. The London Chief Divisional Food Officer¹ strongly recommended that this should be done to meet the peculiar difficulties that the military defence scheme for London was expected to present. The city was to be encircled with three roughly concentric defence lines, which would block all roads crossing them except for three main roads leading out north, south, and west, reserved for military traffic and possibly, but not certainly, for some essential food transport. The area between each defensive ring must therefore be made capable of feeding itself. Stocking up retailers would have meant the least disturbance to normal distribution when the emergency came, but Ministry headquarters doubted whether all retailers would be able to find the space or secure the credit for an extra week's supplies, and even more, whether the stocks would be held inviolate against the day of need. It was decided to go ahead with a plan for depositing bulk stocks in each of twenty-nine zones into which London (between the defence rings) was divided, while plans to increase retail stocks and control sales of unrationed foods to prevent panic buying were considered.² (Hitherto London had been treated as a single unit for the purposes of the 'zonal stock survey'; as such, it had, of course, stocks far exceeding the three weeks' normal consumption that the survey took as a satisfactory criterion of emergency supplies.)

By June 1941 premises had been secured to serve as depots and by August most of the stocks were in place, although numerous problems had arisen by the way, mostly through lack of co-ordination between the London Divisional Food Officer, who supervised warehousing and distribution on the spot, and the Commodity Divisions that arranged for the stocks to be supplied and were expected to maintain them. Trade representatives of each commodity were appointed as Food Distribution Officers in each zone to act in emergency; it was expected, however, that two or three weeks might be needed to distribute the 70,000 tons of stocks.³ How well the scheme would have worked, it is of course impossible to say; but the moral

¹ For the creation of this post, see below, pp. 299-300.

² The policy was eventually to be embodied in an Order. See below, p. 309.

³ One difficulty foreseen by the London Divisional Food Officer was of numbers of people without money to buy food because their work had closed down. He devised a scheme (known as 'Purchases by Penniless Persons') of food coupons which might be exchanged for food free of charge, with subsequent reimbursement to the retailer.

effect of having food stocks on the spot ought not to be overlooked in appraising this and similar measures.

As early as 1940 the Ministry had formed the first of its special emergency reserves of food, at the request of the Ministry of Home Security, to provide for large-scale movements of air-raid refugees. The reserves had been made up of the unused balance of the 'iron rations' provided for the evacuation scheme in September 1939, and a supply laid down in the spring of 1940 to cater for an influx (which never came) of refugees from the Continent. At the beginning of 1941, these stocks were enough to feed about three million people for several days, but they were unevenly distributed in quantities unrelated to the population of the districts where they were placed. One of the first decisions made when the emergency stocks position was reviewed was to increase these reserves and include in each dump a variety of foodstuffs including canned corned beef, sugar, tea, condensed milk, biscuits or flour, and canned fish, stew, or vegetables. The aim was to provide three days' rations for ten million people; later in the year when a further special reserve was being laid down for inhabitants of the coastal belt, the requirements of these 'D.F.O. reserves' were recalculated to provide for one-fifth of the population in each Food Division, *excluding* the coastal belt, but with an extra allocation for 100,000 people in the South-Eastern Division to provide for refugees. The ration allowance for canned meat, sugar, tea, and canned milk, previously undecided, was now fixed.¹ Adjustments and transfers of commodities for these dumps occupied the rest of the year; in December 1941 £830,000 worth of food was stored in about 500 depots throughout the country.

By this time the conception of their purpose had altered. Early in 1941 they had been regarded as a final reserve 'Last Line of Defence' under the direct control of the Divisional Food Officer, to be used by him when all other sources of supply had failed. By the end of the year, the distribution of bulk stocks, as revealed by the Zonal Survey, had so much improved that the 'L.L.D.' dumps were thought more likely to be wanted for feeding invasion refugees; the experience of France was still fresh in men's minds. Divisional Food Officers were asked to make sure that they were sited on the routes of possible refugee movements and that each contained a 'mixed bag' of food. Early in 1943 a fresh inquiry revealed, however, that little had been done along these lines; moreover, the proportion of biscuits in the dumps was too low to provide sufficient calories when they were broken up into individual rations. It was decided to rearrange the stocks so as to provide a balanced ration, and shortly afterwards

¹ The allowance was $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. beef, $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. sugar, 1 oz. tea, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. milk, for three days. It was pointed out that these quantities were above the prevailing ration levels for these foodstuffs.

they were included with other types of reserve in an amalgamated Divisional Emergency Reserve under a scheme for the standardisation of emergency stocks.¹

During 1941 reserves of food were laid down in inhabited islands round the coast, on which bulk Ministry stocks were not kept. On some of the larger islands, traders' stocks were increased and dumps of canned beef were formed; on the smaller islands 'Last Line of Defence' dumps were provided. The effort to furnish every island on an equitable and scientific basis was carried to great lengths—for instance, a fresh survey made in 1942 disclosed several hitherto overlooked islands (including some with a population of one or two)—and the calorific value of all stocks in place was worked out. There were, especially in Scotland, those who doubted the need for these stocks; admittedly there was unusual risk of food supplies being cut off in time of invasion, but the islanders were long used to being cut off by bad weather, and were more self-sufficing than the average dweller on the mainland. (The Food Executive Officer in Lerwick, for instance, pointed out that the allocations of canned milk and butter were unnecessarily large as milk and butter were home produced, and that iron-ration biscuits would be much less valuable than flour for home baking.) The difficulties of finding storage and store-keepers and arranging transport and turnover of island stocks were quite out of proportion to the amount of food in them.

III

One of the earliest acts of the Emergency Services Division was the appointment of four *Chief Divisional Food Officers* in England and Wales, to work alongside the military authorities, and be responsible for areas co-terminous with Army Commands.² The functions of these officers were perhaps inevitably ill-defined, and throughout their existence remained something of a puzzle both to the military and to other Departments, such as Home Security. They were given no executive duties nor general overriding authority; it was emphasised that Divisional Food Officers would continue to be answerable to Headquarters alone on normal Ministry business such as rationing and enforcement. Chief Divisional Officers were to assume 'general responsibility' for plans for meeting heavy air attack and invasion, and might supervise work of this kind within the Divisions for which they

¹ Described below, p. 314.

² The C.D.F.O. area for London and the Home Counties included London, Eastern I and II and South-Eastern food divisions and coincided with Eastern, South-Eastern and London District Army Commands. Other C.D.F.O. areas corresponded with Northern, Western and Southern Army Commands.

were responsible, but their primary purpose was to act as links between the Ministry of Food and Army Commands, so that the interests and intentions of both parties might be co-ordinated. In invasion they would be stationed at Command headquarters and would continue to pass on military requirements to divisional headquarters as long as communications remained open; but once communications had been cut and regional government had been instituted, they would play no further part. This was something that no one outside the Ministry of Food could understand. The prefix 'Chief' suggested a rank superior to that of Divisional Food Officer—and in fact the appointments were represented as promotions from that post, which those chosen had previously held, and carried a higher salary; yet the former had no authority over the latter, and was to abdicate in his favour at the precise moment when one might have expected him to take charge of the operations he had helped to plan.

The creation of four new Chief Divisional Food Officers, moreover, had to be seen against the fact that the Ministry was beginning to feel that the one it already had—in Edinburgh—was something of a white elephant. The original appointment of a Chief Divisional Food Officer for Scotland reflected the partial devolution of administration there and also the different form of the civil defence organisation, with one Regional Commissioner and five District Commissioners, to whom the Scottish Divisional Food Officers corresponded. The Chief Divisional Food Officer would become in emergency the opposite number of the Regional Commissioner; in 'normal war conditions' his office was to be a sort of miniature headquarters to which Divisional Food Officers would refer purely Scottish matters. This was a plausible enough notion to convince the Food (Defence Plans) Department, and in support of it the Chief Divisional Food Officer had been allowed to recruit a sizeable administrative staff at the outbreak of war. But time was to show that the scale of his operations had been misconceived. Had he been content (as was originally suggested) with being *primus inter pares*, and exercised besides the functions of a Divisional Food Officer, he might have come to enjoy real authority. By deliberately relinquishing these functions he allowed its substance to escape him; men of the calibre, and with the local standing, that the Ministry had chosen to be Divisional Food Officers were unwilling to invoke Edinburgh when they could go direct to Colwyn Bay. Moreover, the centre of gravity of Scottish food distribution was not Edinburgh, but Glasgow, and the post-war solution that appointed the Glasgow Divisional Food Officer to be Chief Divisional Officer also, with a liaison office in Edinburgh, perhaps conformed better with the economic and administrative facts.

While, therefore, the Chief Divisional Food Office in Scotland was becoming more and more obviously a liaison post pure and simple,

its very existence seems to have been responsible for the conferment of the same grandiose title on other posts even more devoid of executive duties. The first of them, and that for which there was the strongest case, was that for London and the Home Counties, an area both vital and vulnerable from the food standpoint. Even so, the Local Organisation Division, which had not been consulted about the creation of the post, found difficulty in drafting its terms of reference and appointment. The new Chief Divisional Officer¹ was largely left to carve out his own responsibilities and assess his staff requirements. The biggest piece of work he found to his hand was co-ordinating emergency storage and transport arrangements in the Divisions for which he was responsible, a task much complicated by the need to pay attention to the changing views of military commanders. At a special conference of Divisional Food Officers held in January 1941 he was able to give an outline of the presumable course of military operations in invasion and their effect on food distribution, and to point out the need to create some kind of food reserves that would at once satisfy the military objections to concentrations of stocks in the battle-area and provide for the people entrapped within it. The value of the contacts he had already made with the military and the obvious need for their extension impressed Headquarters; moreover, it was revealed that other Divisional Officers usually had to rely on the Regional Commissioner's office to put them in touch with the military. In consequence, at the end of that month three more Chief Divisional Food Officers were appointed, to be stationed at York, Chester, and Salisbury, and to be responsible for the Food Divisions not already covered.

The main tasks of the moment for the new Chief Divisional Officers were the dispersal of bulk stocks from the coastal belt and the provisioning of defence areas, both in the light of military requirements; and a statement of the general principles that should guide their plans, indicating levels of food reserves, was included in the announcement issued by G.H.Q. Home Forces to introduce them to Army Commands.

By the late summer, when these preparations were either complete or well under way, the close association of the new Officers with Army Commands was coming under question from the Ministry of Home Security, especially in the London area where the problem of responsibility was complicated by the overlapping of Army Command and Regional areas and even by the outstanding qualities of the Chief Divisional Officer himself. Home Security seemed fearful lest, in time of invasion, the authority of the London Regional Commissioner with his adjutant Divisional Food Officer might be superseded in food matters by the Chief Divisional Officer at Command headquarters.

¹ Brigadier Sir Julian Young, formerly Divisional Food Officer for London.

On the other hand, the Commissioner for the Eastern Region would have welcomed the Chief Divisional Food Officer at his headquarters in Cambridge during an invasion, if he were in a position to act for Eastern I and II Food Divisions; this would be a safeguard against a breakdown of communications with Eastern II Divisional Food headquarters at Chelmsford.¹ Both Eastern Command and Home Security, however, opposed this and it was confirmed that in invasion the Chief Divisional Food Officer or his deputy should take up his station at Eastern Command headquarters in Luton, with another headquarters at Windsor in touch with the other Commands in his sphere of responsibility.

A series of conferences and much correspondence was necessary before these problems of function could be cleared up to the satisfaction of the Ministry of Home Security. Officials there needed a good deal of convincing that the Ministry of Food did not intend to supersede Divisional Food Officers, whose relationship with the Regional Commissioner had been satisfactorily settled long before. Emergency Services Division, realising that the name of the new office was the chief source of difficulty, tried to clarify matters by describing it as an 'outpost' of the Ministry rather than a part of the divisional organisation. A circular was finally issued on 1st November 1941 restating the final authority of the Divisional Food Officer acting under the Regional Commissioner during a period of regional government, and this was reissued by the War Office to all Commanders-in-Chief; in spite of this, at the end of December Home Defence Executive were calling once more for elucidation of the rôle of Chief Divisional Food Officers on 'Action Stations', as the London Chief Divisional Food Officer was apparently unable to give a clear idea of his emergency functions which might indeed be non-existent, but might also be considerable. Later on, there were still signs that local army commanders tended to think of Chief Divisional Food Officers as the chief Ministry officials in their area and superior to Divisional Food Officers; the military mind, the Chief Divisional Food Officer for the North-Eastern Command area drily declared in his final report on his tenure of office, in February 1945, was quite unable to comprehend the true position.

It is clear from this and other reports prepared at the same time

¹ The sub-division of Eastern Region into two Food Divisions had its origin in alterations in regional boundaries made before the war. There was originally a London and Home Counties Region, comprising the counties of Essex, Kent, Surrey, Middlesex, and Herts. which was divided into two Districts (Home Counties North and South); Food Divisions were set up to correspond with these areas, with headquarters at Chelmsford and Maidstone. At the beginning of 1939 it was decided to restrict the London Region to the Metropolitan Police area, and the outlying parts of Essex and Herts. were detached and included in the Eastern Region of which Cambridge was the headquarters, while a new Region was formed of Kent and Sussex. The Food (Defence Plans) Department decided to retain the Home Counties North area (outside the Metropolitan Police area) with its headquarters at Chelmsford, as a separate Food Division.

that the chief value of the Chief Divisional Food Officers was as accredited representatives of the Ministry of Food at military headquarters, acting as living reminders of the existence of a civilian organisation which had somehow to be fitted into the military machine unless the people were to starve, and which the army itself might be glad to fall back upon should its own commissariat fail.¹ After 1942, when the anti-invasion preparations were completed, most of them² had little to do, and in the summer of 1944, when the London Chief Divisional Officer resigned for personal reasons, he was not replaced, partly because of his own statement that for some time he had been embarrassed by lack of work.

The military staff of Home Defence Executive was anxious to secure liaison between the Ministry of Food and the army at all levels of the hierarchy, and during 1941 pressed for appointments to be made corresponding with Corps and Divisional Headquarters, as Chief Divisional Food Officers corresponded with Commands; a sentence about the need for close and effective liaison at all levels was included at the end of the agreed statement on the relationship of Regional Commissioners, Chief Divisional Food Officers, and Divisional Food Officers. Most local army commanders were not found to be enthusiastic; however, some appointments were made, and in March 1942 Emergency Services Division asked Divisional Food Officers to appoint from their staffs officers as desired by military commanders, both at the Corps headquarters (as Food Liaison Officers) and at lower levels (as Area Liaison Officers). At that time there was some idea that the Area Liaison Officers would develop into local representatives of the Divisional Food Officers for emergency matters, and supervise local food offices. The functions of these officers and of 'Pivotal' Food Executive Officers³ were not clearly differentiated, and there might have been collisions of authority if they had ever gone into action. At the end of 1943 it was discovered that a sinecure appointment of Food Liaison Officers, with no other functions, had been made in one Division, and an inquiry was held. This revealed that Food Liaison Officers, or corresponding appointments, had been introduced in most Divisions (although Northern Command had refused to have Liaison Officers at Corps

¹ At the end of 1941 an army exercise suggested the advantages of a special reserve, in the charge of some food official such as the Chief Divisional Food Officer who would be in close touch with military headquarters, that could be used to feed army units cut off from their regular supplies, or refugees making their way from one Food Division to another. Special 'C.D.F.O.' reserves were therefore arranged to provide rations for two million people for three days.

² The Officer at Southern Command, however, had an important part in maintaining liaison with both British and Allied military authorities during preparations for the invasion of Normandy.

³ See below, page 307.

headquarters), but few Area Liaison Officers had been appointed.¹

As there was no invasion, the multiplication of liaison and supervisory appointments without positive functions was bound to appear superfluous or worse, though when the post was combined, as it usually was, with everyday or other liaison duties (as in Eastern II Division, where an Assistant Divisional Food Officer appointed as Food Liaison Officer also acted as liaison officer with the Regional Office as well as being responsible for emergency work), it was no more than a formal recognition of an officer's necessary relationship with his opposite numbers in other organisations. The creation of these offices was no more than a surrender to the tidy-mindedness of others, without genuine necessity to justify it; the very absence of active employment for those concerned led to ingenious contrivances of the kind being rife.²

¹ The official correspondence about Food Liaison Officers is enlivened by the efforts made by Ministry headquarters to procure the military uniform and camp equipment which Northern Command stipulated that they should bring with them when they reported for duty at battle headquarters. The Divisional Food Officer insisted that the equipment, which it was estimated would cost about £45, was essential for maintaining the status and dignity of Food Liaison Officers at military headquarters. The news that Liaison Officers would probably be required to provide transport for their own gear while moving about with military headquarters was a further shock to the Ministry. Camp beds of a suitable type were difficult to find; the Ministry of Works could only supply beds of a solid and unportable build, and it was eighteen months before camp beds could be delivered at Divisional and Chief Divisional Food Offices at the end of 1943. Shortly afterwards it became necessary to think about their disposal as they were no longer likely to be needed during an invasion.

² Another example of the same sort of thing was a suggestion that Civil Defence Regions should be grouped under senior Regional Commissioners in such a way as to correspond with Army Commands, like the Ministry of Food's 'C.D.F.O.' districts; but the Ministry of Home Security did not respond to this.

CHAPTER XX

Anti-invasion Precautions, 1941–43; The Creation of Emergency Stocks

I

IN THE summer of 1940 the *coastal belt* in which bulk stocks were to be restricted had been defined as a strip of land stretching for ten miles inland from the coast. Later this was widened to twenty miles for the south and east coasts from Fowey in Cornwall to the Wash (though Eastern and London Army Commands tended to look on the whole area of their Commands as a potential battleground, and to act accordingly). Commands were informed that bulk food stocks in the belt should be restricted to five days supply; there were few wholesalers as close to the coast as this, but it was estimated that retailers might hold another 7–10 days' supply. By March 1941 some progress had been made in dispersing stocks from the coastal belt all round the country, but plans could not be completed outside the southern and south-eastern coastal districts because military commanders elsewhere had made no final decision about the levels to which they wanted stocks restricted.¹ The Eastern and South-Eastern Commands, however, had now announced that no bulk stocks were to be held anywhere in the coastal belt outside the towns of Chatham, Dover, Folkestone, Newhaven, and Harwich; these with other towns further to the west² were to be defended to the last, and required 10–15 days' supplies for the whole population.³ The military planned to defend for limited periods a large number of smaller towns and villages at strategic sites, called 'nodal points', and five days' supplies were required for these. The military authorities suggested that elsewhere in the coastal belt wholesalers and retailers should

¹ It was agreed that bulk stocks in the Tyne and Tees estuaries must remain because of the density of population engaged in essential industry and the existence of essential food undertakings.

² These were Portsmouth, Plymouth, Weymouth, Portland, Milford Haven. Later Southampton was added to the list.

³ These stocks, which were under the control of Commodity Divisions and resembled 'zonal' stocks in being available for current use, were found in March 1941 to have been assessed on a consumption instead of a calorific basis of the foodstuffs involved, so that the ration represented only 1,200–1,300 calories. A ration formula providing nearly 3,000 calories a day was introduced and adjustments made in the stocks.

hold an extra ten days' supplies and that household stocks should be encouraged.¹

Any reliance on household stocks to remedy deficiencies in official provision had, however, long been ruled out as a matter of policy, as the poorest people, who would be most in need since they would have least chance to get away from the battle areas in advance, would not be able to afford to lay in stocks. In April 1941 therefore, the Ministry reiterated that supplies under its control must be provided for the whole population of the coastal belt, and proposed that 50-ton dumps of food should be left in selected places. South-Eastern Command were still unwilling to permit stocks outside retailers' shops and private houses; but Eastern Command suggested that small stocks of food should be placed with specially-appointed food organisers in every town and village where no reserves existed, to overcome the objection to household stocks. From this rather casual² proposal originated the Ministry's Coastal Belt Reserve and the body of Voluntary Food Organisers that was called into existence to take charge of it. Responsibility for the reserve was placed directly on the three Divisional Food Officers in whose areas it lay. A special ration to last five days was devised; it weighed 7½ lb. and consisted of iron-ration biscuits, sugar, tea, canned corned beef, condensed milk, soup, and canned margarine, giving about 1,800 calories a day. Part of it, to save time, was drawn from the 'Last Line of Defence' dumps,³ which were replenished by Commodity Divisions, but the biscuits, canned margarine, and soup had to be specially purchased. It was intended to take advantage of the delivery of new supplies to 'L.L.D.' dumps to reconstitute them on a more rational basis, but this was not entirely successful.

In June 1941 the scheme was extended to other Divisions having a coastline, providing five-day rations for another 2½ million people. (Because of the widening of the coastal belt at some places the number of people covered was later increased to nearly five million.) By September deliveries to distribution points south and east had been completed, and a further extension to vulnerable areas inland

¹ In early 1941 the Ministry received several letters from local authorities urging the Government to provide an emergency household ration, and some Regional Commissioners, who thought an iron ration was necessary to bolster up the 'stay put' instruction, were known to have encouraged private stocking-up.

² Certainly casual in the way it was put forward—to the Chief Divisional Food Officer for London, without reference to Ministry headquarters. A few days later South-Eastern Command indicated through the same channel that it no longer objected to the existence of certain bulk stocks. The Ministry of Food found these independent and changeable decisions of army commanders untidy and exasperating. Their estimates of the supplies required for the 'fortress towns' varied constantly: at Harwich, moreover, the military and naval authorities were at prolonged variance about whether stocks should be for ten days or more. The former eventually prevailed, but only after three weeks' supplies of margarine and condensed milk had already been delivered.

³ pp. 206-207, above.

was now proposed by Emergency Services Division, and agreed to with some hesitation by higher authority. At the same time, two-day reserves were arranged for about one million people at essential industrial works.¹ In April 1942 another extension (known as 'C.B. Part III') was put forward to supply reserves in areas not previously included but within the expected path of the enemy. Finally in June 1942, at the instigation of the Home Guard Directorate, an extra three days' Coastal Belt Ration (excluding canned milk and soup) was proposed for rural areas in Eastern, South-Eastern, and Southern Commands (covering 3,700,000 people), making eight days' supplies in all for these areas; and distribution under this and 'C.B. part III' was carried out together. Because of the awkward quantities that would have been involved the eight-day ration did not represent a proportionate increase from the five-day one; for biscuits, tea, and margarine it was double or nearly double, but for other commodities was not increased, seeing that large amounts of meat on the hoof were thought to be available in country districts. The allowance of sugar for the Coastal Belt five-day Ration was already double the normal weekly ration. Even Emergency Services Division, perhaps prone to over-insure, were doubtful about the need for Coastal Belt extensions after seeing the results of a survey of local produce in sample areas in southern England. The population of one area 'could have lived luxuriously without any assistance', wrote a member of the Division; meat, poultry, eggs, potatoes, milk, and root and green vegetables were in abundance. The extra provision was, however, accepted to make assurance doubly sure and the problem was regarded as finally disposed of.

Early in 1941, when 'fortress towns' were being provisioned, lists of 'nodal points' where small defending forces were to be maintained, to guard road and railway junctions or other important objectives for as long as possible, were supplied by Eastern and South-Eastern Commands, with the request that the Ministry should provision them for five days; but with successive changes of military command no more was heard of the plan, and the Ministry made no special preparations for nodal points. In August 1941, however, nodal points reappeared in a survey of invasion preparations made by Home Defence Executive, and the Ministry had to point out that they had not been provisioned, unless fortuitously under the coastal belt reserve scheme. At the end of October a list of places was eventually forthcoming; this was found to include a number of 'vulnerable defiles', defined as points of intersections on important lines of communication particularly likely to be attacked from the air. The Ministry proposed

¹ Rations for two days for one million Home Guards had already been ordered by the War Office. The scale was the same as that of the special ration packs ordered for Civil Defence workers and industrial undertakings and was less bulky than the Coastal Belt Ration.

to supply nodal points with five-day Coastal Belt Rations, but was soon confronted with an old difficulty, lack of precise knowledge about their boundaries, as defined by the military. It was known, for instance, that although in some cases the proposed defence perimeter embraced most of the population of the town, in others some of the people would be outside the defence lines; in addition, Divisional Food Offices were kept busy by alterations in local military plans.¹

Ministry headquarters decided to provide a five-day reserve for the whole of the population in each town or village nominated as a nodal point, leaving it to the Divisional Food Officers to ascertain the boundaries of each point and provide a further five-day reserve for the people within it; but before any action had been taken, all was thrown into confusion by the discovery that the list of nodal points supplied by the Home Defence Executive was being drastically revised by Home Security and Army Commands. Ministry headquarters could now only advise Divisional Officers of the general principles agreed for provisioning nodal points and ask them to attend local meetings of regional officers and military commanders to secure final information of the location and size of nodal points. The lists of points secured by them did not coincide with new lists provided by Home Security in February 1942; but it was now decided to proceed with placing Coastal Belt Rations in nodal points without waiting any longer for a definite list that might never be forthcoming. Towns with populations of over 30,000 usually had considerable bulk stocks, but Coastal Belt Rations were requested for the people living outside the defended area who might flee within the defences. The work went on laboriously during the summer, confused by identification of areas scheduled for defence with areas scheduled for evacuation; but it was becoming evident that the whole scheme for defending selected areas now seemed unreal even to the military. In October 1942 the Ministry was informed that no fresh defence work was to be put in hand at nodal points, and that no new ones were to be created; but by this time the distribution of Coastal Belt Reserves to the smaller points was practically complete. Early in 1943 Emergency Services Division decided to shelve the question, and abandon the plan to supply larger towns.

II

The devolution of authority from headquarters to Divisional Officers had been a feature of the Ministry's policy for emergency conditions

¹ At Guildford, only 5,000 people out of nearly 50,000 lived inside the defence perimeter. At Wisborough Green in Sussex the population inside the defences was given as 15 and that outside as 390, though here and presumably elsewhere the situation was complicated by Home Guards who would be drafted into the nodal point at 'Action Stations'.

since before the first threat of invasion; the danger that districts might become completely cut off by fighting, and the creation of a complex of food reserves to serve villages and even hamlets caused this policy to be extended to ensure that none should be without its official Ministry representative. In invasion he might take charge of all available reserves and control food distribution if his area were cut off from the outside world, with the object (to quote from the memorandum for food organisers prepared by the Eastern Divisional Food Office)

'not merely to prevent people from starving. It is to keep them at home and encourage them to stay put. We are dealing with the problem of civilian morale, and nothing will contribute more to this morale than the knowledge that the food situation is firmly in hand'.

Instructions drawn up early in 1940 had clearly stated that, in the event of a breakdown in communications with headquarters, Divisional Food Officers should assume control of food supply and distribution on behalf of the Minister, and might draw upon Ministry-held stocks, requisition other stocks or premises as required, control retail distribution, fix prices, vary ration levels, or adopt any other measures that might seem necessary to meet the situation. It was later announced that Food Executive Officers, in their turn, must be prepared to take charge of food distribution within their own areas if they were cut off from divisional headquarters, and Divisional Food Officers were instructed to see that they knew the whereabouts and quantities of foodstuffs stored in the neighbourhood in case they had to draw on them to keep up food distribution.¹ In Midland Division, where the divisional headquarters was in the middle of a thickly populated industrial district and the rest of the Division was rural and sparsely populated, an attempt was made to meet the problems of outlying Food Office areas remote from headquarters by the selection of 'Pivotal' Food Executive Officers to co-ordinate emergency arrangements for neighbouring Food Office districts. Other Divisional Officers were asked to consider similar appointments, but Headquarters itself was not wholehearted about them; there were some who thought them a step in the wrong direction, away from decentralisation. 'Pivotal' Food Executive Officers were chosen, in fact, in fewer than half the English Divisions, and in no Scottish Division.

¹ Before making this decision Emergency Services Division had consulted Home Defence Executive to find out whether local military commanders would take control of food distribution in a small area cut off from outside help, and had received an answer implying that the Ministry had better make its own arrangements for districts other than fortified places where military and civilian food reserves were already being placed.

More in line with the general trend of the Ministry's 'emergency' thinking at this time was another suggestion, namely, that villages and hamlets without a Food Office should have a local resident appointed as Voluntary Food Organiser to control food distribution, (including the organisation of emergency feeding) if the district were cut off. Appointments of this kind had already been made in South-Eastern Division, where the Divisional Food Officer had selected food organisers at nodal points to keep in touch with the military and supervise food supply in invasion. In March 1941 other Divisional Food Officers were asked to appoint Voluntary Organisers, who were sent formal letters of appointment, and sealed notes of authority to take charge of food affairs in emergency.¹ By the end of the year appointments had been made in every Food Division except London, and most Divisions reported a complete list, although some admitted a constant turnover through resignations.

The original announcement of the scheme stated that when the Food Organisers came into action they would have the same powers as Food Executive Officers to commandeer all available food resources, including bulk stocks, and should be ready with plans for the distribution of perishable foodstuffs—bread, milk, and meat—which involved arrangements for emergency baking, milk collection, and slaughtering. They were to be put in touch with Area Commodity Officers and managers of buffer depots and cold stores.² Some of them became custodians of the Coastal Belt Reserve (in fact its guardianship remained their sole executive function during their tenure of office), and would have had to distribute it when the time came.³ The bulk of the food available in most districts, apart from local produce, would, however, have been the stocks in retail shops and at any wholesalers there might be in the neighbourhood.

Retail stocks had been under study since March 1941, when the London Chief Divisional Food Officer had proposed the compulsory stocking-up of retailers and the introduction of rationing schemes in invasion for goods normally unrationed.⁴ The idea was that should an area be cut off, food shops should be immediately closed for a few

¹ Emergency ration cards and petrol coupons were supplied with the letters, and badges of authority which the Organisers were allowed to keep as mementoes after they were stood down.

² For Meat and Livestock, links between the local food organisation and the area commodity organisation existed at all levels. Area Meat and Livestock Officers corresponded with D.F.O.s, County Committees with 'Pivotal' F.E.O.s, District Committees with F.E.O.s, and Retail Buying Committees with V.F.O.s.

³ Local food officers were advised to hold rehearsals of the distribution of the Coastal Belt Reserve. Those held showed up the difficulties of breaking bulk into the quantities allowed, and the inconvenient bulkiness of the ration, especially of the biscuits; few of the housewives who attended with shopping baskets to collect their rations came prepared to carry away the mountain of food waiting them.

⁴ This plan has already been mentioned in connection with the London zoning scheme. See pp. 295-296, above.

hours for stock-taking. The local food officer ¹ could then declare a ration scale, based on supplies available (including any bulk, wholesalers', and manufacturers' stocks), to feed the local population for about fourteen days, a period representing the average of various military estimates of the time required for driving out the enemy; and shops could then re-open for business on the new basis of rationing. Another part of the Chief Divisional Food Officer's plan, the compulsory stocking-up of retailers with at least a fortnight's supplies, did not come to fruition until the following year, and his proposals for ensuring a minimum of three weeks' wholesalers' and two weeks' householders' stocks had to be dropped, the first because of lack of storage space at wholesalers' premises, the latter because of the political and practical difficulties in compelling householders to buy two weeks' rations at once. In July 1942, however, a Rationed Foods (Emergency Retail Stocks) Order was introduced,² after a long delay spent in overcoming the objections of commodity directors to the proposed storage of bigger quantities of cheese, margarine, and lard; this Order approached its objective as it were in reverse by prohibiting the retail sale of any of a list of foods³ unless a fortnight's stocks at the normal rate of sale remained in reserve. (It was later admitted to be unenforceable.)

Full details of the plan for controlling retail stocks were issued in August 1941.⁴ Divisional Food Officers were then left to train Organisers and interpret instructions from headquarters as they found best. All issued instructions of their own, some very detailed, and arranged meetings for Organisers with the police, A.R.P. authorities, local Food Control Committees, and other organisations likely to be concerned in time of emergency.

The formation of the corps of Organisers was not without some of the difficulties that usually accompany the mobilisation of volunteer forces. On the one hand, it was found that some Organisers were inclined to exaggerate their authority and powers (perhaps encouraged by the 'sealed orders' they held);⁵ on the other, in some villages where responsible people were hard to find, ineffectual persons were appointed who were found to be unable even to look after the Coastal

¹ This term was used to mean either Food Executive Officer or Voluntary Food Organiser.

² S.R. & O. (1942) No. 1500.

³ Cooking fats, margarine, preserves, sugar, and tea.

⁴ The broad outlines of the suggested rationing scheme were as follows: all foods rationed nationally at the date of the emergency would continue to be rationed, on a reduced scale if necessary; bread and potatoes would be rationed by weight; and other foodstuffs by value. A list of conversion factors giving adjusted prices was supplied to help in fixing a cash limit.

⁵ One newly-appointed Organiser was reported in the local press to have said: 'We have very strong powers and we shall not hesitate to use them in any direction when the time comes'.

Belt reserve properly. To discourage officious zeal, great care was taken to define the moment when Voluntary Food Organisers should put on the mantle of office. The military warning of imminent danger of invasion ('Action Stations'), which was to be the signal for the mobilisation of the Home Guard, would, it was decided, also determine the distribution of the Coastal Belt Reserve.

To fix the time when shops should be closed for stock-taking was more difficult. The Home Defence Executive had been nervous about this proposal and had only reluctantly agreed that shops should be closed not only in districts immediately threatened by the enemy but in all places where panic buying was taking place. Hence the Ministry's instructions to local food officers made a point of insisting that, so long as communications could be maintained, no action should be taken except on orders from higher authority. This was, of course, in harmony with the policy concerning Divisional Food Officers' relationship with headquarters; and in the comments of some of them on it, there is a hint of the resentment of over-centralised control occasionally shown by Divisional Food Officers on their own account. It was obvious, of course, that in an emergency everything might depend on the man on the spot, who should be able, as the Minister remarked to a meeting of Voluntary Food Organisers, to tear up his instructions and act according to the needs of the moment, without rushing into action that might only increase the confusion. The occasion would probably have produced the organisation, time permitting, as well as the man, although he might not always have been the officially-appointed Organiser.

III

People leaving districts threatened with invasion, whether as official 'evacuees' or unofficial 'refugees', would have been the concern of the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Food was supposed to act only as food provider, as with air-raid rest centres.

The keynote of government policy and propaganda on this subject was the injunction to 'stay put', inspired by the object-lesson of the disastrous results of refugees blocking the roads and hindering troop movements in France in the summer of 1940. From the time when the threat of invasion developed until April 1941, when a scheme was evolved for the evacuation of most of the population of coastal towns in the South-East, 'stay put' or, more impressively, 'stand firm', was to be the order of the day for all. It was indeed officially recognised that there were those who would disregard government injunctions and take to the roads, and in the summer of 1940 the Ministry of Health

and other departments had been asked to frame a plan¹ for getting them away from the scene of military operations by shepherding them to railheads and packing them off by train to reception areas. Special feeding arrangements were not at first thought necessary because the refugees would be rapidly dispersed to other districts where rest centre or normal arrangements would exist; moreover, people who were disobeying government instructions did not deserve to be 'pampered'. More important, the assembly points for refugees would be in remote districts without rest centres where they could be fed.

Early in 1941, however, when it was realised that the state of the railways might prevent any rapid dispersal of refugees, the Ministry of Food was asked to arrange for Divisional Food Officers to supply 'iron rations' that would be handed out by the police controlling refugees waiting at rail centres; public assistance authorities, it was suggested, might have to take responsibility if the refugees remained at the stations for any appreciable time. Anxiety about these arrangements was felt in Emergency Services Division, especially on discovering that some of the assembly points, for instance Polegate, lay within a few miles of the coast and right in the path of reinforcements, and that the military had announced that no trains would be allowed within twenty miles of the coast in invasion. It began to look as if refugees in such a case could not be removed from the district, but must be passed through the rest centres and then dispersed to billets. The Division thought rest centres might be overwhelmed by a refugee movement on a scale much larger than the Ministry of Health seemed to expect, and were not without support from expressions of military opinion; as the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, had bluntly put it, 'it is impossible to stay put in a burning house'.

The Emergency Services Division, therefore, wanted to prepare to supplement rest centre provision by the Ministry's mobile feeding arrangements, and managed to get a reference to them included in a high-level report on Invasion Preparations; but the Ministries of Health and Home Security kept up an unwavering opposition to any plan for advance preparations for refugees, on the grounds that any such preparations were bound to become known and would only encourage people to disregard the 'stay put' order. Efforts by the Ministry of Food to get the problem considered locally by collaboration between Divisional Food Officers and Regional Commissioners met with little encouragement.² The Ministry had to fall back on its usual plan of increasing emergency stocks—either 'Coastal Belt' or

¹ This came to be known as the Refugees Emergency Scheme.

² One Regional Commissioner felt similar doubts of the probable success of the Refugee Emergency Service and supported a scheme by which refugees were to be shepherded along certain roads not likely to be used by the Army, leading to the edge of the Region (the 'yellow road' scheme); but he was informed that this scheme was contrary to Government policy.

'Last Line of Defence'—in areas likely to have invasion refugees. Its arrangements, undertaken in conjunction with the public assistance authorities, had not been completed when rationalisation of the emergency dumps was carried out in 1943.

At the beginning of 1941 a propaganda drive was started to encourage the removal of people not needed as workers, officially described as 'useless mouths', from coast towns in the south and east; but its results were negligible, and a plan was prepared for compulsory evacuation of up to eighty per cent. of the population of 31 towns (later increased to 38 by the addition of Brighton and six towns west of it). It was hoped that enough warning could be given of the enemy's intention to invade, to make the movement orderly; railway time-tables and billeting in selected reception areas were arranged. People from the east coast were to go to Midland towns and those from the south-east to London and its suburbs—in fact, the movement was to resemble the original evacuation in reverse. Divisional Food Officers would co-operate with the local authorities responsible at each end by providing materials for sandwich packs at the rail centres and arranging for larger buying permits for retailers and (if necessary) for communal feeding, in reception towns. In evacuated towns it was expected that communal feeding would have to be arranged for the whole of the nucleus left behind; retailers' stocks here were to be made up to fourteen days' supplies or supplemented from D.F.O. dumps. Key workers in the food industries were not to go with the rest; wholesalers, flour millers, bakers, dairymen, and slaughtermen, not needed in the evacuated towns, were to move into the hinterland that they normally served, to help keep up food distribution there.¹

IV

By the summer of 1941 the Ministry's full programme of emergency stocks had been drawn up and in a review of invasion preparations made for the Home Defence Committee in September it was able to report that on the conclusion of certain tasks still in progress, like the provisioning of nodal points and the coastal belt, its plans would be substantially complete. The emergency reserves and the organisation

¹ The Ministry was anxious about the vulnerability in invasion of the sugar-beet and vegetable oil processing industries, of which the latter was described as the most important single food processing industry in the country; unfortunately, practically the whole processing plant of the first and part of the second of these industries was situated on or near the east coast. As the two foodstuffs concerned were both essential and irreplaceable, the Ministry thought it worth making representations to the Home Defence Executive to ask that special attention should be given to these plants in military counter-invasion plans. The loss of their output, after the invaders should have been driven out, might have created serious difficulties.

of Voluntary Food Organisers made up the sum of the Ministry's specific invasion precautions, so that at the beginning of 1943 when, on the strength of an assurance from the Chiefs of Staff that an invasion was improbable, the Home Defence Executive called for a relaxation of precautions, the only possible move was a withdrawal of stocks, and this the Ministry was still unwilling to consider.

The practical difficulties of administering a scheme so complex as emergency stores had become were, however, beginning to press for resolution. For some time Divisional Officers had been complaining of the complication, confusion, and waste of manpower and transport, caused by the existence of so many varieties of stocks, consisting with slight variations of the same commodities though in different packs, sometimes lying in the same buildings but requiring turnover at different times. The Coastal Belt Reserve, which had been laid down in three stages, was a particularly awkward stock to turn over, as it was often in unsuitable premises in inexperienced hands. In April 1943 Emergency Stores Branch was faced with a particularly heavy job of inspection and turnover involving 24,000 out of 38,000 storage points and fifteen commodities; nearly all of the twenty-one storage schemes required a partial turnover, some for the second time. Suggestions to simplify the general administration of emergency stocks by physical amalgamation, concentration of stocks, and the adoption of a common turnover date were therefore especially opportune. When the stocks were first laid down the object had been to get them divided into small lots situated as close as possible to the consumer, to guard against the possibility of large stores falling into enemy hands and to facilitate distribution under invasion conditions. By 1943 the distribution of ordinary stocks had so much improved that it seemed unlikely that any area would be cut off from food supplies for long.¹ One sign of the changed circumstances was the cancellation by the Home Defence Executive of the ban on bulk storage of foodstuffs (except canned meat) in the Coastal Belt.²

In May 1943 it was agreed in principle that emergency stocks should be rationalised; it was proposed to amalgamate several schemes, to standardise food packs and to reduce the number of storage points. Types of emergency reserve fell into three broad groups, of which the principal consisted of stocks owned and controlled by the Ministry; these accounted for about 84,000 of the 100,000 tons of food held in emergency reserves.³ The second group

¹ In fact, the Warehousing Division were described about this time as 'at their wits end to find storage accommodation'.

² Restrictions on storage of food in the Coastal Belt had already been substantially relaxed except for readily consumable items such as canned goods.

³ The administrative task of handling emergency stores was disproportionate to their quantity. Statistics prepared in March 1942 showed that emergency reserves were less than 10 per cent. of total U.K. stocks, and apart from canned meat and soups, only about 1-2 per cent. of annual supplies.

consisted of stocks held by local authorities *in situ* (a) for emergency feeding in British Restaurants, emergency feeding centres and cooking depots, which it was thought advisable to retain, and (b) for shelter feeding and the special evacuation scheme, which could be dispersed when the time came for turnover. The third group consisted of stocks held by outside bodies for special groups of people, such as Civil Defence workers, essential factory workers and government officials: these also it was hoped to eliminate.

In the first group, controlled by the Divisional Food Officer, several designations of stock—the 'Last Line of Defence', 'Chief Divisional Food Officer's',¹ 'Queen's Messenger Convoy', 'War-time Meals', and 'Reserve Emergency War-time Meals' (from which the last named were supplemented in emergency)² were to be amalgamated into a Divisional Emergency Reserve.³ The Home Guard Reserve of biscuits had to be kept, like the Coastal Belt Reserve, though it was at first proposed to concentrate the latter at about 3,000 storage points instead of the current figure of 20,000. Chief Divisional Food Officers, however, obtained a stay of execution on this plan, partly on the grounds that the Voluntary Organisers' garages and cellars might be irrecoverably lost for storage and other inland storage space for the concentrated packs was impossible to find, but mainly because of the affront to the Organisers' prestige and sapping of morale that the removal of their only executive function was sure to bring about. It was agreed that Coastal Belt Reserves should be turned over, stocks from the three schemes being replaced by a single pack.

At this moment, an urgent request for emergency biscuits came from the War Office, which proposed to lay down a stock for the liberated territories, and as requirements were far more than could be met at short notice a happy solution was found in the decision to use old Coastal Belt Reserve biscuits, which were in any case to be turned over, to fill part of the order. All biscuits from the Northern Coastal Belt Reserve, and half those from districts where the reserve had been increased to eight days, were therefore withdrawn at once, together with those included in other dumps, and their replacement with new biscuits was begun. By September 1943, however, it seemed safe to consider the total abolition of the Coastal Belt Reserve, as the

¹ These were included in the merger rather against the will of the Chief Divisional Food Officers, who stipulated that although the stocks might be treated as part of the Divisional reserve, they should be able to draw on them without question if asked for supplies by the Military.

² Responsibility for these last had been transferred from War-time Meals Division to Emergency Stores Branch in 1942, so that they could be considered on the same footing as other emergency stocks.

³ A National Emergency Reserve of 2½ million rations was laid down in five dumps (at Ayr, Harrogate, Market Harborough, Chippenham, and Tring), placed with a view to reinforcing any Divisional Emergency Reserve, and controlled from headquarters.

risk of invasion was now merely academic, ordinary stores were crammed to bursting-point, and the Divisional Emergency Reserve had now been rearranged to greater advantage. Home Defence Executive assented, a suitable placatory letter was devised for Voluntary Organisers, and the collection of the Coastal Belt Reserve was begun.

This was recognised at the time as the beginning of the end of emergency precautions, but caution still prevailed; apart from the dispersal of fortress town stocks, to which the Home Defence Executive agreed at about the same time, nothing more was changed for another year; the withdrawal of the Coastal Belt Reserve went on gradually but even this was suspended south of the Wash—Bristol Channel line for a while before and after 'D-day', as a precaution against the 'V' weapon attacks. At last, in September 1944, the Chiefs of Staff reported that all danger of invasion was now at an end, and that the state of United Kingdom air defences and the general ineffectiveness of the German Air Force made heavy air raiding impossible and bomber attack on any scale improbable after the end of 1944. The Ministry of Food now proceeded to abandon its anti-invasion preparations. The withdrawal of all emergency reserves including emergency feeding stocks¹ was begun, arrangements for maintaining minimum stocks within the 110 zones and in retail shops were revoked, and the Voluntary Food Organisation was disbanded. The collection of emergency reserves, especially when they lay outside the immediate control of the Ministry was no light task. A number of them consisted of old stock and needed sampling for condition before they could be released for use, either in this country or for Relief purposes abroad.² Canned soups and stews, biscuits, margarine, and rice pudding, went for Relief;³ the rest was disposed of through trade channels or taken back into stock by Commodity Divisions.⁴

As invasion did not come, the usefulness of the Ministry of Food's measures was never tested; though their value in maintaining public confidence can hardly be questioned. Within the Ministry, after the war, there were those who criticised as cumbersome and over-elaborate the whole policy of peppering the country with little dumps of food that were difficult to supervise and turn over, and that could not be fitted into the normal pattern of distribution. Such critics,

¹ Reserves at emergency feeding centres in London were retained for the time being.

² 'We must be scrupulously careful', wrote a high official, 'not to transfer any "dud" food to relief and charge it up to our contribution to UNRRA'.

³ The War Office had to be asked to take delivery at once and move some stocks abroad, as Warehousing Division could find no room for the food collected by Emergency Stores Branch.

⁴ Among the stocks released for normal trade allocation purposes were supplies of 'self-drinking teas' mentioned in a letter circulated to Area Tea Officers in November, 1944. The peculiar qualities of these teas were not explained.

struck also by the weakness of the wholesale trade under air attack, would rather have reorganised it *in toto*, under a flexible but firm control; thus enabling it not only to survive air raids, but to do duty in emergency instead of a completely separate organisation. The attractions of such a plan are obvious. But it is one thing to bring under control the wholesaling of a single commodity, like meat, and another to take charge of the distribution, not merely of a score of groceries and provisions, but of the thousand or more items that the wholesaler may handle, including such things as matches, metal polish, candles, and string. Indeed, a proposal to 'nationalise' food wholesaling 'for the duration' would raise, by implication, the whole question of whether the vertical division of responsibility between a Ministry of Food and other controls is the best one; the same question, in fact, that the would-be reformers of the Ministry in 1940 were raising.¹ The historian can but remind such questioners that in economic organisation one never starts with a clean slate, and that the apparently tidy solution is not necessarily the best.

¹ See Vol. I, pp. 54-55.

CHAPTER XXI

The Lessons of Air Bombardment

I

A BRIEF ACCOUNT has already been given¹ of the effect of the great air raids on the country's food supply, and the measures taken by the Ministry to deal with them, by way of background to the wider questions of food policy. What follows will enlarge upon that account to discuss the particular problems encountered by the Ministry in devising its reply to the bomber and, after the raids of 1940-41 had ceased, its precautions against further attack. The problem of air attack presented itself, historically speaking, in two overlapping phases whose problems also overlapped rather than coincided. There was the initial attack on London in the autumn, renewed with fresh force in the spring of 1941; and, in between, the attack on provincial cities and ports, tailing off, as it were, in the so-called 'Baedeker' raids.

In London, the problem of food supply was always within control. There were heavy losses of food stocks, especially in the first month of attack, and until a salvage organisation was set up; much processing plant, especially flour and provender mills and cold stores, was demolished, damaged, or immobilised by damage to public utilities; and transport difficulties hampered and delayed food distribution. The weight of attack, however, although on occasion greater than that of almost any other single attack elsewhere, was still small in comparison with London's size and resources. The local food organisation was efficient; the London Divisional Food Officer was able to keep the situation well under control with the help of four assistants, each responsible for all work in one sector of the Division with an alternative office within it. Transport and communications within the Division remained reasonably good, thanks to the number of alternative routes. Emergency commodity arrangements worked satisfactorily; milk distribution, for instance, despite transport difficulties,² was maintained without a break with the help of mutual assistance schemes and by a reallocation of supplies when bottling depots were affected. By November 1940, when the tempo of attack on London had for the moment slackened, the Ministry could feel

¹ Vol. I, Chapter XI.

² About three-quarters of London's milk supply arrives in rail tankers. During raids on London much delay was caused by damage to the Southern Railway; for several days, tankers had to be emptied at Wimbledon.

that the organisation it had prepared for emergency distribution there had stood up tolerably well.

Two urgent needs remained for which no advance preparations had been made; for an emergency meals service, and for an organisation to salvage food damaged by bombing. Neither task had been the Ministry of Food's previous responsibility, so that it was obliged to improvise to fill the gaps in the existing provision. Its salvage organisation was started from scratch; emergency feeding, on the other hand, became involved with the general programme of communal feeding that had been under consideration since June 1940, and was only loosely connected, administratively, with other emergency arrangements.¹

When the air attack on London came, the innumerable personal problems it caused—ranging from the total loss of all worldly possessions to the destruction of the current week's groceries—turned out to be a bigger and in its way harder job to tackle than the deaths, bodily injuries, or collapse of morale, that had figured so largely in pre-war discussions—and that had not materialised to anything like the extent expected. Disaster on the grand scale had been foreseen and some provision had been made against it; not so for a host of minor ills. In particular, the weaknesses of rest centre policy were rapidly exposed. Difficulties arose, not at the rest centres on the outskirts, from hordes of refugees who still had homes to return to, but in the East End itself, where the centres became crammed with the homeless in numbers far exceeding any they had been planned to shelter.² Instead of supplying transient visitors with a seat, a cup of tea and a slice of bread and margarine, the centres, ill-equipped as they were at first with sanitary facilities, food, and bedding, had to provide bed and board for days to crowds (swelled by the 'time-bombed'³) who had nowhere else to go, since during the periods of heaviest raiding the rate of house destruction exceeded the rate of re-housing.

The problem of the rest centres and the steps taken to deal with it have been the concern of another work in this series;⁴ but certain aspects of it have a bearing on food policy. It was now realised that the traditions of the poor law and the limited resources of the public assistance authorities, which were largely dependent on income from rates, were unsuited to the task of providing assistance

¹ An account of communal feeding is given below, Chapters XXIII, XXIV.

² London lacked the safety valve that existed in provincial towns in the proximity of open country or smaller towns and villages unaffected by the raids, to which people could migrate or 'trek' nightly for shelter. This was a reason both for the strain on the rest centres, to which, for most homeless Londoners, there was no alternative, and for the extensive use of air-raid shelters. Some further comment on the practice of 'trekking' and the official view of it appears below, pp. 323-324.

³ This was an unexpected category of victims evacuated from their houses while unexploded bombs in their neighbourhood were being dealt with.

⁴ R. M. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, 1950.

on a large scale to people who, because they had suffered loss through the chances of war, could expect it *as a matter of right*. Aid had to come from the Central Government; and it had to be freed from the odour of the poor law. These principles, applied to emergency feeding under the control of the Ministry of Food, meant that the local authorities that operated it required full reimbursement of expenses but, on the other hand, that feeding services were in no sense a charity and need not be provided at especially cheap rates. Confusion on both these points was felt in the Ministry of Food at the outset, and it was some time before the lessons were learned.

Apart from the homeless, there were many others who needed help to a greater or lesser extent in the conditions of life under air attack. There were those who, when all-night raiding started, and seemed likely to continue for an indefinite period, took to sleeping in public air-raid shelters and the London tube stations; as autumn drew on and the nights lengthened, they took up their positions earlier until they spent most of their time out of working hours in the shelters, so that some kind of feeding arrangements became essential. There were the victims of 'incidents' who were the better for a snack or at least a drink of hot, sweet tea—quoted by every 'first aid manual' as an elementary treatment for shock—directly they had been rescued from the ruins and before they had been transferred to the rest centre; and there were the Civil Defence workers and others on the spot who found refreshment equally welcome. Most numerous of all were the households unable to cook for days or even weeks through interruptions of public utilities;¹ and in addition there was much domestic upheaval through the departure of mothers with young children, leaving other members of the household unable or unwilling to fend for themselves.

If the rest centres had not been overburdened by the claims of the homeless, a way might have been found to extend their meals service to cater for at least some of these groups. In the circumstances, however, it was obvious that some other instrument must be found for the purpose, and in September 1940 it was the Ministry of Food that seemed the most apt. The Ministry had in fact been engaged with the preliminaries of a communal feeding scheme since July, when the Food Policy Committee had decided that it should assume responsibility for supplying meals for poor people, factory workers, and others who might have difficulty with home catering in war-time circumstances.² The Ministry had indeed expressly repudiated the responsibility for emergency feeding arrangements, placing this upon the Ministry of Health, and describing its work on 'communal kitchens'

¹ These were usually referred to as 'gasless households', for gas failures, as they took longer to repair, were nearly always the most serious feature of any interference with public utilities.

² See below, Chapter XXIII.

as 'long range policy'; but it had, by sheer coincidence, compromised this position by inviting the London County Council¹ to start communal meals centres in Metropolitan boroughs, a day or two before serious raiding began on 7th September. This step was intended merely as part of the Minister's plan to establish 'long-range' communal feeding through the local authorities, but the marked success of the L.C.C. meals centres in heavily-bombed districts meant that they came to be regarded by many, including L.C.C. officials, as an emergency and temporary provision. On 19th September Ministers agreed that there was an unsatisfactory lack of definition of responsibility for communal feeding; but it was thought that people 'would hold the Ministry of Food responsible by and large'. Later, 'by and large' was defined to mean that the Ministry would be responsible for all communal feeding outside the rest centres, with the special task of considering means for the provision of hot drinks for shelter users.

When heavy raiding began in September 1940 the only existing organisation for the rescue, treatment, and disposal of damaged goods was the peace-time system of assessment by insurance officials appointed by the Board of Trade, followed by salvage action by policy-holders with the help of the Salvage Corps of the Fire Offices Committee which was established throughout the country. In October 1940 it was reported that this procedure was still being followed automatically after accidental fires under a long-standing arrangement between the insurance companies and London wharfingers, but stocks suffering air raid damage were being left untouched for long periods. Most goods were insured against war damage under the Government War Risks (Commodity) Insurance Scheme,² and although the Ministry of Home Security had recommended policy holders to protect damaged goods by such means as tarpaulin sheets, no one (except the Government) had any financial interest in getting them salvaged. Food stocks owned by the Ministry were little better looked after, as although Area Commodity Officers had been authorised to have money spent on salvage work,³ they had usually little experience and no local staff for individual jobs, which had to be left to the warehouse-keeper.⁴ In any case, the peace-time procedure,

¹ This was agreed at a meeting on communal feeding held in the Ministry on 3rd September.

² This was a Board of Trade scheme compulsory on retailers holding stock worth over £200, and on all traders with over £1,000 worth.

³ A circular issued in August 1940 had authorised Divisional Food Officers, in consultation with Area Commodity Officers, to lay out money on behalf of the Ministry. Earlier they had been advised to get emergency committees of the Area Provision and Grocery Committees appointed to organise salvage.

⁴ Some good work was none the less reported from the provinces. In Liverpool, the Liaison Officer had been able to rescue considerable quantities of goods which would otherwise have been destroyed. This, however, was in October, before any really heavy raids had been made on provincial cities.

based on the necessity for an accurate financial assessment of the damage done, was totally unsuited to circumstances that called for the minimum delay in salvage of the maximum quantity of food, even if the cost seemed excessive by peace-time standards.

In London the wharfingers, by an agreement of their Association with the Board of Trade, had arranged to short-circuit the normal assessment procedure and go ahead with salvage without waiting for instructions from the owners, so that some salvage work was proceeding in the Port of London area, but little was being done outside it. Neither the Port of London Authority nor the Metropolitan boroughs, moreover, had been able to cope with the clearance of debris from collapsed buildings, and the special organisations set up for the purpose could not operate in the Port of London area.¹ The Ministry of Food was well aware that, in London at least, food was being allowed to lie about to deteriorate for want of salvage. For instance, the proprietors of a wharf containing tea, which had been damaged on 10th September, informed the Fire Offices Committee on 24th September that they had tried for the past ten days to get authority for salvage operations, and had finally gone ahead on their own account with the salvage of the tea; and at another bombed wharf where canned fruit and meat were in store, the proprietors reported that they had been unable to get any instructions. Cases like that of Nelson's Wharf became widely known, and the waste of food threatened to become a public scandal. During September and October, however, the Ministry of Food took no action, as it was waiting on a plan for a co-ordinated Salvage Control expected from the Ministry of Home Security, which was responsible for salvage operations in general. In November 1940 the London Divisional Food Officer introduced his own scheme as a stop-gap until the Salvage Control should be created; and this eventually became the nucleus of an independent scheme organised by the Ministry of Food.

II

On the night of 14th/15th November there took place the notorious raid on Coventry, the first of a new series of raids on industrial centres and ports, on a scale comparable to that of attacks already made on London. Later that month and at the beginning of December Bristol and Southampton were heavily attacked, and on 12th and 13th December Sheffield had its turn. These raids were devastating, especially that on Coventry, which became a byword as the most overwhelming attack of the whole war on any British town. In the

¹ Vol. I, p. 159.

words of the City Architect, 'in a single night a very considerable part of the centre of Coventry had changed the tightly packed mass of buildings for an area of desolation, debris and ashes'. Movement in the city centre was made difficult and dangerous by piles of rubble, masonry falling from damaged buildings, the presence of delayed-action bombs, and fires on which the Fire Brigade was still working, and the area had to be cordoned off; all public utilities, gas, electricity, and water, were put out of action, and the city transport and railway systems were paralysed. Seven out of the nine food wholesalers had their premises damaged, and the Area Provision and Groceries Committee for Coventry and District could not have functioned even if its members had been in a condition to cope with the situation (the chairman, whose home and business premises had both been bombed, could not be found, and the vice-chairman had been killed). 120 retail food shops had been destroyed and another 180 were closed because of air raid damage or other reasons; most of the caterers had been knocked out, bread baking was impossible even in surviving premises, and milk delivery was difficult. Thousands of people were homeless, and at that time no emergency feeding had been organised in Coventry. Finally, the Food Office had been damaged, the records were in disorder, and at first many of the staff were stunned by the raid.

Coventry, in fact, provided a compendium of almost every post-raid difficulty that might have been foreseen, with one exception, as instructive in its way as the problems. There was plenty of food in Coventry; bulk stocks had not been damaged, and besides these there were ample supplies of groceries and provisions including what was in damaged premises, covered with debris but intact. Because of the breakdown of the wholesale and retail distributive machinery, most of this food could not be used, and supplies had to be brought in from outside by Birmingham and Leicester wholesalers, who fortunately had not been affected by raids at the same time. Bread¹ and milk supplies from outside the town were organised by the Divisional Food and Area Commodity Officers, road milk tankers being diverted to other towns from which distribution was arranged; after a few days a large plant bakery on the outskirts of Coventry using oil-fuelled ovens was able to resume baking, and the two largest milk processing plants were back in action within two days. A special issue of canned corned beef was also sent in, because of the difficulties of cooking; fish destined for Coventry was diverted elsewhere, apart from a quantity which was rescued from the bombed railway station and used by the friars. Lack of contact between food officials and wholesale and retail traders proved to be one of the most serious deficiencies in the

¹ Birmingham, which supplied bread, was itself in trouble after a raid on 19th November, when mutual assistance pacts for bread supply had to be brought into operation.

emergency food organisation; retailers were with difficulty, after unsuccessful use of loudspeaker announcements, gathered together to be told how to get supplies. At the same meeting it was decided to suspend strict rationing, on account of the large number of people who had lost ration books and identity cards, and the number of retailers out of action; traders were asked to try to restrict issues of food to the normal, but not to insist on ration books or registrations. At the end of ten days, however, there had been so many abuses of the relaxation by customers (including many coming in from outside Coventry), that it was decided to restore rationing. By a great effort the Food Office, which was in the charge of an acting Food Executive Officer of unusual ability, was able to issue about 20,000 new ration books within a few days to enable this to be done.

The Army was soon on the spot with field kitchens and water supplies, which were invaluable in the early stages after the raid when no other means of emergency feeding was available; indeed military help (or naval, as after the attack on Plymouth the next year) saved the situation several times after the heaviest raids,¹ which suggests that some kind of military unit, could it have been available, might have been the best solution to the first-aid emergency feeding problem. A number of mobile canteens arrived in Coventry later, but were soon in difficulties over replenishments of food and water supplies and suffered from an absence of central control.² After a week, a temporary feeding centre was opened and, a fortnight later, Coventry's first municipal restaurant. Salvage of food was energetically tackled, with valuable help at first from the military, by a specially-appointed salvage officer; the Divisional Food Officer reported that, according to his own observations, food salvage seemed to be going forward much more favourably than other salvage work because of the Ministry's promptness in action, without waiting for the local authority to move.

No other raid presented such a variety of problems as that of Coventry; reports from other towns, however, contain additional details or fresh problems, varying mainly according to the part of the town most badly affected, so that a composite picture can be built up of likely conditions in a raided district. The Southampton raids at the end of November 1940 caused heavy loss of life among the inhabitants and produced the phenomenon known as 'trekking', a nightly movement of people outside the city boundaries, which had already appeared to a certain extent in London after the East End had been bombed, and which caused serious problems of accommodation and feeding. This practice was strongly deplored in official quarters as a

¹ Military field kitchens were also used after raids during this period in Bristol and Southampton (where 4,000 rations were served on the first day), and again in Bootle the following year.

² pp. 560 *seq.*

sign of poor morale, although observers on the spot were unable to find that most of the trekkers were influenced by anything more ignoble than a desire for a night's sleep in quiet and safety, and many of them came back daily to work inside the city. Southampton, however, had undoubtedly been severely shocked by the raids; the people, it was said, appeared stunned, and stayed at home behind boarded-up windows, 'dazed, bewildered, unemployed and uninstructed'. A number of mobile canteens appeared in Southampton, many very sketchily supplied, with no idea of how to obtain replenishments. Ministry of Food observers thought they were little or no use because of their complete lack of organisation. The Food Office staff, although, like others, it seems to have risen to the occasion by carrying on with work under difficult conditions and organising an emergency issue of ration documents, was handicapped at the start by damage to its original premises and lack of a previously-prepared alternative building, and of any means of informing the public of its change of address.

The Bristol raids about the same time were very heavy incendiary attacks and caused especially serious damage to wholesalers; this was worse than it might have been because fire-watching arrangements were inadequate and some premises had been left empty and locked, so that the Fire Service had to break in. A good many wholesalers managed to secure other premises, but two of the smaller firms were seriously hampered by the total loss of their records, as they had ignored previous advice to keep a duplicate set elsewhere. Some firms lost their lorries or vans, but this difficulty was largely overcome through the good offices of the Area Provisions and Groceries Committee. A number of retailers in Bristol were also damaged and much difficulty was experienced by food officials in getting reports—the Divisional Food Officer claimed to have received some information through gossip. Ministry officials reported that they had received little co-operation from the local authority in efforts to set up communal feeding, which they were told was not necessary.

These raids destroyed any complacency that might have been felt at Ministry headquarters about the completeness of emergency arrangements; in fact, one senior official told the Minister that he was 'increasingly disturbed by the inadequacy of our arrangements for dealing with food supply and distribution under emergency conditions' in localities which suffer from what the Home Security Department call 'bad incidents', and prophesied a disastrous effect on public morale of 'a succession of Coventries and Southamptons'. His fears were thought exaggerated by others in the Ministry, who pointed out that the situation in each case had been capably handled by its local and divisional officials, but it was generally agreed that the Ministry's existing organisation, both in the Divisions and at headquarters, was inadequate to deal with the effects of a really severe raid, which

might dislocate food services for a whole provincial community. A special conference was called of representatives from Divisions (including London), that had been involved in the recent attacks, to pool experience and work out a model technique as a general guide in future raids.

Before it took place, the raids on Sheffield provided further evidence of some of the difficulties that had already been demonstrated in Coventry, Bristol, and Southampton: lack of reliable information at the Food Office of damage to retailers, failure of retailers' mutual assistance pacts because of the destruction of all businesses in a pact, and, in consequence, the need to introduce temporary 'loose rationing'.¹ There was in addition a new problem; this was the breakdown of the relief service, needed especially badly because of widespread damage to houses and public utilities, through the destruction of 40 out of the 54 rest centres that had been prepared in the town. The use of the Firvale Institution, working with old coke-fired ranges, to distribute meals throughout the town² and the subsequent opening of similar kitchens to prepare emergency meals is referred to below in the account of the Ministry's Cooking Depots, of which these were the prototypes. Area commodity arrangements were reported to have worked especially well in Sheffield, apart from those for flour, for which no representatives were present, although there were four Flour Officers living in Hull; Area Commodity Officers concentrated on getting into the town easily-cooked or ready-to-eat foods like bacon and cheese.

The conference agreed that the Ministry's policy of decentralising responsibility for action in emergency had proved sound; some reinforcement of local staffs might, however, be needed, and a party including Area Commodity Officers should always be sent at once from Divisional headquarters to any area suffering heavy bombing. Suggestions less well received were that other Divisions should adopt the London plan of 'sectorising' their areas under Assistant Divisional Food Officers, and that a 'flying squad' of senior officers should be sent into a Division from Ministry headquarters—though officers from headquarters did in fact visit other towns after later raids to report or advise, especially on emergency feeding. It was decided that divisional staffs should be strengthened by the appointment of assistant Divisional Food Officers especially for emergency work.

The chief weakness in organisation shown up by the raids had been inability to keep in touch with local circumstances, through want of first-hand information in the local Food Office about the effect of

¹ Registration was suspended and customers without ration books were asked to sign their names when they bought rationed goods. The results, however, were the same as if rationing had been entirely suspended.

² The Public Assistance Committee in Sheffield was particularly able and resourceful; it had laid in good food supplies, and it also received help from the Bradford authority.

bombing, and insufficient contact between the various parts of the Ministry's hierarchy. The Food Office, it was now thought, should become the rallying-point for all food interests affected by a raid. Wholesalers and retailers should know in advance that if their businesses were damaged their first course should be to report to the Food Office, which should have an alternative address, known to the public, in case it was itself damaged. The Food Executive Officer ought to be in touch with the local authority, the public assistance authority, the police, the civil defence authority, and others concerned with emergency work; and if, as was frequently the case, he was also the clerk to the local authority and likely to be occupied with other business, he should have an effective deputy who could take control of food affairs without waiting for his senior's approval.¹

Liaison between local and divisional Food Offices, and even more between Divisional Food Officers and Ministry headquarters, had been conspicuously weak since air raids began, and there had been no satisfactory channels of communications for the passing of reports. In July 1940 Area Commodity Officers had been instructed to report cases of damage to food premises, not to Commodity Directors, but to Divisional Food Officers² who would pass on the information to Regional Commissioners for transmission to the Ministry of Home Security, where a Ministry of Food liaison arrangement had been established in the War Room.³ Thence, the information was teleprinted to Colwyn Bay, where the section of the Ministry dealing with emergency organisation had moved in July 1940. It is obvious that in the course of this journey there was ample opportunity for confusion of messages; and when premises on the Key Points List were involved, matters were complicated by the requirement to use code.⁴ Headquarters found it necessary to get confirmation from the Divisional office over the telephone, when the need for secrecy was a

¹ The deputy Food Executive Officer in Sheffield complained that his position had been difficult immediately after the raids, as he had to refer a number of points to his superior, the Town Clerk, who was naturally much occupied with other business at that time.

² An area margarine production officer, employed at one of the principal margarine works, wrote to point out the number of reports of damage his firm had been called on to make: to the County Council, the South of England Seed Crushers' Association, the Ministry of Food, and—by him in his capacity as area officer—to the Divisional Food Officer.

³ This was worked by a rota of officers, and varied from a twice-daily visit in quiet periods to a continuous 24-hour attendance in the War Room at the height of the fly-bomb attack in 1944. The liaison duties included that of keeping in touch with Key Points Intelligence Directorate to secure early information of damage of food 'key points'.

⁴ A misunderstanding developed when the Ministry of Home Security, in response to the Ministry of Food's request for the earliest possible information about Key Points, sent messages *en clair* which, contrary to all security regulations, were transmitted to Colwyn Bay over the teleprinter. For the Key Points List, see above, p. 288.

handicap to plain speech. In practice, as attacks on food undertakings came thick and fast, information of damage began to reach Colwyn Bay from all sorts of quarters including the heads of bombed firms, direct or through Commodity Divisions.¹ By December 1940, when heavy raids on provincial areas were becoming more frequent, officers of Emergency Services Division were making a practice of telephoning every morning to each Divisional Food Officer in whose area, according to the guarded reports in the morning papers or in the B.B.C. news bulletins, it seemed likely that there had been a raid; often, of course, to find that no food interests had been affected.

All these deficiencies clearly called for an expansion of the Ministry's emergency organisation and the issue of fresh operational instructions to local staff. The headquarters staff concerned with emergency affairs, which had previously been very small, was now strengthened and a number of special emergency problems that had recently become urgent were simultaneously tackled. A War Room was established in Colwyn Bay, linked with each divisional headquarters. A salvage organisation was formed, using the scheme already worked out by the London Divisional Food Office as a model for the country; associated with this was the work on protection and treatment of foodstuffs against gas attack, which had been held up while financial responsibility for it was settled. Communal Feeding Division was moved to Colwyn Bay to associate it more closely with Emergency Services Division, and it inaugurated new plans for feeding in an emergency, concentrating on the preparation of shadow centres for emergency use in an attempt to co-ordinate the activity of mobile canteens, and on the creation of the Ministry's own force of Queen's Messenger Convoys to bring immediate relief to bombed districts. At the same time, counter-invasion plans were elaborated.² Emergency stocks throughout the country were reviewed as a preliminary to the creation of a very comprehensive system of dumps with arrangements for distribution, which was to be one of Emergency Services Division's chief preoccupations for the next four years. Finally, fresh efforts were made to strengthen the food distributive system against the effects of enemy action, especially at the wholesale stage, which, as the recent raids had shown, had not been effectively overcome by the emergency plans already in force.

III

After the end of 1940, during the worst winter weather, there was

¹ At the beginning of October 1940, an officer at Colwyn Bay wrote to the head of Jam Branch in Oxford to say that reports of damage to factories supplied by him had never been received at all through official channels.

² See above, p. 294 *seq.*

for a while some slackening in the pace of air attack. During January and February 1941, London enjoyed a comparatively quiet period, and although sharp attacks were made on provincial towns, such as Portsmouth (in January) and Swansea (in February), for a time no fresh problems on the scale of those of Coventry or Sheffield appeared. At this time, however, no one knew where the next attack might fall, although it was obvious that more would come, and at each night-fall every town wondered whether it would be the next target for the German bombers.

In a review of current problems made at this time, the roundabout and haphazard way in which news of air damage to food interests was collected in the Ministry's emergency section seemed the outstanding deficiency. The need for the rapid preparation of comprehensive and up-to-date reports was the greater because of the demands of the Minister, the Parliamentary and Permanent Secretaries, and other officials in London. The War Room that was now set up in Colwyn Bay was to operate throughout the twenty-four hours for the collection and dissemination of information from all quarters regarding the effects of enemy action on food interests. Divisional Food Officers, who had already been advised to consider appointing extra staff for emergency work, were asked to maintain a complementary twenty-four hour service in their own offices. Divisional duty officers would be required to telephone news of any major incidents in their Divisions to the War Room by 8 a.m. every day, and to follow this up later in the day by a more detailed report, by reference to numbered questions on a form—called a 'BZ' [for 'Blitz'] form—which was now supplied to Divisions. This required information on air raid effects on food supplies and distribution, divisional and local offices and staff, public utilities, and the progress of emergency feeding and salvage. The use of numbered questions and the framing of their wording made possible the telephoning of brief reports unilluminating to eavesdroppers not provided with a copy of the form, and avoided the need for security precautions. Food Executive Officers were also to transmit 'BZ' reports from the target areas, based on information from the local A.R.P. control room, food traders, and other sources. Divisional duty officers were expected to secure details of air raids by the best means they could; most kept in close touch with the regional office war room of the Home Security organisation, some having a liaison officer stationed there during alerts.

The War Room was enabled to make use in emergency of a number of alternative telephone and teleprinter routes between Colwyn Bay, London, and other points, including a Colwyn Bay-to-Liverpool G.P.O. telephone circuit, an unused Colwyn Bay-to-Cheltenham teleprinter circuit terminating in the Foreign Office's

emergency building, and a contact by direct line between Colwyn Bay and Western Command headquarters in Chester, which was the only possible means of communicating with Merseyside during the heavy attacks of May 1941. Experience showed that the teleprinter service, with its speed and facilities for duplication of messages, was most generally useful for normal purposes, although it was liable to break down. It was usually possible, however, to keep the service going by telephone during periods of breakdown, and this was done in 1940 when Neville House, then the Ministry's chief London building, was damaged by bombing.

The War Room was intended to serve as a nucleus for a Ministry Operations Room in the event of invasion,¹ when Emergency Services Division would have become responsible for the co-ordination of all headquarters activities and the decision of policy. Responsible senior officers of all Commodity Divisions likely to be active, and of Transport, Warehousing, and Cold Storage Divisions, would have taken up duty at the Operations Room, and simultaneously Divisional Food Officers would have set up operations rooms at which Area Commodity Officers would attend.² During an invasion it was intended that the War Room should be the channel for all messages between the various sections of Ministry headquarters, and that Home Security messages should go direct to it. A system of priorities would obviously have been required. The War Room at headquarters stood up well to an increased flow of messages during various exercises, but weaknesses were reported from Divisional headquarters. Despatch rider services were available between Ministry headquarters and the Divisional Food Office in the London area, and it was arranged for Divisional Food Officers to be served by the regional pools of despatch riders in emergency, although it was thought doubtful whether they could have been relied on at the most critical moments. During 'Period B', when parts of the country might be cut off by enemy forces, Ministry of Food messages of exceptional urgency might have had to be transmitted over the Post Office's emergency wireless service.

Another service planned as a stand-by was the pigeon post, which

¹ Under normal war-time conditions, the War Room's functions were mainly for liaison and the preparation of reports; but it was understood that in emergency, such as a partial breakdown of communications or when a senior officer could not be reached to give an urgent decision, the officer on duty in the War Room should have power to take executive decisions.

² Plans were made for a last-ditch stand by a Ministry party in a grave emergency, such as an enemy landing on the North Wales coast, in headquarters near Shrewsbury, with an alternative address in Radcliffe, East Lancashire. A plan was put forward by Western Command for the emergency headquarters to be in Chester, where the Chief Divisional Food Office could have been used, but the plans for Shrewsbury and Radcliffe were not abandoned. Elaborate arrangements were made for the transport of staff and office equipment, and bedding, food, and feeding equipment, right down to the salt, pepper, and mustard pots, were made ready at the emergency premises, but sanitary facilities appear to have been overlooked.

was announced in August 1942, after a year's preparation, as an emergency link between London and Colwyn Bay, and the divisional and chief divisional headquarters. In February 1943, however, this last resource was disbanded; it had been found unreliable in bad weather and was restricted to daylight hours—pigeons do not fly by night—which made it of very little use in the winter.¹ By this time the state of the war suggested that it was extremely unlikely that communications, which had never altogether broken down even during the heaviest raids, would become sufficiently bad to warrant the trouble and expense of a pigeon post service.²

IV

At the end of October 1940, the Ministry of Home Security put forward a plan for a co-ordinated salvage control, in which London wharfingers would be made responsible for salvage throughout the country; the Ministry of Food, however, found this inadequate and insisted on regional control of a salvage organisation, so that Divisional Food Officers could find a place in it. The Ministry of Home Security now seemed to find difficulty in appointing suitable Regional Salvage Officers, having rejected a suggestion that representatives of the Salvage Corps and Associations throughout the country might be used, and after some further delay suggested that it should merely provide regional co-ordinating officers to smooth the way for those directly concerned with salvage. Regional Salvage Officers were finally appointed to the staffs of Regional Commissioners in March 1941, but the Ministry of Home Security took care to emphasise that recovery and disposal of foodstuffs were no business of theirs. Later, the chief use of Regional Salvage Officers was as Chairmen of Committees of the various parties concerned with salvage, including the Ministry of Works, which provided labour and transport. In July 1941 the Lord President of the Council proposed the creation of a single salvage organisation, under the control of the Ministry of Home Security as a disinterested party, to prevent competition after raids for scarce labour and equipment among rival salvage groups, and to provide for salvage of miscellaneous goods which were still nobody's concern; but the Ministry of Home Security was unwilling to take the responsibility and the proposal was dropped, not altogether to the regret of the Ministry of

¹ The service, however, had done quite well in carrying messages short distances during an exercise, and it was thought that it might have been useful in sending messages from heavily bombed towns.

² This included a Treasury grant of £12,000 and an annual import of 25 tons of feeding-stuffs.

Food which by this time had its own salvage organisation in full working order.

This organisation developed out of a scheme introduced in the London Division in November 1940.¹ A Divisional Salvage Officer was appointed with general responsibilities for the rescue, reconditioning and disposal of foodstuffs. He had experienced men as Area Officers who acted as technical advisers to Salvage Committees set up in each borough under the chairmanship of the Food Executive Officers. In December 1940 other Divisions were asked to set up their own organisations on the London model; for practical purposes, the scheme was effective from 1st January 1941, although it had been anticipated by a number of Divisional Food Officers, after some of the heavy raids in the provinces towards the end of 1941. In Coventry, for instance, a man from the divisional staff provisionally appointed as Salvage Officer was able to secure some military help and lorries, and set to work salvaging food and making some temporary repairs to retail shops. In Bristol salvage was also reported to have gone well; thanks to speedy action a good proportion of foodstuffs partially damaged by fire or water was saved. Sheffield, however, was a black spot; there had been no salvage officer there and the Salvage Committee never met after the attack.²

Details of the Ministry's new organisation were sent at the end of December 1940 to 16,000 warehouse-keepers, transport undertakings, and other concerns having the care of food; they were asked to report any damage to Divisional Food headquarters and to Colwyn Bay, and to take any necessary steps to protect the food while awaiting salvage instructions from the Divisional Office. They were given a guarantee that any expense would be made good. Salvage Officers for their part were advised not to wait to be told of salvage jobs but to keep in touch with Divisional and local Food Offices to get early news of air raid damage, and to be on the scene themselves as soon as possible. Private owners were at the same time robbed of the comfortable illusion that they had only to sit back and collect the insurance money by a Board of Trade Press Notice, issued at the instance of the Ministry of Food, announcing that the cost of further damage caused by negligence in protecting stocks affected by bombing would be deducted from their compensation. Divisional Food Officers were empowered to requisition for salvage purposes privately-owned goods, except when a building was only partially damaged and production or other business might be interfered with by requisitioning the entire contents. Requisitioning was necessary to prevent

¹ See above, p. 321; and Vol. I, p. 159.

² In Liverpool also the Food Liaison Officer had early in October been authorised to spend money on salvage work, and had been able to get food dried at the Ministry potato flour factories and prevent bulk stores deteriorating.

speculative purchase of damaged goods for irregular disposal as well as to make it possible for the Ministry to begin salvage work.¹ It was agreed that in cases where the food was insured under the Commodity Insurance Scheme the Ministry of Food should act as the agent of the Board of Trade, to which the owner should apply for compensation; when it was not insured, the Ministry would compensate the owner, deducting the cost of salvage.

A classification for damaged goods was now determined,² and the question of reconditioning considered. By far the worst cause of damage was found to be the water used in putting out the fires; food, especially grain and oilseeds in bulk store, which had been worst affected by raids, was not readily inflammable, and blast damage had on the whole only a superficial effect which could usually be remedied fairly easily.³ Dehydration by special plant is the principal reconditioning process for wet foodstuffs; a Dehydration Branch, including technical experts, was therefore set up at Ministry headquarters early in 1941 to organise the drying of food. A register of commercial drying plants was prepared, and the plants inspected. To avoid competition with others interested in drying food the Branch took over the responsibility for the drying of surplus crops, like potatoes and carrots, and arranged to provide a drying service for all Commodity Divisions by harnessing all drying capacity, arranging comprehensive terms, and allotting contracts. In this way a Branch originally started as an emergency measure became the nucleus of a new field of the Ministry's activity, which played an important part in supplying food for the Forces. The allocation of materials to drying plants was done by Dehydration Officers stationed in the various Port Areas and responsible to Dehydration Branch at headquarters; the Branch was informed by Area Commodity Officers of foodstuffs suitable for reconditioning by drying which had been delivered to them by Salvage Officers.

The reconditioning of canned goods, which included those damaged in storage or transit as well as those affected by enemy

¹ In the early days speculative buyers often carried grain long distances in a water-logged condition, and dried and disposed of it through doubtful channels 'off the ration'.

² This was as follows:

- (a) Sound and fit for human consumption.
- (b) Damaged but fit for human consumption.
- (c) Damaged but fit for animal feeding.
- (d) Damaged but fit for industrial uses.
- (e) Damaged and fit only for destruction. If possible, destruction was to be delayed until the Area Commodity Officer had given his verdict.

³ In August 1940, the effects of glass splinter in foodstuffs had been discussed at the Ministry of Health. The dangers of glass contamination were thought to have been over-rated, as only large particles, which would be easily detected and removable by sieving if required, would cause ill effects. It was, however, decided to issue a leaflet to instruct those responsible for food how to protect it from glass damage. A good deal of meat was lost through glass damage, as it was quite impossible to remove glass splinters driven deep into carcasses. Retailers especially found glass damage difficult to deal with.

action, was in 1942 concentrated in seven depots set up by Salvage Division in London and other large towns. Nearly half the goods treated were suitable for normal use after cleaning, relabelling, and repacking, and most of the rest could be converted into meat and fish pastes and other manufactured products. Disposal of salvaged foodstuffs, reconditioned or otherwise, was handled by Commodity Divisions through Area Commodity Officers, except in the case of foodstuffs not controlled by the Ministry: these were disposed of to traders by Salvage Division. Goods not suitable for their normal purposes were passed to another Commodity Division;¹ some attention was given at headquarters to the utilisation of damaged goods, but there was usually no lack of demand from manufacturers,² and Salvage Division was able to compile a list of firms interested in damaged goods soon after the Salvage scheme was announced. All Commodity Divisions issued instructions for the disposal of salvaged foodstuffs, including such directions for re-refining or otherwise reconditioning as might be appropriate. Commodity disposal arrangements were slow in starting; in March 1941 Salvage Division appealed to the heads of Commodity Divisions to get their Area Officers to take their duties seriously, as Divisional Salvage Officers had found difficulty in getting them to accept the large quantities of recovered foodstuffs that were now awaiting disposal. Later, however, work went ahead more rapidly and, as raiding diminished, disposal of food, including goods taken out of emergency stores, became the major part of the Division's activity.³

Privately-owned goods such as retailers' stocks, affected by air raid damage or other causes, were frequently condemned as unfit for human consumption by the Sanitary Inspectors of local authorities working under powers conferred by the Public Health Acts. A number of cases was reported to the Ministry in which damaged food was either disposed of for animal feeding when it might have been reconditioned for human use, or destroyed outright. One outstanding case, although it did not concern war-damaged food, may be

¹ Animal Feeding-Stuffs Division was particularly interested in dried goods, especially grain. At a meeting in March 1941, the representative of the Division said that the majority of damaged grain could be used for feeding-stuffs though not always for milling. 'He had seen wheat so bad that no one would believe it possible to recondition it but it came up sweet and sold at £15 a ton.'

² Starch Division, for instance, in January 1941 were pressing to have all stocks of damaged flour made available to starch manufacturers.

³ References to one item of Salvage Division's programme of work have a pleasantly archaic air. On the establishment of the organisation, Receivers of Wreck working under the Ministry of War Transport were instructed to report to Divisional Salvage Officers cases of food and animal feeding-stuffs coming into their hands, including the carcasses of animals and Fishes Royal (whales) washed ashore. Instructions regarding Fishes Royal ran: '... if the carcass of a Royal Fish has passed from the Crown to the Lord of the Manor, the concurrence of the Lord of the Manor should be obtained before the carcass is disposed of in accordance with advice given by the Divisional Food Officer'.

quoted: that of the American imported eggs in July 1941.¹ The presence of a few bad eggs in each consignment caused Sanitary Inspectors all over the country to condemn whole cases outright, so that, in the words of Salvage Branch, 'the cumulative effect of the supply of eggs to the public, were the Sanitary Inspectors allowed a free rein, is almost frightening'. In Newcastle, the Port Egg Agent was able to prevent 133 cases of eggs being destroyed on the orders of the Sanitary Inspector; when the eggs were candled, 122 cases of sound ones were salvaged. In August 1941 the Ministry of Health asked local authorities to take care in condemning foodstuffs, and to notify cases of unsound food to the Ministry's Divisional Salvage organisation through the local Food Executive Officer.

The establishment of the Ministry's organisation and the publicity given to it had an immediate effect. During the first three months of 1941, 130,000 tons of goods were recovered, of which 73,000 were fit for human consumption, and only 28,000 tons were unusable; by the end of May nearly 250,000 tons had been recovered. A number of seemingly hopeless cases had been tackled. A cold store at Trafford Park, Manchester, was at first reported as a total loss; after much work on the removal of debris, 480 tons of bacon and meat, out of a total of 1,000 tons, were recovered for human consumption and for manufacture. In Glasgow, after the raids in March and April 1941, a cold store containing 750 tons of butter, bacon, poultry, and eggs was reported a total loss, but within a week over 500 tons of food had been recovered and transferred to another cold store; the butter only needed repacking. These results seem to show that the effects of blast, which may appear devastating at first sight, may only be slight where food is concerned. In a Bristol granary, 8,500 tons of wheat were in a building totally destroyed, which burned for many days:

'vast quantities of water were poured on to the smouldering mass and it appeared that nothing could be recovered. Even after two months fires continued to break out, and every time a fresh opening was made into the mass—which was likened to steaming porridge with a sour smell—fresh fires broke out. By dint of perseverance, however, and careful handling, it has been possible to recover 6,000 tons of wet grain. . . . Work is still going on and further quantities continue to be recovered'.

The most successful results were achieved, naturally, when salvage was put in hand as soon as possible after the damage had been done. Speed, especially with water-damaged goods, was of the essence of success in salvage work, and the Ministry's organisation was handi-capped at the start by arrears of damaged goods which had been

¹ See above, pp. 80-83.

lying untouched since earlier raids.¹ The organisation was imperfect at the beginning; even in London, where it had been longest established, it was found in an inspection in July 1941 to be hampered by shortage of clerical staff, lack of suitable office accommodation, and an unsatisfactory supply of labour and transport, as well as by the loss of records of the contents of warehouses and the absence of duplicates. In Bristol in April 1941, according to a 'BZ' report, food salvage was not proceeding because the military had been taken off the job in order to help the local authority with clearing debris, and the Ministry inspector reported later that too much attention had been given in Bristol to making the place look pretty and too little to urgent salvage jobs. The city authorities tended (it was said) to look after the most recent cases first and neglect the older ones. In Plymouth after the raids of March and April 1941 difficulties were increased by the general breakdown of communications and lack of information. On the whole, however, inspections in the course of 1941 showed that food salvage was being tackled with energy and growing effectiveness.

An official report on the operations of Salvage Division from December 1940 to the end of 1942 stated that 75 per cent. of a total of 577,000 tons of food and feeding-stuffs affected by enemy action in that time had been recovered fit for some purpose. By the end of the war 624,000 tons of food out of a total of 900,500 tons affected by enemy action had been recovered. This gives a recovery rate of just under 70 per cent., but for the period from 1st January 1941 when the organisation came into operation, the figures were 561,000 tons recovered out of 708,643 affected,² showing a percentage recovery of about 80.

The amount of food directly lost by air raid damage in the course of the war would in any case have been small compared with the total stock; thanks to the activities of Salvage Division, it was reduced to insignificant proportions.

V

Experience in the raided towns had shown, apart from the obvious deficiencies of liaison between traders and Food Offices, that the mutual assistance pacts, the only existing device for filling gaps torn by bombs in the distributive system, had frequently failed to function after the more serious raids. Where they had been brought into

¹ But in Bristol, where a building damaged six months earlier was only discovered to contain food when debris was removed by the military for road-making, it was still hoped to salvage something.

² This figure includes a quantity of food damaged in 1940, but left over for treatment until 1941.

operation, they had worked well—for instance in Liverpool in December 1940; elsewhere they had been hamstrung, because all the members had been put out of action simultaneously. The idea behind them, that is to say, was sound, but its realisation had been on too narrow a geographical basis. Many pacts had included all the traders along one street which had been completely demolished by a 'stick' of bombs; wholesalers dealing in particular commodities often tended to congregate in a small area in the heart of the town and might all suffer in the same raid, as they did in Coventry.

Damage to retailers was not fundamentally a very grave problem. Losses of stocks were seldom so serious that they could not easily be made up, although the loss of rationing records both in the shop and at the Food Office might make this more difficult. Provided the shopkeeper himself and his assistants escaped unharmed and received adequate help from the food authorities, business might be resumed fairly quickly, if new premises could be found. Damage to wholesalers produced a much more difficult problem; stock losses were likely to be more serious, and more extensive premises were required than for a retail 'outlet', for which a street or market stall could perfectly well serve.

These problems became the subject of study in Emergency Services Division early in 1941; but when they reappeared, as they did in a number of subsequent heavy raids, they were in the event largely met by local action, so that the Division could do little but publicise the results of individual experience that might prove helpful elsewhere.¹

The series of raids on the provinces, and particularly the west coast ports, in the first months of 1941 threw up no fresh problems; the same pattern of events appeared after each attack, with variations according to circumstances and the initiative and capability of the local people who had to deal with them. Some of these raids, especially when they occurred in series with barely a night's respite such as those on Merseyside and Bootle (which had eight nights' continuous raiding in early May), and on Plymouth (which had two successive nights' raiding in March and four more attacks, three on successive nights, in April), were among the severest ordeals which any group of civilians had to withstand in this country in the course of the war; in Merseyside in particular some anxiety was felt for the morale of the people in the congested dock areas that suffered most.

¹ *Emergency Wholesale Markets.* In January 1941 Commodity Divisions were asked to arrange alternative and, if possible, second alternative sites in London and the provinces for wholesale markets for fish, poultry, and fruit and vegetables, in case the original markets were put out of action. (Meat marketing had been decentralised at the beginning of the war.) In London, the existence of disused markets, including most of the Smithfield Meat Market, provided some alternative space, and other depots were secured on the outskirts of the London area. A number of other towns also had cattle markets that could have been used. A Ministry of Food lien was kept on the sites throughout the war, and lists were kept up to date; but it was never necessary to make use of the accommodation.

Personality emerges very clearly as the vital factor in these times; where there were capable local officials, in no matter what jobs, they were able to achieve much in circumstances where others had failed. Not unnaturally, it was usually the towns already tested in earlier raids that dealt most successfully with later ones. Coventry, which had two heavy raids early in April 1941 (of which the first was said—perhaps with some exaggeration—to have been as heavy as that of the previous November) provides an object-lesson of the value of experience in the work of handling a post-raid situation. The Food Office here took firm control at once, and a divisional party was also on the spot, although breakdown of communications made direct contact with the Divisional Food Office impossible. Fewer retailers were affected this time and the Food Office staff, working with the help of four vans used as mobile food offices, was able to cope with the demand for emergency cards so that there was no need for the suspension of rationing. Wholesalers escaped serious damage; requests for extra supplies of unrationed food were rapidly met by Birmingham traders. The emergency bread arrangements functioned very well, although the second raid affected water and gas supplies to four large bakeries. Milk distribution was also kept up in spite of losses of transport by one of the large dairies.¹

The local feeding and public assistance organisations in Liverpool, which had gained a good deal of experience in earlier raids, also stood up well under the strain of eight successive nights' attack in early May: conditions nearby in Bootle, however, where the attack was proportionately much heavier and the local organisation weaker, made a very different story, as will appear below.

Emergency feeding was handled with varying degrees of success from town to town. The Glasgow area was exceptionally successful with this problem in its first experience of heavy raiding, through brilliant improvisation by an outstanding Divisional Food Officer rather than planning and forethought. Heavy damage was done, especially in Clydebanks, to houses and shops, and there was a big demand for emergency feeding, which had not up to then made much progress in the district because the local authority and employers were prejudiced against communal feeding methods. The Divisional Food Officer, with the support of the District Commissioner, took a strong line with the managements of the Clydeside works and insisted on their starting their own canteen arrangements, as the communal feeding centre in the Clydebanks Town Hall

¹ There was, however, some confusion over the handling of the London *Queen's Messenger Convoy*, making its maiden trip, which set out for Coventry the day after the first raid. Some local officials thought its presence unnecessary and it was on the point of leaving when the second raid occurred. It remained for another day and was then relieved by the North-Western Convoy, which was in turn relieved by the Midland Division's own convoy which had only just come into service.

became congested at dinner time once the men had returned to work. The Divisional Food Officer also arranged that municipal carts should immediately bring water from Glasgow, and that hot food should be supplied from the Glasgow Education Committee's Cooking Centre; this went a long way to fill gaps in Clydebank's local arrangements. Rest Centres were naturally very busy, both in Clydebank and Glasgow, and in small towns in the Vale of Leven to which thousands of homeless people moved. The Vale of Leven had suddenly to cope with about 12,000 refugees, while preparations had been made for 2-3,000; but shelter was found for all, and local residents, most with no official status, showed remarkable energy and resource in catering for the incomers, again helped by food supplies sent in by the Glasgow Divisional Office and Education Authority.

Elsewhere the rest centre service, with which emergency feeding under the aegis of the Ministry of Food was usually linked in practice, if not in theory, was less successful in expanding to meet a sudden need. Belfast had two heavy raids in April and May; casualties were particularly heavy after the first, as the area attacked was entirely residential, the enemy having apparently mistaken some sheets of water to the north of the city for docks. All the premises prepared as emergency feeding centres had to be pressed into service as rest centres, unsuitable though many were for the purpose, and a meals service had to be improvised from some canning factories in the neighbourhood. 'Trekking' of homeless or frightened people made its appearance; a day or two after the raid, the worst bombed districts were practically deserted, and a demand for food and shelter was felt in towns and villages up to a radius of 30 miles round; the Divisional Food Officer heard of bread and provision carts being besieged on the high roads by hungry people begging for food.¹ Confusion was increased because official responsibility for emergency feeding was not at first clearly laid down; all duties concerned with it were eventually transferred from the City Corporation to the Civil Defence authority, under the Northern Ireland Ministry of Public Security, although the Divisional Food Officer was in fact left with the supervision and preliminary organisation of the work.² By the time of the second raid, early in May, the emergency feeding organisation had been strengthened with the help of equipment and technical assistance provided by War-time Meals Division, which had sent a representative. This raid in any case produced less serious emergency feeding problems although it was tactically more serious, as the area affected was different; this time, dock and industrial

¹ About 100,000 left Belfast, according to an estimate by the Minister of Public Security.

² Later the Belfast Corporation refused to take responsibility for British Restaurants either, and the Ministry of Public Security agreed to sponsor them as well, making the Civil Defence authority financially responsible.

targets were heavily damaged, and casualties included a great many food wholesalers, so that mutual assistance arrangements were difficult. The only commodity shortage reported, however, was of condensed milk.

Rest centre services in Cardiff and Swansea almost collapsed after raids in January and February, not through damage to premises, but because inadequate arrangements had been made for the replenishment of food supplies after the initial stocks had been used up; in Swansea, though there was said to be a milk surplus in the town, and milk was being sent away to a depot at Carmarthen, no fresh milk was delivered at the rest centres although there were numbers of children there. Some centres were poorly equipped; one or two Cardiff centres had not even blackout arrangements, and not many had cooking equipment on the premises. In Swansea hot meals were to have been sent from a central kitchen, where the boiler broke down because of insufficient water pressure; no one there had the enterprise to make use of a kitchen range or coal fires on the same premises, and both there and in Cardiff there was said to be an air of helplessness among workers at the rest centres. In Cardiff, the Food Executive Officer and his staff virtually took over the Public Assistance Authority's work on the second day after the raid, and replenished stocks at the centres from a central depot.

In Plymouth, the original arrangements for feeding in rest centres failed because they had been let on contract to a firm of commercial caterers, which was damaged in the earlier raids and completely knocked out in the later ones. Fortunately, the Navy came to the rescue by giving food and shelter to 500 homeless people in the Naval Barracks and sending out cooked meals to rest centres; and as public utilities were not badly affected in the first raids, the demand for emergency meals soon eased. The later series of raids was more destructive of residential and shop property, and emergency feeding was much more urgently needed; and as there was a considerable movement of population from Plymouth to the surrounding districts, as well as nightly 'trekking', the feeding problem was not confined to the city. Mobile canteen workers described how they drove into open country outside Plymouth and 'set up shop'; whereupon people emerged from hedges and ditches.¹ The complete breakdown of communications both within the town and with the outside world² made appraisal of the situation difficult; the local food organisation, at the Food Office as well as at the Town Hall,³ was weak, and

¹ At the time of the first big raids Plymouth was not an evacuation area, and Devon as a whole was a reception area. The population of Plymouth had been increased since the beginning of the war by the influx of dockyard workers and their families because of the expansion of employment in the Devonport dockyard.

² For some time the nearest telephone point was at Tavistock.

³ The terms are used figuratively as the actual buildings had been destroyed in the raids.

uneasiness was even felt at Ministry headquarters about the effectiveness of the divisional food organisation, including the direction of the Queen's Messenger Convoy. A representative of War-time Meals Division, the originator of the Cooking Depot scheme,¹ came to help organise emergency feeding, and opened kitchens from which, by 6th May, 5-6,000 emergency meals were being sent daily.

In Bootle, 11 out of 12 rest centres were knocked out in the May raids,² whereupon the local authority virtually resigned its responsibility for feeding services, so that it fell to the Ministry of Food to do whatever could be done. At first, the only emergency feeding device in operation was the Queen's Messenger Convoy from Manchester, which was divided between Liverpool and Bootle. This was later joined by three other convoys and mobile canteens. The Ministry of Food's Liverpool representative,³ realising that canteen feeding was not sufficient, secured staff and cooking equipment from the Army, and opened four feeding centres in various parts of Bootle, which had to be housed in marquees for want of an undamaged building.⁴

VI

Throughout this period of raiding, the Ministry's system of emergency commodity supply worked well, with only a few exceptions like tea in Plymouth, where the emergency organisation was not equal to meeting both trade dislocation and an enormously

¹ See below, p. 375 *seq.*

² Very heavy damage was caused in Bootle. 15,000 out of 17,000 houses were damaged more or less seriously, and 20,000 people were made homeless and moved, voluntarily or by government arrangement, outside the town; one-third of the retail shops were destroyed, all public utilities and the telephone service were put out of action, and the Town Hall and the Food Office were damaged.

³ The task of the Ministry's Liaison Officer in Liverpool had been none the easier for his status, which was not that of a full Divisional Food Officer, the north-western divisional headquarters being in Manchester. He complained that instructions from Ministry headquarters were sent via Manchester instead of directly to him, so that matters requiring his attention were reaching him six or seven days late—he had, for instance, not been informed of the whereabouts of food supplies recently despatched for emergency feeding; he complained, too, that Food Executive Officers and Area Commodity Officers had not been informed of his functions in an emergency and that co-operation with Divisional headquarters had not been smooth. In November 1941 the functions of the Deputy Divisional Food Officer at Liverpool were redefined to include separate responsibility within a specified area for emergency work, including control of bulk food supplies and transport problems. The Regional Commissioner at Manchester insisted on dealing with only one representative of the Ministry of Food, but agreed to recognise the Liverpool D.D.F.O. as responsible for the application of policy on emergency matters within the Merseyside area.

⁴ A difficulty experienced here and elsewhere was in letting people know what feeding arrangements had been made. (The Bootle local authority asked for the Ministry's help on this, and a representative from Public Relations Division went to advise.) It was found that dazed people did not pay any attention to loud-speaker cars. In Bath sandwichmen were used to parade the street with notices about feeding centres.

increased demand. The emergency arrangements for bread and milk, on which particular care had been expended because of the value of a regular supply of these necessities in keeping up civilian morale, had been very successful; indeed, they were never fully extended, for no two large cities were ever bombed on the same night, and it always proved possible to move ample bread supplies into a raided area from neighbouring towns.¹ Milk distribution, too, was kept up almost without a break, even when, as in Plymouth, the failure of power supplies prevented the normal processing, bottling, and distribution of milk by electric prams; customers of some dairies here for a time received raw, loose milk from horse-drawn carts, and it was claimed that only ten gallons of milk were wasted. Deliveries of milk in bulk were, on the whole easier to many provincial towns than to London as they were less dependent on rail transport over long distances, and surpluses were not uncommon after air raids.² The local stocks of corned beef under the control of Area Meat and Livestock Officers also proved valuable on many occasions in helping out the meat ration, especially when failure of public utilities had made cooking difficult.

Damage to retail businesses caused very considerable dislocation to the normal processes of food distribution, mitigated to the extent that Food Offices were prompt in issuing rationing documents and permits, and arranging for fresh supplies. Whether rationing was relaxed after a raid may be regarded as a measure both of the severity of the raid and of the efficiency of Food Office handling—although not an altogether reliable one, for in some places, such as Clydeside, Belfast, and Bootle, the very severity of the raid helped to solve the immediate problem of damage to retailers by bringing about the departure of large numbers of their customers. That strict rationing was relaxed after fewer raids in 1941 than in 1940 was probably due to improved Food Office organisation. The only place where it was entirely suspended for a few days was Plymouth, and this might have been avoided if arrangements had been made for alternative Food Office premises.³

The securing of fresh premises was found to be the chief problem in the restoration of normal food distribution after a raid. Retailers solved this in a number of ways. If the bombed district as a whole was not too badly damaged, empty shops and houses, halls, or cinemas,

¹ Among the achievements of the Emergency Bread Organisation were the despatch from Cardiff of a convoy of bread vans to raided Swansea, which arrived as the 'All Clear' was sounding, and the delivery of 2 million 2 lb. loaves to Liverpool.

² These were if possible diverted to manufacture; as with surpluses normally arising.

³ Rationing was suspended after the first raid on Coventry, but not after those of 1941. It was virtually suspended after the raids on Sheffield, and registration was suspended in Bristol during the December 1940 raids; unofficially, no doubt, a number of grocers in raided towns waived the strict rules of ration books and registration.

might be available for use by food traders, and food officers were empowered to requisition them,¹ but when large areas were laid waste with hardly a building left standing, some sort of makeshift premises were required. In Liverpool, it was planned to set up street shopping centres using as stalls pantechnicons lent by a local firm of furniture removers. These could be loaded at the suppliers and driven from there to the street market. Mobile shops of this sort were used after the heavy raids on Bootle in May 1941; and the idea was also applied in several places by Food Office staffs, who used vans from which to issue emergency ration cards after raids. In Swansea, the large Borough Market was completely destroyed during the three successive nights' raiding the town received in February, and an improvised market was set up on another site with borrowed trestles and tables. Bread distribution was kept up there by bread vans touring the streets. After the raids on Plymouth in March and April which virtually wiped out the centre of the city,² stalls were set up in the Pannier Market by traders who had lost their shops,³ and were still in use well after the war was over as no rebuilding had yet been possible.

Wholesale distribution was a much more difficult problem which cannot be said to have been satisfactorily solved either at the time of the raids or by plans devised afterwards. The paralysis of food distribution in Coventry after the raid of November 1940, when the city had to be fed from outside, and the precarious situations that had developed through damage to wholesalers in Bristol, Southampton, and Portsmouth, had by the beginning of 1941 made it clear that this was the most vulnerable link in the distributive chain. An attempt to tackle the problem was begun by the appointment of the Chairman of the Bristol Area Provisions and Groceries Committee, who had done good work after the raids in his own area, as Wholesale Trade Adviser at Ministry headquarters, with the aim of binding more closely together the various Provision and Grocery Committees by personal contact with their chairmen. His first practical job was to deal with the situation in Plymouth, where the raids in March and April demolished all wholesale businesses serving

¹ In March 1943 the Ministry delegated to local authorities powers to requisition premises for use as retail shops, as an extension of the powers they already possessed to requisition for communal feeding purposes. Racketeering in shop rents had made this very desirable.

² A local trader wrote of the scene, 'It is possible to stand in the central shopping area of Plymouth and Devonport without being able to see an inhabited building and practically without seeing any walls standing'. About 80 per cent. of the retail shops in the district were affected.

³ Some of these traders appealed to the Ministry for scales, and Ancillary Materials Division was asked to arrange for manufacturers to send scales to the local food office. A general arrangement for divisional reserves of weights and scales, to be stored in Buffer Depots, was made in November 1941.

the city and the country westwards. He was able to get some co-operation from wholesale groups in Bristol, Exeter, and Cornwall, although some of these had their own problems in supplying the increased demand from refugees from Plymouth. Rehabilitation of Plymouth wholesalers was difficult because of the desperate shortage of accommodation within the city. One large wholesale firm found a temporary haven in the Naval Barracks, until requisitioned premises were secured. A wholesale depot was also opened outside the town under the management of some of the wholesalers and, on the recommendation of the Wholesale Trade Adviser, a stock of some of the more common unrationed foods, such as canned goods, breakfast cereals, coffee essence, and cocoa, that tended to be in demand at times when cooking was difficult, was placed in a buffer depot at Tavistock.¹

VII

When this series of raids in the spring and summer of 1941 was over, the peak of the Ministry's emergency work had in fact passed, as later attacks never tested the organisation so severely. But the defences were kept under continuous review, first because of the persistent though increasingly remote fear of invasion, then through fear of German retaliation for the heavy allied air attacks from 1942 onwards, finally through knowledge of the new weapons the Germans were preparing, and the need to guard against tactical bombing as a counter to the allied invasion of Europe.

The main weaknesses revealed by the series of attacks just described, apart from deficiencies in the local organisations, were those in wholesale and retail distribution. Emergency Services Division therefore tried to provide official support for such devices as had proved useful in practice in the bombed towns. The Liverpool scheme for mobile shops was commended to Divisional Food Officers elsewhere, and financial help was promised for fitting up the vans with the necessary shelving and racking. In 1943, in the course of a review of emergency arrangements, the Division considered developing this plan by providing a number of strategically-placed columns of mobile food shops, controlled by the Divisional Food Officer on the lines of the Queen's Messenger Convoys, and run on Ministry of Food account; but the proposal was allowed to drop when it was found that most vulnerable Food Divisions had made some kind of provision for mobile shops, either by earmarking furniture vans or

¹ A shortage of unrationed goods was experienced in Lancashire towns after the evacuation of numbers of people from Bootle, and the establishment of a similar depot was considered; but the trouble was found to be mainly due to faulty distribution.

by arranging for privately-owned travelling shops to come into action. As market stalls had been found useful when food shops had been damaged in Swansea and Plymouth, the Ministry intervened to secure for food a share of 200 out of a stock of 700 steel booths stored in Ministry of Works depots throughout the country for hire to bombed-out traders;¹ the procedure for allocating booths was, however, very complicated,² and the number allotted to each area was small, so that although some use was made of the scheme in Exeter, where a temporary shopping centre was set up after a series of raids in April–May 1942, local officials were not enthusiastic about it. Neither Divisional Food Officers nor local authorities saw much value in elaborate advance planning for emergency shopping arrangements; they preferred to rely on the improvisation of the moment, and on comprehensive mutual assistance pacts, especially when there was more than one shopping centre in a town.³

Experience in Plymouth had suggested several useful measures for strengthening the wholesale system, such as the establishment of a depot outside the town; the creation of a dump of unrationed commodities, which might otherwise be difficult to direct to a stricken area as they were not under the close control of the Ministry; and the opening of a retail reception depot in the town, a device which proved useful in Exeter when it was bombed in 1942, although the one opened in Plymouth had not been used. Plymouth's biggest problem had been the shortage of accommodation, and efforts were made to insure against its repetition elsewhere by earmarking suitable premises; most of these, however, failed because the Ministry of Works objected to the earmarking of premises for an emergency that might never arise, and the wholesalers themselves did not want to rent alternative premises unless the Ministry of Food were prepared to pay for them. Fifty large Nissen huts were secured by the Ministry to supplement warehouse accommodation, and in February 1943 Divisional Food Officers were asked to make a survey of rough storage premises for use as temporary warehouses as a third line of defence, although it was admitted that any premises still available would be very rough.⁴ By this time, wholesalers' mutual assistance pacts were regarded as satisfactory.

¹ This scheme was under the control of the Board of Trade, and was made public in June 1942. The booths were to be allocated through local authorities for rent at 7s. per week.

² It involved action by the Food Executive Officer, the local authority, the Divisional Food Officer, the Area District Officer of the Board of Trade, and the Emergency Works Officer and District Surveyor, who were responsible for the transport and erection of the booths.

³ A few towns worked out emergency shopping schemes; the Bristol Chamber of Commerce prepared a plan for the erection of tents and marquees in open spaces.

⁴ In 1944, during the fly-bomb attack, it was suggested that space cleared in Buffer Depots about 20 miles from the centre of London might be used by groups of wholesalers transferred from the capital in the event of heavy attack.

The last major raid of 1941 was the attack on Hull of 17th–18th July.¹ No more attacks on a comparable scale took place until February 1944, when there was a fresh outbreak of raids on the London area, including three short but heavy attacks on successive nights. The series of attacks on cathedral cities in the spring and summer of 1942, known as ‘Baedeker raids’, were comparatively small,² but serious in relation to the size of the targets, and presented some food problems. After these raids most of the Ministry’s emergency feeding plans worked successfully, including the Queen’s Messenger Convoys which operated at Norwich, Canterbury, and Bath (where they did especially valuable work), and cooking depots outside Exeter, Bath, and Norwich. There was admittedly some confusion, however, over the direction of mobile canteens in Norwich, and at Exeter emergency feeding arrangements did not work quite smoothly because of the local workers’ frayed nerves, and control had to be temporarily assumed by a Ministry official. Bulk food supplies in the raided towns were only slightly affected apart from the loss in Exeter of a number of buffer depots, and in Norwich of several warehouses and also Reckitt and Colman’s factory. Consumer supplies were reasonably well maintained; some difficulty occurred over bread supplies in Bath, which were replenished from Bristol, and in Norwich, where the working of the Emergency Bread Scheme was not up to its usual high standard. The retail trade suffered most in Exeter, where about 100 food shops were demolished, including the suppliers of about 25,000 registrations in the High Street alone. Damage in the ancient centre of the town, with its closely-packed blocks of buildings and high fire risk, had been very great.³ Food registration was suspended although rationing was maintained,⁴ and a temporary shopping centre of about fifty stalls was set up in the High Market. A few Board of Trade steel booths were used but most stalls were built by the Ministry of Works from timber and corrugated asbestos sheets.

The general performance of the organisation in these raids was felt to be satisfactory though there were minor exceptions, such as rest centre provision at Exeter and Norwich, which was described as ‘not up to invasion standard’. There were scarcely any other opportunities for the Ministry’s emergency organisation to prove itself until

¹ The main effect of the Hull raids had been the substantial ‘trekking’ movement, in part countenanced by the local authority which had arranged for extra buses on roads out of the town.

² 30 aircraft are reported to have taken part in the heaviest raid on Exeter, and 60-70 in raids on Bath.

³ The absence of fire breaks in this central area is mentioned in the Ministry of Home Security reports on the Exeter raids, also the fact that six Ministry of Food buffer depots were within this area.

⁴ Both the main and the alternative Food Office were destroyed in Exeter, and their records were lost, but copies were sent from Honiton.

1944; some emergency meals were served in east coast towns attacked in 1943, and Queen's Messenger Convoys were in action that year in Chelmsford and Grimsby. Apart from this, the only training was provided by paper exercises, primarily designed to test the anti-invasion organisation at divisional headquarters.

In September 1943 the last and most urgent warning of prospective enemy attack was issued on the Minister's instructions. It indicated the possibility of a renewed air attack, causing blast on a much more extensive scale than anything already experienced. In London alone a daily total of homeless and refugees might add up to 200,000; the attack would be concentrated on London but its effects might spread over the south-eastern counties. This general warning referred to the risks of 'cascade' bombing, a term covering the use of both heavier bombs dropped from aircraft and rocket¹ or jet-propelled weapons.

There was naturally some doubt whether any organisation could be devised that would stand up to an attack on the scale envisaged. It was thought that the normal food rationing and distribution procedure might be impossible in London. Supplies might have to flow inwards to London from depots on the periphery, instead of outwards as in normal times; emergency feeding might also be necessary for most civil defence workers and others remaining in the city, as well as for large numbers of refugees who would leave. Away from London, preparations would have to be made in the reception areas for those evacuated under official schemes. Transport and communications for the whole country would be dislocated if London were put out of action, and food supplies normally handled by its ports and warehouse system would be particularly affected.

In addition to these problems, which were likely but not inevitable, there was the certainty that the impending allied invasion of Europe would touch the food organisation at a number of points. Service requirements might interfere with civilian supplies, but must have preference; the Services would receive priority over use of transport and communications, and there might be temporary interruptions to normal arrangements; the Ministry was warned, for instance, that the Isle of Wight might be isolated once or twice for up to a week, and had to make sure that the island had stocks to tide it over. As a result of the enemy's expected counter-offensive (as distinct from his attack on London) there might be a recurrence of danger within the 'coastal belt'. For security reasons reports to headquarters would have to be reduced to a minimum, and difficulties as far as

¹ The effects of rockets were greatly over-estimated mainly because of failure to allow for the quantity of fuel they had to carry. They were expected to cause total demolition within a radius of 750-850 feet from the point of impact, damage requiring first aid repairs within a radius of 1,500-1,700 feet, and minor damage up to 3,500 feet. The demolition force would be inadequate to cope with an attack on this scale, and an accumulation of uncleared 'incidents' was expected.

possible settled on the spot. The Home Defence Executive agreed that Ministry of Food representatives should be included in Planning Committees appointed for consultation between military commanders and local representatives of civil departments, to ensure that food problems should be recognised by the military and food distribution and processing interfered with as little as possible.¹

By May 1944 the Ministry's preparations to meet any emergency, whether from the consequences of allied operations or enemy attack, were substantially complete. Bulk stocks in the coastal zone of the southern half of the country had been built up to four weeks' supply, and to eight weeks' in each Division over the whole area concerned. Special arrangements had been made for bread supplies to London. Reserves of canned meat and milk were in position. Stocks of food had been laid in for key workers in Government departments and factories who might have to remain on duty in acute emergency. Attempts had been made to safeguard labour and fuel supplies to processing plants in operational areas; where possible, production had been stepped up elsewhere. Sustained efforts had been made, as already described, to strengthen the food distributive organisation; but in case of its failure, emergency feeding arrangements in Southern England had recently been reviewed, and mobile cooking equipment, secured since the 'Baedeker' raids had demonstrated the risk of unexpected attacks on unlikely or random targets, had been transferred to the south from less vulnerable Divisions. Divisional Food Officers in the north had also been asked to nominate staff for emergency work in the south if required.

The operational climax of the war, when it came on 6th June 1944, was thus almost an anti-climax for the Ministry of Food. The Divisional Food Officer at Cambridge spoke for all his colleagues in reporting that so far as his Division was concerned, the invasion had gone off 'most remarkably smoothly. We have literally had no interference in any food matter at all, and must give the Services absolutely full marks for the way they have run their show'. The food organisation along the south coast had a few difficulties to report, but they were trivialities, especially in view of the training food traders had already had in exercises. Within a few days, however, the long-foreseen enemy attack had started, and the first of the 'V' weapons had begun to fall in London and south-eastern England.

The force of the 'V' weapons, and especially their potential force if they had been delivered in the numbers planned by the Germans,

¹ In the United States Army Exercise 'Duck', at the beginning of 1944, food vehicles were denied access to roads in certain places. This was made clear by a Ministry of Food representative at a *post-mortem* meeting, and the United States Commanders promised to attend to this point in future. During Exercise 'Duck II', in February, traffic restrictions were much lighter, and food vehicles were allowed access to closed roads. This time difficulties were reported because of the calling out of Home Guard members who either held official positions in the local Ministry organisation or were key men in food trades.

should not be under-estimated. During the three months before the launching-sites of the fly-bombs were captured by the allied forces, widespread damage to property was caused throughout the London area: because there were no reliable periods of respite, as there had been during the night raiding of 1940-41, the strain on the people was considerable. Shelter usage increased to somewhere near the 1940 level, and large numbers of people left the capital. Nevertheless, the general effect on food interests was slight compared with that of the earlier raids. In the middle of September 1944, when the worst of the fly-bomb attack was over, it was possible to estimate its results. Bulk food losses had been small; 76 food factories had been damaged, but the damage was mainly slight and the total effect on production negligible, although there had been some falling off in output because of the strain on the workers,¹ especially in milk pasteurising and bottling plants where walls and roofs were often mainly of glass; difficulties threatened in June at one of United Dairies' bottling plants when the staff refused to work during alerts.² Bread production had suffered less than in earlier attacks, because blast damage was mainly above ground level, and therefore gas and water supplies were not much affected. The relatively small numbers of fires started had been a notable feature of the attack, and a reason for the light food losses; in earlier raids the damage had mainly been brought about by water used to put out the fires.³ In a few isolated cases fires had been caused by the bursting of gas mains.⁴ A good many wholesalers and retailers had their premises damaged, but as fly-bomb incidents had been widely dispersed, food distribution had caused no trouble. Population movements caused some supply problems outside London; 'points goods', especially biscuits, ran short, and some

¹ In the week ending 1st July 1944, sugar refining dropped by 20 per cent. and flour production by 26 per cent.

² A number of bottling plants were damaged, and after six weeks attack, United Dairies reported 198 out of 259 shops damaged to some extent. At the end of June they had to cut their deliveries by 10 per cent., but cuts in supplies were never serious.

In Dover, milk processing and distribution was affected by cross-Channel shelling, which opened up in September 1944 on coastal towns within range of the German guns. This also necessitated some emergency feeding, including shelter feeding in the cliff caves where practically the whole population retired when the warning was given. As a stand-by, a special free allocation of canned milk was made by the Food Office staff.

³ According to Salvage Division figures, about 100,000 tons of foodstuffs were affected by fly-bombs, of which 98,000 tons were recovered.

⁴ Such an incident at Dudin's Wharf, Bermondsey Wall, caused a difficult salvage problem. The wharf contained 4,000 tons of oilseeds and 4,800 tons of cereals and flour. Fires there burned for four days, during which thousands of gallons of water were pumped into the building, and hundreds of tons of oilseeds and cereals were washed into the adjoining streets and houses, blocking drains and sewers. Difficulty of access by road and cramped working conditions made the work of clearance and recovery slow, and as the weather was warm the wet material started to ferment and caused an unpleasant smell and fly nuisance; the Ministry's Infestation Division was called in. In September, a month after the event, Salvage Division estimated that it would take another two months to complete the job. In the end, all but about 1,000 tons of the goods was recovered.

remained scarce as, in an effort to mitigate hardship in the London area, the Ministry did not reduce its supplies there although the population had fallen. A special release of canned goods was made in the reception areas and retailers were allowed a points credit if they needed one to cover their extra orders. Labour shortages caused difficulty in the baking and retail distributive trades outside London in catering for the increased population; and they were felt in London as well. They would, in fact, have made it extremely difficult for the Ministry's emergency feeding plans to be put into effect had they been needed on anything like the expected scale. As it was, the London County Council lost through evacuation a quarter of the 4,000 staff employed in the meals service, and the Ministry considered applying to the Ministry of Labour for a priority in the allocation of labour for emergency feeding work. Fortunately, there was little demand for emergency feeding, as damage to public utilities was not serious and home cooking was possible. The chief demand was for mobile canteens to serve snacks to workers and survivors after bombs had fallen, and a limited street-to-street delivery of hot meals in insulated containers was carried out by the L.C.C., as it was found that some people whose homes had been damaged preferred to remain on the spot to protect their property from looting.

The long-range rockets, which began to fall when the fly-bomb attack was practically over, presented virtually no problem from the point of view of the Ministry of Food. Incidents were comparatively few in number,¹ and although the damage at the point of impact was much greater than that caused by the fly-bomb, it was much less widespread. Mobile feeding equipment was used in a few places in eastern England where rockets fell, and there was some food salvage work; apart from this, there was practically no call on the Ministry's emergency organisation.

The organisation of the food trades, reinforced by the Ministry's emergency provision, stood up to all the demands that were made on it after 1940. This does not necessarily mean that it could have withstood attacks of the weight that was feared, both before and during the war, and that was actually inflicted by the Allied air forces on cities in enemy territory. After an exercise in 1943 to test the preparedness of Divisional emergency arrangements under cascade bombing, it was remarked that the problem was almost entirely one of distribution. 'We had the food available but getting it to the people who wanted it would have been a very difficult operation'. A great deal had been learnt about the way in which to tackle the job of maintaining the flow of supplies in emergency: none the less the nature and prospective scale of the problem remained intractable.

¹ Only 500-600 rockets fell in the London area during the whole period of activity from 8th September 1944 to 27th March 1945.

The economic forces at work in a food-importing, urban society had produced a concentration of manufacture and distribution that was inherently highly vulnerable. To break up that concentration, in the name of safety, was an undertaking so formidable, costly, and lengthy, that one cannot imagine it being undertaken (which is not to say accomplished), except in a completely collectivist State.

CHAPTER XXII

Emergency Feeding

WAR-TIME Meals Division, the name eventually chosen for that section of the Ministry of Food whose activities are the concern of the following chapters, had a dual function. When the pattern of its work became clear, which was not until it had been in existence for six months, it was found to have two distinct aspects: Emergency Feeding, and day-to-day Communal Feeding. The latter came first in point of time, for it was a request by Ministers that communal feeding schemes be organised that led to the Division's foundation in the summer of 1940. From the beginning of September, however, the Division was for a while mainly concerned with the former; later its attention was about equally divided between the two.

Although a precedent for communal feeding in war-time existed in the 'National Kitchens' of 1917-18, the idea of large-scale state provision of meals received little attention before 1940. Within the Food (Defence Plans) Department, the need for some kind of feeding arrangements for victims of air attack was briefly mentioned, but received no further study.¹ In the autumn of 1939 the new Ministry of Food was pressed to consider setting up communal feeding centres to provide a cheap meal for the poor, on the model of the National Kitchens, but decided that there was no demand at that time. After the formation of the Coalition Government, however, communal feeding began to be advocated afresh by some Ministers as a form of everyday welfare provision, as well as an element of defence policy for a country under attack. The Ministry, although unconvinced that it was the right department for the task, was persuaded to take responsibility, and began to devise tentative schemes; but the great air raids, supervening almost at once, produced a feeding crisis, in which measured policy was impossible and improvisation essential. Such resources as there were had to be mobilised as seemed best, and problems as they arose were met by expedients which in the end were elaborated into a comprehensive scheme for feeding arrangements in any foreseeable emergency: though not until the crisis had passed, with the winter of 1940-41.

Emergency feeding policy in the course of time underwent an important transformation; its original limited aim of providing for

¹ Food in rest centres was primarily a Ministry of Health responsibility. See above, pp. 284-285.

the few who could not help themselves because they had lost everything through bombing was broadened by the realisation that the whole community of a stricken area might need temporary help with the business of preparing meals. So too in the wider field of providing everyday meals for the general public under normal conditions—*communal feeding* as distinct from *emergency feeding*. In the summer of 1940, communal feeding was viewed as a specialised form of public assistance in kind, to help out those who might be affected by economic and other war-time difficulties; but the development of school and industrial feeding came to be accepted by the Government as a feature of social policy with a permanent peace-time value, as well as a convenient means of augmenting the rations of special groups of people.

While falling in with the general view, the Ministry of Food never acknowledged that it was bound to provide day-to-day feeding for the community at large. Its initial scepticism about the need for communal feeding was modified into one of acceptance, which in the end became enthusiastic, of the need for a Government-subsidised service under Ministry supervision as a supplement to other catering activities; but the provision of meals was never regarded as an obligation. Delegating responsibility for organising communal restaurants upon the local authorities, the Ministry used no weapons stronger than exhortation and persuasion to get them opened. Consequently the development of *British Restaurants* was patchy, often owing more to local initiative than local need, and the movement, although successful within its own limits, represented only about three per cent. of the total of catering activity during the war.¹

A preliminary exchange of views on communal feeding between the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Food in May 1940 gave a hint of the future attitudes of their respective Departments. Mr. Bevin thought the Ministry of Food should run canteens for workers. Lord Woolton rejected this idea; he thought local authorities would be the proper bodies to run communal feeding in cases where employers could not undertake it.

In June communal feeding came up at the Food Policy Committee, as a possible means for the relief of distress among the poor, hit by rising prices; the extension of school meals was proposed as likely to be of most assistance to large families.² The Minister of Food suggested that school feeding centres might be valuable as nuclei for communal feeding in emergency, and alluded to the need for canteen meals for factory workers called on to work longer hours

¹ From figures of meals served weekly, March 1944. At this time British Restaurants served 7.5 per cent. of all *main meals* served in catering establishments.

² The Ministry was giving some attention at this time to various devices for subsidising food purchases by the poor, and some effort was made to survey conditions in the East End of London; but no definite evidence seems to have been found of people going short through lack of money.

and night shifts; but he avoided committing his Ministry to any action in this new field. At a further meeting, Ministers generally agreed that communal feeding arrangements were desirable for the community as a whole, as well as for special groups; the central Department to make them should be the Ministry of Food.

In discussion between officials, it had been readily agreed that school feeding could be dealt with separately by the Education Departments; on provision for workers, the views of the Ministries of Food and Labour could not be reconciled. No department possessed ready-made machinery that could be used to work large-scale feeding schemes, and as the Ministry of Health argued strongly that local authorities could not be asked to undertake more work it seemed that a new organisation would have to be built up; the Ministry of Labour considered that this should be done by the Ministry of Food, which could cover factory workers unprovided with canteens as part of the general population. The latter, however, persisted in the view that communal feeding was none of its business; both special classes and the general population in emergency were, or could be, adequately covered by other Departments with existing responsibilities. In face of the general desire that it should take some action, the Ministry offered to establish one or two National Kitchens on its own account, to gain 'valuable experience and guidance as to the possibilities of communal feeding in an acute emergency', and proposed that it should secure a fleet of mobile self-contained cooking units, or Field Kitchens, which might prove the most efficient means of feeding people on the move. A survey of commercial catering facilities was also to be made. The Food Policy Committee approved these hastily improvised suggestions, and decided, moreover, that the Ministry of Food should be responsible for supplementing canteen provision for factory workers.

There followed a half-hearted attempt to comply with Ministers' wishes. So far as industrial catering was concerned, the Welfare Officers of the Ministry of Labour were to survey the country and report any instances where service by factory canteens or commercial caterers was out of the question and communal meals were needed outside the factory.¹ The Ministry of Food undertook thereafter to send an expert to investigate the situation, and, where a need was proved, to open communal feeding centres; the appointment of such an expert was considered, although not made. No plans were prepared for the management of any centres that might have to be opened, but the Minister suggested that the help of the voluntary organisations might be sought in running them, and in July an approach was made to the National Council for Social Service, which was willing to experiment with communal feeding in London, and

¹ Factory canteens are the concern of the History of Manpower in this series.

with ministerial approval began to do so in existing social centres. It had to be recognised, however, that the scale of operation by voluntary organisations would be small, and that reliance could not be placed on them alone as tools for the establishment of communal feeding.¹

In consultation with the Ministry of Labour, Manchester and Birmingham were selected for the establishment of experimental National Kitchens to be run on the cafeteria principle, and a search for suitable premises was begun through the Divisional Food Offices and in collaboration with the Office of Works. Although at the outset the kitchens were intended to be situated 'in a poor neighbourhood and preferably close . . . to a factory or factories engaged on essential national work', their 'model' character was afterwards emphasised: 'it is more important that the premises in which they are opened should be suitable for our purpose than that they should be in an area where the greatest demand for these facilities exists at the moment'. This insistence on suitable premises may help to explain the total failure to secure premises of any kind, even after the search had been extended to other cities. The scheme was eventually dropped, in view of the development of communal feeding under the management of local authorities, which incidentally were able to set up flourishing centres in the very places in which the Ministry had failed to find accommodation.²

The survey of existing catering facilities was undertaken by a questionnaire addressed to all catering establishments through local Food Offices. Its primary object was to estimate the help that might be given by commercial caterers in emergency, but as less than fifty per cent. of them replied, it cannot be said to have served any useful purpose.

The second project—a force of travelling field kitchens for emergency use—was soon found to bristle with difficulties, both technical and administrative, of which one of the most thorny was staffing. In this as in other communal feeding schemes the Ministry was unable even to envisage forming its own labour force to operate the units. In discussing National Kitchens it had considered the employment of

¹ A number of small communal meals centres were opened by voluntary workers in the London area after the beginning of September 1940, just in time to cope with the increased demand caused by the air attack. Their methods of operation included many of the features that later became universal in British Restaurants.

² The decision to abandon the plan was never formally communicated to other Departments, an omission which caused some complaint.

As late as 29th October a high official of the Ministry of Food was inquiring whether the 'decision to abandon National Kitchens had been formally and authoritatively taken'. It was agreed that the decision had never been notified to the Food Policy Committee, but the conclusion was against 'an exhumation merely for the purpose of a decent funeral service'.

In November the Ministry of Labour learned to its surprise of the abandonment of the National Kitchens idea by the Ministry of Food, and thought that it had 'good reason to feel aggrieved' at this change of policy without due notification.

industrial caterers; for the mobile force it favoured the formation of a special uniformed unit organised as a section of the Local Defence Volunteers, a proposal that was opposed by the Ministry of Home Security because it did not conform with the non-military character of the Civil Defence Services. Cooking equipment was available in the War Department, but the difficulties of securing a fleet of transport for equipment and staff proved insuperable; the War Office and Ministry of Transport were unable to help. After an unsuccessful attempt to hand the whole responsibility over to the War Office, at least as a temporary measure, the Ministry of Food prepared to acknowledge its defeat to the Food Policy Committee. By this time it was early September and the whole plan seemed out of date; the opening of heavy air attack had revealed the need for emergency feeding on different lines from those envisaged in June, when the problem of providing for air raid victims had seemed inseparable from that of coping with streams of refugees.

Some difference of opinion existed within the Ministry itself about the functions and future development of the Ministry's communal organisation. The Food Economy Division, formed with the objects of preventing waste of food and encouraging its right use, saw communal feeding centres as centres also of the 'Kitchen Front' propaganda it had recently begun to disseminate, and as a logical development of its food education movement, which could put precept into practice by supplying economical and nutritious meals to the poor. But, in the prevailing view, the new work was essentially an administrative job requiring the creation of a new Division. The Minister had been giving his personal attention to the problem, and had reverted to his earlier plan of calling on local authorities to undertake communal feeding. Setting aside the objections to their use that had been voiced by other departments, he argued that their local knowledge made them more appropriate for the task than the Central Government; foreseeing the probable cost of the scheme, he also hoped to get the municipalities to accept financial responsibility.¹ On 14th August he invited the Lord Mayor of Liverpool to begin schemes for communal feeding in working class districts, and this initiative in his home city was followed up with other Lord Mayors and with the London County Council. A prominent Liverpool business man with experience of the food trade was made Director of Communal Feeding, and a technical expert was appointed to work on National Kitchens. Some permanent Civil Servants were

¹ As late as the end of September, when the London County Council had already demanded and secured a guarantee of reimbursement for financial loss for emergency meal centres, a draft prepared in the Communal Feeding Division stated: 'No Exchequer grant is contemplated under this scheme; the cost of establishing the centres is to be borne by the local authorities and thereafter it is expected that the food will be sold at a price sufficient to cover its cost plus a small percentage to meet running expenses'.

attached, to make up the new Division, which was barely, however, in existence when air attacks on London produced a welter of new problems.

II

When the Ministry accepted responsibility for emergency feeding, it had no body of experience or of planning on which to draw;¹ its task must have appeared as a series of crises arising one upon the other rather than a problem open to consideration as a whole. During the winter of 1940-41, however, the main stages of a campaign for emergency feeding were identified, and found to be—in order of time after a raid—first a feeding service for shelters wherever they were in prolonged use; then a ‘front-line’ service of mobile units equipped to bring hot drinks and snacks quickly to sufferers from a raid; finally a chain of feeding stations, both permanent and ‘shadow’, ready to come into action immediately to supply more solid meals, at first of a simple, easily-prepared type, but with facilities for preparing a more varied menu in the event of a prolonged interruption to normal catering arrangements.

Shelter feeding was a pressing requirement in late September, when the Ministry of Food was made formally responsible for it. The conditions that had developed in public shelters were among the consequences of the mistaken pre-war forecasts of the nature of air attack. The pre-war planners had expected short, fierce raids, mostly in daylight, and evenly scattered over a wide area, with about seven minutes’ warning; they had provided public air-raid shelters for people caught in the streets by warnings, but as raids were expected to be short, amenities in the shelters were thought unnecessary, and it was not until August 1940 that local authorities were told they could provide even as much as seating and limited lighting in surface shelters.² Shelter protection against direct hits by heavy bombs was not attempted; the amount of labour and materials required for constructing deep shelters seemed prohibitive, and they were expected to be too difficult to reach in the short period of warning that would be available. Instead, the Government favoured a policy of dispersal, and relied mainly on the ‘Anderson’ domestic steel shelters for individual families.

¹ ‘When London was attacked in September 1940 not only was there no provision made anywhere for a service such as we now call Emergency Meals, but it was not even decided that the responsibility should rest with the Ministry of Food. We were all groping in the dark’.

² For shelter policy and usage see T. H. O’Brien, *Civil Defence* (H.M.S.O.), 1955.

When the main attack on London opened conditions—like the behaviour of the public—were in many ways the reverse of what had been expected. Raids were prolonged and occurred mainly at night, and the weight of the enemy attack was usually concentrated on a single target. In consequence of the fall of France, little warning was possible, and there were many instances of bombs falling in advance of the sirens. The morale of the people stood up unexpectedly well to what was, after all, an attack on a scale much smaller than had been envisaged, and Londoners found it possible to adjust themselves so as to carry on life and work much as usual. Many who lacked the *sang froid* to sleep at home found comfort in society, and the illusion, if not always the reality, of safety in a public shelter; so every evening the shelters filled up. The tube stations, deep and out of earshot of bombs, immediately proved as attractive as they had done in the 1914 war, and although the Government, as before, had decided early in the war that the tube railways must be kept clear for transport, and must not be used as shelters, the people could not be kept out; faced with a *fait accompli*, the Government and the London Passenger Transport Board had to give way.

The extent of shelter usage in London should be kept in proportion. It has been estimated¹ that even at the height of the attack in September and October, only one in seven of the population of Metropolitan London slept in a public air-raid shelter or tube station. But the numbers who did so were large enough. In October 1940, 120,000 persons were sleeping in the tubes, and possibly another 220,000 in public shelters of various types; an unknown number of these were homeless, and *de jure* clients of the already overflowing rest centres. This formidably large shelter population, ignoring the principle of dispersal that had been the keynote of the Government's policy, was using as dormitories shelters totally without amenities and producing conditions of squalor that called for immediate attention. A requisite of decent conditions in the shelters, besides sanitation, bunks and bedding, was food nourishing enough to sustain people who might be getting little enough elsewhere—for some were known to be treating the shelters virtually as their homes; and in late September the Ministry of Food was charged with providing it.

Government action had been anticipated by voluntary organisations, notably the Salvation Army, which on 20th September was invited by the police to supply refreshments in certain very large shelters in the East End.² The Ministry at once harnessed this

¹ In November the Ministry of Health began a census of shelter population in Metropolitan London. By this time 13 per cent. of the people were sleeping in communal shelters and 27 per cent. in Anderson and other domestic shelters.

² Other voluntary organisations prominently concerned in emergency feeding work throughout the war were the W.V.S., the Y.M.C.A., the Church Army, and the Women's Legion.

voluntary activity by allotting selected shelters to the various organisations, and asking them to experiment to find the times and places of greatest demand. It attempted to bring in commercial caterers as auxiliaries to the scheme by asking them to open early to provide breakfasts for people leaving the shelters, and by arranging with the police for coffee-stalls to function during daylight hours, but the response was poor, and in any case it soon appeared that there was no demand for breakfasts.

The practical difficulties of shelter feeding were great. The first voluntary efforts were usually made by means of mobile canteens, which the organisations had been operating since the beginning of the war for various feeding purposes. At first the Ministry supported this method of feeding by allocating extra vehicles, but later abandoned it as unsuitable, as canteens had to operate during raids, when driving was unsafe and manoeuvring, particularly of the more common trailer type of vehicle, often difficult; on the other hand, suitable equipment for fitting up canteens within the shelters was rare, and at first there was neither water supply nor electric power in them. Even at the peak period of demand, catering in shelters was seldom remunerative, and experience showed that apart from a few cases where exceptional catering ability was shown, shelter feeding could not cover the cost of paid labour.¹ Finding commercial caterers broken reeds, and the voluntary societies unable to cope with so big a problem, the Ministry resorted to local authorities once more by calling on all boroughs in the London Civil Defence Region to organise shelter feeding through whatever catering facilities might be to hand, suggesting a shelter holding 200 persons as a suitable unit for a canteen. To empower local authorities to control prices, and times and conditions of sale, of food in shelters and to prevent any competition between rival suppliers, an Order² was made providing for a special licence for shelter caterers.

In November 1940 the District Shelter Feeding Officers appointed by the Ministry to work in liaison with the local authorities reported disappointing progress with shelter feeding schemes; this was put down to poor response from caterers, and especially to the lack of any financial reimbursement for expenditure by the authorities, some of which had been considering taking over the catering themselves. This omission seems surprising in view of the Ministry's

¹ The question of electricity charges caused much friction with the commercial caterers, who maintained that the Ministry had given an undertaking that they would not have to bear the cost. The Ministry and the London Civil Defence Region agreed that charges for current ought to be covered by prices. The submission of electricity bills hastened the withdrawal of many caterers from shelter feeding early in 1941, a development viewed with equanimity by the Ministry, which by this time had realised that small schemes on a self-help basis, adjusted to actual shelter 'usage' rather than 'capacity', provided the most practical solution of how to serve a clientele whose numbers, though liable to sudden increase after a heavy raid, always tended to dwindle after the peak period of the autumn of 1940.

² S.R. & O. (1940) No. 1964.

experience with the London County Council¹ but was partly explained by the hope that money for equipping shelter feeding schemes would be forthcoming from the Lord Mayor's Air Raid Distress Fund.² The Ministry and the London Civil Defence Region,³ acting in concert, thereupon authorised expenditure on minor canteen fittings and equipment, and a financial guarantee against operating losses was given, contingent on the return of monthly accounts.⁴ To help overcome the shortage of equipment, the Ministry evolved a scheme for a central pool, which in its extensions to other branches of emergency and communal feeding was to develop into one of the most notable features of a centrally administered meals service. Orders were placed for supplies of equipment of certain standardised types, and local authorities were invited to apply for direct provision of equipment from the Ministry in lieu of grant.

It rapidly became clear, however, that these financial arrangements were unworkable. The people who were running shelter feeding were as often as not volunteers from among the shelterers who were quite unused to keeping the accounts necessary to enable claims to be made for the recovery of operating losses. Organisers also complained that takings were too small to cover the amortisation⁵ of the capital cost of equipment from the Ministry pool without a sharp rise in the prices charged for food. As a result, some authorities were reluctant to begin schemes at all under the Ministry's conditions.⁶ The Treasury readily agreed to abandon the accounting arrangements, together with the guarantee against operating losses, but was brought only with difficulty to consent to the free loan of equipment and might not have done so at all had not the position been virtually given away in advance by the Home Secretary's free issue of shelter fittings. The pool of equipment remained as the only link between the Ministry and the local authorities; but the altered arrangements were justified by a rapid spurt that now took place in the development of shelter feeding schemes; by the end of April 1941 most boroughs had completed their plans.

¹ See below, pp. 369-370.

² A grant of £20,000 was in fact made from the Fund, but £15,000 of this was allocated to the L.P.T.B. scheme (p. 350) and the remainder to voluntary organisations for shelter feeding equipment.

³ The London Civil Defence Region, under the direction of the Ministry of Home Security, was responsible for shelter construction generally.

⁴ The financial arrangements resembled those for communal feeding by local authorities (below, p. 384 *seq.*).

⁵ The period suggested by the Ministry for the amortisation of capital expenditure was one not exceeding two years.

⁶ It was reported that in six weeks after the issue of the Ministry's letter the volume of applications for equipment from the comparatively small number of voluntary organisations (which had it on free loan) exceeded that of all applications from local authorities.

The history of the London Passenger Transport Board's tube-station feeding service illustrates in miniature the characteristics of shelter feeding. The fluctuations of the tube-station population throughout the war acted as a barometer indicating the general state of affairs in London shelters, and the tube refreshment service was regarded as the backbone of London's shelter feeding arrangements and as such maintained until the end of the war.

The Board was approached by the Ministry early in October 1940, and agreed to provide its own catering service as the Ministry's agent, with a grant of £15,000 out of the cheque received from the Lord Mayor's Air Raid Distress Fund. The Board was not required to furnish a detailed statement of accounts, but the Ministry was represented on the Tube Refreshments Committee that ran the service. It was hoped that the scheme, which was efficiently managed and comparatively well supplied with staff and equipment, would pay its way, and this might have happened if it could have run at something approaching its full capacity of 70,000 snacks nightly. But decline in custom and the necessity of employing paid staff made losses inevitable, except at rare intervals such as the beginning of the fly-bomb attacks in June and July 1944, when the number of customers rose to about 60,000 nightly. At other times, numbers of shelterers fell as low as 700-800, many of whom were probably homeless, and demand for refreshments was sustained by casual travellers passing through the stations. The Ministry seriously considered closing down the whole service, but refrained from doing so as experience showed that one or two heavy raids could multiply the tube-station population tenfold overnight, and the Board could not undertake to restart even a partial service from a standstill in less than a week. Service was, therefore, continued in a minimum 24 stations right to the end of the war, and at the close of operations showed a total deficit of £17,500, which may be considered a reasonable figure for an undertaking of this size.

Shelter feeding was mainly a London problem, for the practice of sleeping in the shelters did not appear in provincial towns, except for the ports of Liverpool, Cardiff, and Bristol, which experienced protracted spells of raiding, and south-east coastal towns such as Dover, Margate, and Chatham, which suffered from 'tip-and-run' attacks and shelling. When the practice did appear, conditions were often bad, especially as many provincial municipalities opposed the provision of amenities for fear of encouraging the use of the shelters by night. The Government's dispersal policy was rebounding on its own head and providing a convenient excuse for inactivity. Experience in London, however, had shown that bad shelter conditions did not discourage sheltering when raids were heavy; and even when a slackening of the enemy attack early in 1941 allowed a

breathing-space, the fear persisted that past experience was only a foretaste of renewed violence to come, in preparation for another attempt at invasion. It was, therefore, thought wise to extend the London shelter feeding scheme to vulnerable provincial centres.

Nominations of areas where schemes were desirable were secured from Regional Commissioners in England and Wales, not without opposition from some who held fast to the principle of dispersal. Towns nominated were brought within the scope of the Ministry of Food's operations by piecemeal extension of the Shelter Feeding Order, and were informed of the Treasury assistance available for canteen installation. Unremitting effort on the part of the Ministry's District Shelter Feeding Officers—who provided local authorities with an advisory service—was required to maintain progress. Some authorities were openly hostile, notably Sheffield,¹ and even where opposition was not shown progress was slow. In the absence of air raids, which had often produced a remarkable acceleration in the development of communal feeding schemes, it was difficult to urge authorities to press on with schemes for an emergency that might never materialise.² By the end of the year, the more laggardly authorities were being overtaken by increasing difficulties over labour and materials, and in April 1942, when about one-fifth of shelter feeding installations remained to be provided, drastic cuts in labour quotas for civil defence work and the relegation of shelter amenities to the bottom of the priorities list made the achievement of the programme seem almost impossible. However, in January 1943 the Shelter Feeding Branch was able to report that the installation of canteen facilities in the qualifying shelters was almost complete. Catering schemes had been provided wherever canteens existed but the actual usage of shelters had seldom been heavy enough to justify their operation. The majority of provincial shelter feeding schemes, in fact, remained untried. The risk of shelter caterers being caught without stocks by a sudden heavy demand was recognised, and in September 1941 provincial authorities were recommended in such circumstances to supply them iron rations from emergency meals stocks.

Statistical returns showing the shelter feeding position on certain nights were begun by Food Executive Officers in London before the end of 1940,³ and were collected in the provinces from October 1941

¹ The Sheffield authorities maintained firmly that there was no night usage of the larger shelters in the centre of the city, but the District Officer discovered bedding and other traces of occupation in them.

² In April 1942 the Colwyn Bay headquarters of the Division thought it well to give a word of encouragement to its own Shelter Feeding staff in London.

³ Difficulty was experienced in collating shelter feeding returns, which were known to be unreliable, especially at the beginning. The L.P.T.B. never kept accurate records of the numbers served, and merely returned figures of the numbers of hot beverages served.

onwards. Provision of shelter meals in London reached its peak in December 1940 (allowing for the numbers fed in tube stations for which no returns were made at that time); the peak in the operation of feeding schemes came in April 1941, when about 185,000 people were fed in nearly 2,400 shelters, including the tubes. Thus shelter feeding, even in a partially developed state, missed the peak period for shelter occupation (in October 1940 it was estimated that about 340,000 people spent the night in shelters and tube stations). The number of schemes continued to increase until 1943, but that of meals served fell off rapidly in mid-1942 and remained limited until 1944; it recovered during the fly-bomb period to about a third of the level of custom in early 1941. In the provinces, demand was negligible from the start, being confined to a few areas out of the whole country, and shelter usage had already been declining for months before feeding schemes were introduced.

In view of the limited operation of shelter feeding schemes, they can only be regarded as an insurance measure against the risk of renewed attacks on the 1940 scale or worse. The coverage in London was fairly adequate, ranging from about eighty-five per cent. of the largest shelters to about twenty per cent. of the smallest, with an average of about thirty per cent. In provincial areas nominated for schemes, average provision was only about twenty per cent., with a range of from fifteen to fifty per cent., although more shelters might have been supplied by mobile schemes in case of need.

III

Most voluntary organisations operated *mobile canteens*, purchased with their own funds or presented by private benefactors, which they had used since the beginning of the war for serving refreshments to the Forces and some others. Certain local authorities also controlled canteens, usually staffed by voluntary workers, for supplying the police and civil defence services. Voluntary initiative after the opening of air attack on London brought out the canteens to serve at air-raid shelters and at the scenes of 'incidents', and the London County Council used those under its control as adjuncts to its meals service by sending them out stocked with food from central kitchens. They were obviously the most effective means of rushing food to a given spot which might be entirely without feeding facilities, and in the first hectic weeks of improvisation the Ministry made great efforts to increase the number available by placing its own orders and appealing publicly for assistance in building up a fleet of canteens.

The response was embarrassing. Gifts of money and canteens flooded in from the United Kingdom and overseas, including an eventual total of nearly £100,000 subscribed from the Colonies, of which only £10,000 was spent. As the Minister pointed out, 'in the long run, such gifts do nothing, from the financial point of view, other than save the Treasury money'. Their chief significance was in their publicity and political value, but they produced their own problems when the help offered was over-generous.¹ All canteens received or ordered by the Ministry were allocated to independent bodies, frequently to voluntary organisations for operation in designated areas; some went to local authorities.

The Ministry soon recognised that co-ordination of the canteens worked by a number of independent concerns was badly needed, and tried to open interdepartmental discussion on the subject, but with little response. Meanwhile, evidence was accumulating of lack of direction, overlapping, and gaps in the canteen service at the sites of 'incidents'.² The problem was aggravated by the extension of heavy bombing of provincial cities where little or no provision had been made for emergency feeding outside the rest centres. When Coventry had its first big raid on 14th–15th November, the Ministry had to arrange for canteens to go there from places as far apart as Northampton, Shrewsbury, and London: some failed to arrive at all. After the Southampton raid on 30th November, a scratch collection of canteens went down from London, only to be told that their services were not required; the withdrawal of some of them was immediately followed by another raid. Some of those that remained were reported by an observer to be short of supplies,³ and unable to reach more than a handful of people because the public did not know of their existence. From towns subsequently raided came the same story of canteens insufficient in number, inadequately staffed, and without means of replenishing supplies, accomplishing far less than they

¹ That the publicity value of mobile canteens could be turned to advantage was shown by the episode of the mobile soup kitchens provided for air-raid sufferers by a powdered-soup manufacturer. The Ministry had some difficulty in avoiding the appearance of being the sponsor of this enterprise.

On a larger scale was the Ford Emergency Food Vans scheme. About 450 Ford vans were presented by Mr. Henry Ford, his son and other donors for use by local authorities. The vans were stationed throughout the country with Ford dealers, who provided free servicing. They were primarily intended for emergency feeding, but although not ideal for the purpose they were mainly used for the transport of meals from Cooking Depots and British Restaurants.

² For instance, the Ministry of Labour's London Divisional Welfare Officer had found that several voluntary organisations had an unofficial arrangement for sharing the work, but on one occasion the Salvation Army and the Y.M.C.A. both arrived to do a job, and on another the Y.M.C.A. turned up only to find that the Borough Council's canteen was already on the site.

³ One canteen had arrived from Acton 'with the most haphazard stores—tea, sugar and some soap [*sic*, ?soup] tablets'. In another, the woman in charge said 'she had no idea how to renew supplies, unless she went to Chichester'.

might owing to lack of central control to direct them where they were most needed.¹

By December an embryonic scheme had been worked out in collaboration with Home Security, for the registration of voluntary canteens with Divisional Food Officers, who, in liaison with Regional Commissioners, could direct them as required in emergency; meanwhile, however, a new development had supervened. The Civil Defence Executive Sub-Committee, meeting after the Southampton raid, had approved a Ministry of Food suggestion for a reserve of canteens under central control which could be sent anywhere in emergency. On to this plan was grafted that of a central corps of women volunteers, stationed in units under the control of Divisional Food Officers to operate the reserve of vehicles, which would be so planned as to be self-supporting in food and independent of public gas, water, and electricity.

The relation of existing mobile canteens to this new service and their respective functions in the general scheme for emergency feeding were at first obscure, so that co-ordination plans hung fire for a while. The further history of canteens is inseparable from that of the new *Convoys*, which represent the Ministry's first deliberately-planned measure to cater for difficulties after air raids, and the beginning of a new phase in the development of emergency feeding. The new plan was in essentials a duplication of the idea of travelling field kitchens conceived at mid-summer, except that the Ministry now envisaged ordering new vehicles instead of making shift with old or borrowed. Before the plan was put in hand, the Ministry made one more attempt to withdraw from the direct management of this new venture in emergency feeding, suggesting that a task so largely concerned with Civil Defence might properly be considered the work either of the Ministry of Home Security or of the Ministry of Health; but the Civil Defence Committee preferred control of the new force, as of the old mobile canteens, to rest with the Ministry of Food.

The task was tackled with the greatest energy. An officer was specially brought in by the Minister to organise the convoys, and Divisional Food Officers were given a first warning of a plan to supplement mobile canteens. Money for the vehicles was to be forthcoming from the 'United States British War Relief Fund';² and Her Majesty the Queen, who contributed to the cost of some of the canteens, agreed that the new women's corps should be called the 'Queen's Messengers'. The original idea that the corps was to be an

¹ In a report from Manchester, which was raided just before Christmas, it was said that 'no one seemed to know how many they had, where they had come from or where they were operating. This service showed complete lack of organisation and it is doubtful how far these canteens were doing useful work'.

² The cost of some vehicles was charged against funds available from other sources.

entirely new creation was abandoned in favour of a plan to recruit Queen's Messengers from the Women's Voluntary Service, whose services in connection with Field Kitchens had been offered by the Dowager Lady Reading in July 1940. Crews of women were to be trained to work with the actual convoys and would travel with them to the bombed areas, where they might be relieved by resident W.V.S. workers who could be appointed temporary Queen's Messengers; in action they would be commanded by an Assistant Divisional Food Officer in charge of Convoys. Operational control of the Convoys was to be retained by the Divisional Food Officers, who would be responsible for garaging, maintenance, and the training of crews, and for directing them when required to places indicated by the Regional Commissioners. Strategic control of the whole Queen's Messenger Convoy force was to remain with the War-time Meals Division (as it was now called) which authorised the deployment of Convoys throughout the country according to need.

The Annex¹ shows the make-up of the Convoys. They were designed to be independent of outside services, including water, and to carry supplies and equipment for the preparation without replenishment of 18,000 meals of a substantial 'snack' type which could be distributed from the central kitchen by the canteens. The original design for a Convoy, and the type of vehicles and fittings selected, appear on the whole to have been found satisfactory in operation; apart from a few minor adaptations, the only serious criticism consistently voiced in later operational reports was of the motor-cycles, intended for marshalling the Convoy en route. These were reconditioned machines and suffered from constant breakdowns. A total of 114 vehicles was ordered in the first place² to make up 18 Convoys, and deliveries began in March 1941. One Convoy was originally allocated to each Divisional Headquarters, with the exception of West Scotland and North Wales; later, three additional Convoys were stationed in the London area, and a reserve Convoy under the direct control of War-time Meals Division was stationed in Chester.

Consideration of the financial basis on which Convoys were to be operated revealed a problem of some importance, which recurs in connection with other types of emergency feeding. It had originally been intended that food supplies by the Convoys would be charged for so that no cost would fall on the Exchequer, but it was realised on reflection that it would not in practice be possible to segregate the destitute 'rest centre' class from others in the confusion after a raid, and that others not technically homeless or destitute might be temporarily without funds and could hardly be refused food. As the

¹ p. 380, below.

² Later a utility van to carry some of the Queen's Messengers en route, and a welfare van for their use during operations, were added to each Convoy.

Treasury was anxious not to abandon the 'self-supporting' principle completely, it was eventually agreed to compromise by supplying free meals during the first forty-eight hours of Convoy service, but displaying a tariff of charges and providing a collecting-box for voluntary contributions.¹

Like other branches of emergency feeding, Queen's Messenger Convoys must be judged on their insurance value rather than their performance. Some Convoys never went into action at all; others only on minor operations lasting a day or two, and no Convoy operated on more than three or four occasions. As early as June 1941 the first of a number of proposals was made by another section of the Ministry for an alternative use for vehicles from the Convoys, on the ground that they 'stood idle all day long'; but it was decided to keep them intact as an emergency reserve. They were ultimately handed over as complete units for relief work on the Continent at the end of the war.

The occasions when the Convoys saw action seem to have justified the choice of this type of self-contained unit for emergency feeding. In Bootle during the prolonged attack of May 1941 the Queen's Messengers were for some days practically the only means of emergency feeding, as most of the emergency feeding stations previously established had been destroyed. Convoys therefore had to operate for much longer than the two or three days envisaged before static feeding centres could be brought into operation. Altogether, six Convoys, including those sent from the London, Midlands and North Midlands Divisions as well as the local Headquarters, operated in the Liverpool and Bootle area over a period of 13 days and served over 400,000 portions of food. When Pembroke Dock was raided about the same time, the Cardiff Convoy, summoned to action in the middle of a training exercise, also found itself alone at first in providing food for those of the population who had not fled the town but remained in their houses without means of cooking. After an attack on Clydeside, another of the series of heavy raids at this period, the Glasgow Convoy served nearly ten thousand meals in a single day. The Convoys also proved valuable during the 'Baedeker' raids of 1942. Nearly 150,000 people were served in Bath, where the Convoy did especially good work in serving Civil Defence parties and people saved from the ruins.

The operation of the Convoys, however, showed some weaknesses.²

¹ This arrangement proved to have little more than a token value. During 12½ days Convoy operation in Liverpool and district in May 1940, 408,000 portions of food were served, and only £629 19s. 4d. collected. During the first two days' service in Greenock, the Divisional Food Officer gave instructions that no charge was to be made, and not a penny was received in voluntary contributions.

² A report by a member of the Friends' Ambulance Unit, which supplied drivers for the London Convoys, contains some typical comments on faults of Convoy management; for example, 'It has always been the experience when out with the Queen's

Staffing arrangements, which had mainly been left to the W.V.S., were not always satisfactory; shifts of local volunteers to relieve visiting Queen's Messengers proved inadequate, and arrangements for the accommodation of the visitors were usually left to the improvisation of the moment. A supply of men drivers, needed for some of the vehicles and to help with heavy equipment, was difficult to arrange. Above all, there was a conspicuous lack of liaison between the Convoy chiefs, the Divisional Food Officers and the local authorities and Civil Defence organisations. More than once Queen's Messengers arrived at their destination to find neither work nor instructions awaiting them. Although operational control had been placed in the hands of Divisional Food Officers, local arrangements differed, and this sometimes led to confusion, as at Plymouth in April¹ 1941, when there was some criticism because the Convoy was not on the spot when required.

Meanwhile efforts were still being made to devise a scheme for controlling mobile canteens. During December 1940 the headquarters of the Ministries of Food and Home Security collected information about the disposition of canteens belonging to the various voluntary organisations, and worked out a plan for their control by Divisional Food Officers, who would direct them according to requirements notified by local Civil Defence Officers. When some progress had been made with plans for the Convoys, it was decided that the canteens should collaborate with them wherever they came into action, receiving orders from the Convoy chief and re-victualling from the Convoy supplies. An interim scheme, for the organisation of mobile canteens within Food Divisions into units run on Convoy lines, to operate until the actual Convoys were ready, came to nothing; and the issue of operational instructions for canteens had to be delayed while details for the control of the Convoys were being worked out, and again while objections of the Ministry of Home Security over consultation with Regional Commissioners and provision for Civil Defence workers were being met. A circular was

Messengers that no arrangements are made for the workers to sleep anywhere at night, with the exception of the first trip to Coventry. . . . 'There are two things required—restful sleep during the few hours available and adequate feeding during the day. The fact that either of these two things was obtained at Plymouth or Liverpool was purely coincidental. . . . 'We were then (in Liverpool) faced with the difficulty of having a different team of women every day, and furthermore a cosmopolitan team which never really functioned as a team should.' 'Each day we had no less than five people, each claiming to be the supreme authority. . . . 'Similarly, it was reported by the officer in charge of a London Convoy in Coventry, ' . . . There seemed to be a complete lack of co-operation with the services concerned'.

¹ In Plymouth, control of all mobile canteens, including those from the Queen's Messenger Convoy, had been placed under the charge of the Food Executive Officer, to whom the Assistant Divisional Food Officer in charge of the Convoy reported. An officer especially sent from Ministry headquarters to help with emergency feeding in Plymouth did not know of this arrangement, and, having failed to make contact with the Assistant Divisional Food Officer, ordered out the Convoy himself; this conflicted with previous orders, and there was delay before the Convoy came into operation.

eventually issued at the end of April 1941; it provided that the Assistant Divisional Food Officer responsible for the Queen's Messenger service should still control the canteens even when the Convoy was not in operation; but in this case, stores would have to be replenished from the emergency meals supplies of the local authority, if re-victualling from the canteens' parent organisations were impossible.

The delay in getting out the scheme had been such that the Ministry had to issue an accompanying letter to Divisional Food Officers admitting that they might already have made their own arrangements for control of canteens, which might be allowed to stand. In fact, many Divisions did have arrangements already in existence which did not conform with the headquarters plan; thus in the Midlands the Regional Commissioner, and in Scotland the District Commissioner, directly controlled the canteens. However, one of the main objects of the co-ordination scheme was secured by the registration of canteens in most Divisions to form pools, divided into 'first-line' and 'second-line' vehicles, according to whether or not they would be available for immediate service in emergency.

In January 1942 War-time Meals Division sponsored a scheme to relinquish Divisional control of mobile canteens when a Convoy was not in operation, and to attach them all to local authorities to use as part of their emergency feeding schemes, drawing on the same stocks and following the same financial principle of forty-eight hours' free service. This plan had the advantage of eliminating the distinction between the local authorities' own canteens, which they liked to reserve for supplying their Civil Defence staffs, and the voluntary canteens, which the Ministry had constantly emphasised should serve ordinary civilians first; it also made all canteens in a district available for emergency feeding wherever the greatest need existed, and improved the flexibility of the service by making possible the distribution of more solid meals from a town's emergency feeding centre to surrounding districts where emergency feeding schemes were not in operation. The new scheme was fairly readily accepted by Divisional Food Officers; the only serious objection came from London, where the proposal to pool Civil Defence and voluntary canteens was viewed with misgiving by the Civil Defence authorities in case their workers might be neglected for the civilians. It was agreed that London should be treated as a special case, and separate arrangements made for re-stocking of canteens serving Civil Defence workers and civilians; in the latter case, certain central kitchens and British Restaurants were designated as replenishment bases. The arrangements were tested during the fly-bomb period of 1944, when mobile canteens and canteens detached from the Queen's Messenger Convoys were found valuable in bringing food to people who would

not leave their bombed homes. Elsewhere there was little opportunity for a trial of the perfected plans for operation of mobile canteens.

IV

It has seemed convenient to discuss separately British Restaurants and other features of the Ministry's day-to-day war-time meals administration.¹ In considering the establishments known as *Emergency Feeding Centres*, however, it is difficult to disentangle emergency and day-to-day aspects of the Ministry's work, for both grew from the same root.² One of the original motives for promoting communal feeding had been that it might fulfil a dual purpose—of providing cheap meals for the working classes in normal times, and food for all and sundry in emergency. In theory, this was an ideal arrangement, and it was put into effect most successfully in London, where the establishment of meals centres by the County Council to form the *Londoners' Meals Service* was begun in September 1940. For a while the Ministry of Food and the L.C.C. were at cross purposes over the meals service. At first the Ministry had no formal responsibility for emergency feeding, and emphasised that the London scheme formed part of a long-range policy for communal feeding; but the L.C.C. insisted on regarding its task as temporary and organised it on a short-term basis, opening and closing centres at brief intervals as demand moved from place to place and serving food of a simple stew type on the cash-and-carry system.³

Unlike the Liverpool Corporation, which had been specifically asked to organise a long-term scheme, the London County Council raised the question of finance, and so brought about the first stage in the development of the financial administration of British Restaurants, of which these early Londoners' Meals Centres were the prototypes. On receiving the Ministry's proposal, the Council immediately consulted the Ministry of Health (which the Ministry of Food had omitted to do), emphasising that its willingness to run the scheme depended on a guarantee that any losses would be reimbursed by the Treasury. The Ministry of Health had meanwhile drawn attention to the fact that special powers under the Defence Regulations had to be conferred upon a local authority to enable it to

¹ Chapters XXIII–XXIV, below.

² 'Looking back it may seem simple to divide up (a) British Restaurants, (b) Emergency Meals Service and (c) Shelter Feeding, but at the time there was no clear-cut distinction between these three things. We were literally groping towards a policy'.

³ The growth of the service was rapid. The first centre was opened in the Isle of Dogs on 15th September. By 2nd October 49 centres were open, by 24th, 76, and by 29th, 192 serving 46,720 meals a week.

engage in municipal trading, a point that had been overlooked in the overtures to Liverpool and other cities.¹

Sanction was obtained from the Lord President's Committee for a guarantee of indemnification against losses, and a formal letter was sent to the L.C.C. to advise it of this undertaking, given on the understanding that the meals service would be conducted on a self-supporting basis, and to direct it under the Defence (General) Regulations to perform the function of supplying meals.² It is worth noticing that the Council was granted formal powers in its own right to trade in food as a principal, and not as the agent of any Government department. This was another essential feature of British Restaurant administration, which explains the Ministry's practice of avoiding direct action in opening British Restaurants, and in emphasising the independent character of the responsibility of local authorities.

At first, no capital grant was necessary for the Londoners' Meals Service. The L.C.C. was able to make use of its own premises, equipment and staff, unoccupied at the time owing to the evacuation of schools. In October 1940, however, the conversion of the service to a permanent one, with dining-rooms for the consumption of food on the premises, was put in hand at the suggestion of the Ministry, which was now planning to intensify its drive for communal feeding throughout the country. Increased expenditure on equipment became necessary as the service expanded, and the Ministry had to consider underwriting this capital cost. Approval for an initial sum of £50,000 was given in January 1941.

Once the dual value of Londoners' Meals Centres in emergency and normal conditions had been recognised, the Ministry proceeded to emphasise this aspect of communal feeding in a campaign to extend it throughout the country. After a tour of visits by the Director of Communal Feeding to the civic heads of a number of the principal cities of England and Scotland,³ the Divisional Food Officers were enlisted as missionaries in the cause, and asked to encourage local authorities to set up communal feeding centres 'both for the immediate benefit of the poorer sections of the population, and in order to provide a valuable nucleus for development as an insurance against emergency conditions arising in any town similar

¹ The Secretary to the Ministry, writing to the Legal Adviser about the draft of the formal letter to the L.C.C., said: 'I must admit that I had not contemplated previous to seeing this letter that it was necessary for the Ministry of Food to give a local authority formal powers'.

² A grant of separate powers to open meals centres was made shortly afterwards to the City of Westminster, with the agreement of the L.C.C., but the powers were only used in one instance.

³ At this stage, the attitude of local authorities to communal feeding was not encouraging. There was said, for instance, to be no demand in Sheffield, and Leeds was opposed to the plan.

to those experienced in London'. On 5th November, the Minister addressed a personal letter to civic heads, appealing for their support for communal feeding; and on 15th November a circular outlining the Ministry's financial arrangements in regard to the operation and equipment of community kitchens was despatched to Clerks of local authorities.¹

Despite these efforts, progress with communal feeding was slow; and towards the end of January 1941 the Ministry decided to concentrate its campaign on the 'emergency' aspects of communal feeding. This was thought likely to meet with a better response from local authorities;² experience in raided cities like Sheffield had shown that the existence of a state of emergency could work wonders in hastening progress in communal feeding. At the same meeting the internal organisation of the Ministry's work on communal feeding was discussed, and it was agreed to move the Communal Feeding Division to Colwyn Bay to bring it into closer contact with the rest of the Ministry's organisation for emergency services, leaving in London only the Shelter Feeding Branch to finish setting up a shelter feeding service. It is not certain whether this was a wise move. The greater part of the Division's work continued to be centred on London, and the move made liaison with the London Divisional Food Office, the County Council, and other government departments much more difficult; and the Shelter Feeding Branch continued to function long after it had been expected to die, involving much correspondence and duplication of records between London and Colwyn Bay. The link-up with the rest of the Ministry's emergency services work does not seem to have been close enough to justify the change.

A review of the emergency feeding situation at the end of January 1941 showed that available resources, especially in London, were tiny in comparison with the problem that might present itself in the event of renewed and heavier air attack.³ The London County Council, through its Meals Service and rest centres combined, estimated that it could provide a maximum of 300,000 meals a day; staff difficulties prevented much expansion in the organisation. A figure of 75,000 meals a day was quoted as the provision by communal feeding centres at that time for the whole of Great Britain outside the L.C.C. area; some thickly-populated areas, such as Glasgow, which had always

¹ The financial proposals set out in this circular will be discussed below, p. 384 *seq.*

² One of the reasons for local authorities' want of enthusiasm was the existence of the rest centres, which some authorities were already administering on behalf of the Ministry of Health. It was said that local authorities expected everyone, irrespective of circumstances, to use the rest centres.

³ Enemy air activity over London had slackened at this time. It was renewed in March.

been hostile to communal feeding, had made no plans at all. The Queen's Messenger Convoys were not expected to be ready until March, and then would only provide 250,000 meals a day. In the circumstances the only hope of getting rapid enough cover for possible emergency feeding requirements in London was by calling on the catering trade, and the London County Council agreed at a meeting on 11th February to accept responsibility for emergency feeding for the four and a quarter million people under their care provided this was done. In consultation with the Council, an Order¹ was prepared to confer upon each local authority the power of calling upon caterers within their area, including industrial caterers and firms operating their own canteens, to supply meals of the price and type they required to conform with their own emergency meals service. These powers were considered so sweeping that it was thought wise to circumscribe them by a direction that they should be exercised only in an extreme emergency certified as such by the civic head. It was later noted with some surprise that the caterers appeared to have accepted the position without question. Difficulty arose, however, when the London caterers expressed dissatisfaction at the absence of an agreement for reimbursement for losses and loss of profits incurred during a period of emergency meals service, but the Ministry insisted that compensation would not be justified, except in cases of special hardship. In any case, as the powers given by the Order were never invoked in London the point was entirely an academic one.²

The chief means devised to provide for emergency feeding was the establishment of shadow centres to supplement the existing community kitchens,³ known as emergency feeding centres. Local authorities were asked to be prepared to supply meals for ten per cent. of their population, over and above rest centre provision. They were recommended to earmark suitable premises such as schools, which might already have a modicum of equipment, widely distributed over the less vulnerable parts of their area, and on its outskirts where people might migrate after heavy raiding. It was emphasised that expenditure on conversion should be confined to the minimum; solid fuel cookers,⁴ boilers and water heaters, and plumbing should be installed, and a stock of food laid in so that 'simple but satisfying' meals of the stew type might be prepared. Arrangements were made for standardised units of food and equipment to be available; bulk

¹ S.R. & O. (1941) No. 298.

² It is understood that caterers in Exeter were required to supply meals after the raids in the summer of 1942, but no record of this has been traced.

³ These would, of course, switch over to emergency feeding when required. They were all to be equipped with solid fuel cookers.

⁴ Provision for oven ranges was made only in the largest unit of equipment for centres to feed 1,000-2,000 people.

food stocks were placed with Divisional Food Officers for distribution to local authorities,¹ and equipment was obtainable from the Ministry pool. Staff were expected to be recruited at the time of emergency from school teachers and voluntary workers.

Financial arrangements for emergency feeding schemes were laid down broadly on the basis already established for community kitchens. The Ministry undertook to reimburse approved capital expenditure and operating losses, but preferred schemes to aim at being self-supporting by allowing for overheads, including amortisation of capital expenditure, in the prices charged for food. It was admitted from the start, however, that as the feeding centres might only be in use for comparatively short periods much of the capital expenditure might not be recovered, and that deficiencies on running expenses might occur. The difficulties of serving people without money, already envisaged in connection with Queen's Messenger Convoys, came up for further discussion, and were resolved less expeditiously but in the same way. It was first suggested that customers at emergency feeding centres should be divided into two lanes to segregate the payers from the non-payers. This plan was found objectionable and was withdrawn as early as November, when definite instructions were issued for free service during the first forty-eight hours.²

Administrative and supply difficulties made it necessary to introduce the emergency feeding centres programme by stages. On 24th February 1941 the scheme was presented to all towns with a population of 100,000 upwards. In the middle of March it was extended to towns (mainly boroughs and urban district councils) with between 50,000 and 100,000 inhabitants, and subsequently to a number of smaller industrial areas that were surrounded by districts already qualifying for emergency feeding schemes. Greater London obviously had to be regarded as a composite area rather than a conglomeration of individual boroughs, many with populations below the 50,000 level, and was included in the first stage of development. Co-ordination of the schemes of individual authorities outside

¹ The following staple foodstuffs were included in the dumps: tea, biscuits, margarine, Ministry soup (made from recipes specially devised by the Scientific Adviser's Division to provide a protective meal, with the addition of bread), sugar, beef hash and meat roll, baked beans, condensed milk, and canned rice pudding (for children). These stocks were also intended to form a reserve for Queen's Messenger Convoys.

The emergency soups manufactured for the Ministry were of two types, pea and thick vegetable. The recipes were as follows: *Pea*: Split peas, carrots, potatoes, leeks, oatmeal, milk (dried skimmed milk powder when liquid milk was not available), yeast extract, salt and pepper. *Thick Vegetable*: Milk, yeast extract, oatmeal, herbs and seasonings to make a sauce, with carrots, turnips, parsnips, dried beans or peas, cabbage, leeks and potatoes.

In serving, it was recommended that an equal quantity of water should be added. 'It is almost sufficiently thick to be regarded as a vegetable stew'.

² After forty-eight hours, special arrangements were to be made for free service to persons receiving Poor Relief or sent from Rest Centres.

the London County Council area was achieved by the Middlesex and Surrey County Councils in co-operation with the Ministry. By the end of 1941 over four thousand emergency feeding centres had been established and provision for ten per cent. of the population in the areas covered was virtually complete. Great efforts had been made to provide a reliable and flexible service. Divisional Food Officers were provided with reserves of food¹ and transportable cooking equipment to reinforce emergency feeding centres and to create new ones if needed in districts where no provision had been made. In cases of exceptionally serious damage, they were to be able to get marquees and tents² from the Ministry of Works and Buildings to set up makeshift feeding centres, and they were instructed how to build outdoor emergency cooking stoves. They were constantly encouraged to stimulate co-operation in emergency feeding plans between local authorities in their Divisions, so as to provide for neighbourly help when any town was attacked and to cater for refugees migrating from one authority's area to another.

The local government units nominated as scheme-making authorities in the emergency feeding programme had been mainly county boroughs and county district councils. In an effort to co-ordinate emergency feeding plans with the arrangements made by county councils in their capacities as public assistance authorities and local education authorities, and to lighten the burden on the authorities in smaller areas, the Ministry proposed in June 1941 that county councils should be taken into consultation by all areas other than county boroughs, and that the county council itself should act as emergency feeding authority in areas with populations less than 50,000. This brought opposition from the county district councils, but the difficulty was eventually ironed out by an agreement to co-operate in emergency feeding matters, on the understanding that the county council would be generally responsible in all joint schemes.

V

The new series of exceptionally heavy raids on provincial cities in April and May 1941, including prolonged attacks on Plymouth and Merseyside, and raids on Coventry, Clydeside, Belfast, and Hull, produced problems on a scale that threatened to overwhelm the emergency feeding arrangements so far planned. It was impossible

¹ Divisional reserves of food, amounting to 25 per cent. of the total stocks held by local authorities, had been created. The reserves also included solid fuel ranges, boilers, and insulated containers.

² These were used during the heavy attack on Bootle in May 1941.

to safeguard against the risk that many of the prepared feeding stations, with their stores and equipment, might be destroyed overnight (as happened in Bootle, where the whole brunt of emergency feeding fell on the Queen's Messenger Convoys for the first eleven days). After serious raids, people sometimes had to depend on emergency feeding for days, and became tired of the semi-liquid meals that were all that most of the emergency feeding centres could provide. The new problem of 'trekking' that had appeared after some of the provincial raids was expected to lead to fresh demands upon emergency feeding arrangements. Government policy discouraged this practice, and the Ministry was not called on to devise means for supplying food to trekkers, but it had to envisage the probable need for more feeding facilities for refugees.

Some towns were caught with their emergency feeding preparations incomplete. Belfast, raided in April 1941, had about fifty feeding centres in various stages of preparation; most escaped damage, but some had to be surrendered for use as rest centres, and many new ones had to be improvised and supplied with cooked meals from two canning factories in the district. Plymouth, raided shortly afterwards, had had some equipment delivered, but had not organised feeding centres. In both these places, large-scale kitchens were set up to provide cooked food for distribution round the town on the plan used in Sheffield in December 1940¹ and subsequently adopted elsewhere in the North-Eastern Division. Kitchens of this type, located in safe areas to escape damage in air raids, and equipped to supply in heat-preserving containers solid meals of roast and pudding, as well as emergency stews, seemed the ideal means of providing a flexible service of emergency meals to be eaten in feeding centres set up in whatever buildings remained standing, and it was argued that they could be used at other times to prepare meals for everyday services in British Restaurants and school canteens, which would need no cooking equipment other than hot-plates and that necessary for preparing drinks.

Cooking depots, the name adopted for these kitchens, now became an important feature of the emergency feeding programme. Equipment was ordered to fit up about a hundred,² situated around port areas and certain important inland towns. The allocation of depots to various areas was roughly worked out by the Ministry on the basis that there should be enough to feed two-and-a-half per cent. of the population, but responsibility for their erection and operation was again entrusted to local authorities, usually counties and county

¹ The Firvale Institution in Sheffield produced 60,000 meals in the first three days after the raid. Five cooking depots were subsequently set up in school buildings on the outskirts of the town.

² Each was equipped to supply 3,000 solid or 6,000 'stew-type' meals over a certain period of time.

boroughs. As cooking depots were expected to operate over wide areas,¹ neighbouring authorities were advised to co-operate in their selection of sites. The Ministry undertook to reimburse capital expenditure and approved operating losses as with communal feeding centres. Provision for the amortisation of capital expenditure was expected to be made in prices charged for cooked food issued for day-to-day feeding, but not for emergency meals.

The chief difficulty of this plan was found to be the shortage of adequate premises, suitably placed about seven to ten miles outside towns and well enough supplied with transport facilities and utility services. In the first stage of development it was decided to take advantage of some building operations then in progress on behalf of the Ministry of Health; temporary hostels for evacuated workers were being erected around a number of large ports, and it was agreed that ten extra cooking depots for the use of the Ministry of Food should be built at the sites of these hostels. Eventually a number of prefabricated huts had to be provided where buildings were impossible to find.

After its inauguration in May 1941, the cooking depot programme was rapidly extended: first, in June, to provide for other industrial areas and for reception areas in the rural hinterland of coastal and large inland towns,² and again in October, when an agreement was made with the Ministry of Health to supply meals from cooking depots to additional rest centres that were being opened outside target areas to accommodate trekkers. This was the consequence of a plan for joint action concluded between the two departments in May, after the Ministry of Food had pointed out that the inadequacies of the rest centres in many bombed towns threw an extra burden on the emergency feeding centres. It was agreed at the same time to have occupants of rest centres fed at adjacent feeding centres, and to supply rest centres with stocks of foodstuffs from the Divisional Food Officer's reserves to repair their deficiencies.³ By this time the Treasury had agreed to reimburse in full⁴ the cost of rest centre provision for all,⁵ and according to an arrangement designed to

¹ Meals were expected to be distributed to places up to a fifteen mile radius of depots.

² The extra cooking depots, planned for rural areas at this stage, were intended to cater mainly for people who might be compulsorily moved under the special scheme for evacuation of the 31 towns round the east and south-east coasts (above, p. 312). A reserve of £10,000 worth of equipment was also laid in at cooking depots to make possible an extended service in districts without depots, and mobile units were planned.

³ A Ministry of Food minute of May 1941 described the result of an analysis of rest centre food stocks as 'pitiful'. It was decided to bring them up to a safety level agreed as 2 per cent. for London, 8 per cent. for the provinces, and 5 per cent. for large provincial towns.

⁴ The new policy was announced in the Ministry of Health's circular 2290 of 6th February 1941 to local authorities. See *Problems of Social Policy* (op. cit.), p. 263.

⁵ The removal of the whole financial burden of the rest centres from the administering authorities did much to alter the old idea that they were poor law institutions. Many counties and county boroughs now placed the responsibility for rest centres with

simplify accounting, the Ministry of Food was able to supply food to rest centres without recovering the cost from the public assistance authorities.

The swift expansion of the programme for cooking depots was not matched in its execution. Only sixty had been completed by the end of 1941, and the final total of just over three hundred was not reached until May 1944. There were several reasons for this delay. The initial difficulty of securing suitable premises had been serious, and it was complained that local authorities had been lacking in energy in scouring their areas for sites. At the end of 1941 the Ministry had to adopt the procedure of submitting orders for equipment through the Ministry of Works and Buildings, instead of direct to manufacturers, as before, and delays in delivery became longer, partly because of the altered system but partly also because of increasing stringencies of supply coinciding with expanding orders from other quarters. The installation and operation of cooking depot equipment produced technical problems that local authorities were often unable to solve without consulting the Ministry's headquarters, as technical advice was seldom available in Divisional Food Offices; even at headquarters the technical staff was small and delays were inevitable.

A map showing the situation of cooking depots on the completion of the programme reveals a heavy concentration in the north, particularly in the North-Eastern Food Division (Leeds), which had twice as many depots as any other Division, mainly because of enthusiasm at divisional headquarters for cooking depot development. No provision was made for London, which relied on the Londoners' Meals centres for emergency needs.

The cooking depot organisation was by far the most costly¹ and elaborate of the various emergency feeding services, and it was agreed from the beginning that to avoid waste and to maintain a trained staff that could keep the equipment in working order, it should be used as far as possible for day-to-day feeding if the emergency usage should, as it did, prove slight. The original proposal of kitchen-less British Restaurants to be supplied from cooking depots was carried out only to a limited extent. Self-contained restaurants continued to be more popular with local authorities, and the supply of meals from cooking depots never amounted to more than about ten per cent. of the total of meals served, or about thirty per cent. of the cooking depot output. A few meals were also sent out to small

departments already controlling feeding or emergency organisation such as the Education or the Emergency Committee. The same authorities thus became responsible for both rest centres and emergency feeding, a solution that had often been recommended by critics of the division of functions between the Ministries of Food and Health.

¹ The capital loss on the winding up of the cooking depot scheme in March 1947 was estimated at £866,200.

factories without canteens; but the most important use of cooking depots was for school feeding.¹ At the time of the service's fullest extension, towards the end of 1943, about eighty per cent. of the depots were in daily use, supplying about 300,000 meals.

As cooking depots were little used in emergency, assessment of their emergency value must be confined to generalities. They were certainly a reliable means of insuring against complete breakdown of cooking arrangements in heavy widespread raids, and might have been the only solution of the feeding problem if raiding on the scale of the allied attack on the enemy had ever been experienced here; yet other factors might have detracted from their value. The possibility of transport difficulty is obvious. A considerable amount of transport was involved in running the depots—in conveying staff and supplies and in sending out meals. A miscellaneous fleet of vehicles was at the Ministry's disposal for distributing meals, made up of about 150 Chevrolet trucks and other vans obtained from the War Office, and 450 Ford Emergency Vans, owned by the Ford Trust² but maintained by local authorities. In addition, local authorities used for the everyday distribution of meals the mobile canteens they held for emergency purposes, and many hired vehicles locally. Under emergency conditions it might have been difficult to expand the transport fleet quickly enough to cope with a greatly increased output of meals, apart from possible difficulties of traffic disorganisation. The engagement of extra staff for emergency periods might also have been more of a problem in country districts than in towns.

The effectiveness of cooking depots for day-to-day feeding is discussed later;³ here it will be enough to remark that as they were primarily intended for emergency use, disadvantages were to be expected if they were used otherwise. It may be considered a gain that the service had something more than an insurance value.

In July 1941 there was some public criticism of the division of responsibility for feeding services between several government departments; and an interdepartmental conference was called, which recommended that departmental responsibilities should remain unchanged but that the Ministry of Food should review emergency feeding arrangements with the aim of closing any gaps. The review, carried out through local authorities who were asked to report on the adequacies of their organisation, was prolonged, and a final report was not available until January 1943; this showed that the framework of emergency feeding according to the existing plan was

¹ See below, pp. 421-423.

² This had been formed by Mr. Henry Ford and his son to provide vehicles for emergency feeding purposes. See note, p. 363.

³ Below, pp. 391-393.

virtually complete. Provision had been made to supply emergency meals to roughly ten per cent. of the population over the country as a whole, with a special concentration of resources where they were expected to be most needed.¹ Reconsideration of the arrangements made in 1941 with an eye to the possibility of fresh dangers, either from invasion or new weapons of attack, led to the conclusion that some mobile equipment was needed to give cover for less densely-populated districts without feeding centres, and for possible movements of refugees. A type of cooking depot mounted on wheels was therefore devised;² two hundred and fifty units were formed, and allocated among Food Divisions, the majority going to the east and south-east districts, which had been scantily provided for by the cooking depot programme. Divisional Food Officers were entrusted with the responsibility for dividing them among local authorities according to need and local resources, especially for staffing the units; and for their general supervision and direction, as with Queen's Messenger Convoys.

The units did not prove popular, and the Ministry had difficulty in getting authorities to accept them, partly because of unfavourable experience in the running and staffing of permanent cooking depots. There is little evidence of any use being made of these units even during the fly-bomb and rocket attacks of 1944-45, when there was a number of 'incidents' at isolated villages in the eastern divisions of the type the mobile units had been designed to provide for. The transportable kitchen units known as Mobile Emergency Feeding Units,³ operated by some authorities in the east and south-east to provide soups and stews, were more generally used on these occasions.

Once again, when the second serious aerial attack on Britain came in 1944 with the launching of the V-weapon campaign, the brunt was borne by London and its environs. The emergency feeding system there, based on the permanent feeding centres, easily bore the strain,⁴ and with the assistance of sections of the Queen's Messenger Convoys and mobile canteens, the London County Council was able to start 'kerbside feeding' for sufferers who were unwilling to leave the wrecks of their houses. Such use of emergency feeding services as was made suggests that the plan for a mobile and flexible system had

¹ In London, provision had been made for 25 per cent. of the population, and in some port and other vulnerable areas a 20 per cent. cover had been arranged. Over the country as a whole more than 4,000 emergency meals centres had been organised by 317 local authorities, and provision made for over 4 million people. Mobile feeding facilities had been arranged for approximately 2½ per cent. of the population in the London area.

² Each unit included two bluff cookers able to prepare 500 full-scale meals (or 1,000 stew-type meals) over a period of two hours.

³ These included a portable hut, boilers and simple kitchen equipment, with stocks of food, packed in containers that could be transported on lorries.

⁴ The capacity of static centres was reported in September 1943 to be 572,000 meals in the L.C.C. area, and 537,000 in Outer London.

380 *EMERGENCY AND COMMUNAL FEEDING*

been the right one, but it was never called upon to function at anything approaching full stretch; the development of the enemy offensive was frustrated by the success of Allied military operations on the Continent.

ANNEX: COMPOSITION OF A QUEEN'S MESSENGER CONVOY

The majority of the vehicles were 30 cwt. (army-rating) Bedfords on which special bodies had been built. They were equipped as follows:

<i>No. of Vehicles</i>	<i>Type</i>	
4 (at first 3)*	Canteens	These carried insulated soup- and tea-urns, $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint mugs, $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint soup bowls, spoons, etc., trays for food and an 8 gallon insulator urn to give hot water for washing up. The vehicles were fitted with a serving hatch on the near side.
2	Store Lorries	These were fitted with cupboards and racking for stores. Each van carried sufficient food for 6,000 meals, including tinned soup, baked beans, meat roll, biscuits, margarine, tea, cocoa, sugar, and condensed milk.
2 (at first 1)	Water Tankers	Each lorry carried 300 gallons of water.
2	Kitchen Lorries	These carried 10 soyer boilers and other kitchen utensils. If mobile canteens provided by voluntary organisations were in operation, it might be necessary to supplement the number of boilers from reserves which were in each Division.
Added later:		
1	Utility Van	This was used for bringing up reserve crews, carrying in food supplies to mobile canteens when in action, etc.
1	Welfare Van	This was used exclusively for the use of the crew; it provided washing facilities, two bunks, and cooking apparatus, so that the crew might be fed near their work.

* An additional canteen and water tanker was added to each convoy to facilitate its division.

CHAPTER XXIII

Communal Feeding: The British Restaurant Movement (1)

I

THE UNCERTAINTY of motive and direction, that had marked the Ministry of Food's first essays in communal feeding, persisted even after it had thrown itself, under pressure of emergency, wholeheartedly into the task of promoting the establishment of 'community kitchens'. Apart from their use in air-raids, which from being something of an afterthought developed, in face of the success of the Londoners' Meals Service, into a principal feature of the Ministry's propaganda to local authorities, what purpose were these novelties intended to serve? Officials asked themselves this question, and at different times came up with varying answers. In the early autumn of 1940, the emphasis was still on philanthropy; a circular to Divisional Food Officers referred to the value of communal feeding for 'alleviating hardship and possible distress among the poorer people', and asked them to concentrate on getting feeding centres established in areas where 'a definite poverty problem' existed. By November, however, it had shifted to dwelling on the potential economies in food, fuel, and labour, that would result from communal feeding on a national scale; economies so great as to make its adoption all but essential. In his letter to civic heads, dated 5th November 1940, the Minister declared in emphatic terms that it would do much to help solve the problem of diminishing food supplies:

'I believe that many of these problems and dangers can be met by the establishment of community kitchens and feeding centres in every part of the kingdom. If every man, woman and child could be sure of obtaining at least one hot nourishing meal a day, at a price all could afford, we should be sure of the nation's health and strength during the war. . . .'

There were, too, enthusiasts for communal feeding who thought that meals centres might be an improvement on the family dinner-table even in peace-time; they might provide the worker with more nutritious and better-cooked food than he was accustomed to eat at home, and set an example to all of simple, well-balanced meals.

Communal feeding plans received more support in January 1941 when the Minister of Labour, dealing with a request for a special meat allowance for heavy workers, remarked that canteen meals were preferable to supplementary ration in catering for special groups of workers who found difficulty in managing on normal rations.¹

Communal feeding for all, the goal that seemed to be set out in the Minister's November message, was soon seen by some to have awkward implications. Meat and Livestock, and Rationing Divisions, in the midst of the former's supply crisis,² expressed concern at the prospect of vast and increasing quantities of meat being consumed without coupons in works canteens and communal feeding centres, or even taken away for eating off the premises under the Cash and Carry scheme that existed at some centres. What, they asked, was to become of the domestic ration? Logically, it would require to be reduced *pari passu* with any extension in eating out, and fairness would then require the introduction of coupons for meals. In principle, coupons for meals were anyway desirable, though administratively daunting; but the Ministry's whole policy, since February 1940, had been based on avoiding them, and endeavouring to maintain the domestic ration at a level that could be claimed as adequate without supplementary meals. (Whether it was so for persons living alone is another question.) Communal feeding, that is to say, was only compatible with that policy if it could be kept to a level that was ancillary to the general supply of food. There was in fact no ground for the Divisions' fears. Even the 10,000 British Restaurants that were hoped for at one time (when the thousandth was being opened in September 1941) would have represented no sort of threat to the domestic meat ration. In August 1941, for instance, it was calculated that, except for tea, less than two per cent. of rationed foods was going to works canteens and British Restaurants combined.³

As 1941 went on, it became clear that a revolutionary development of communal feeding was not to be expected. Local authorities were often apathetic; moreover even the existing scale of activities was arousing alarm among commercial caterers, whom the Ministry did not want to put out of business.⁴ Official replies to their complaints began to use the argument that communal feeding was intended, not to compete with commercial caterers, but to fill a gap:

¹ For the question of canteens *v.* differential rations, see below, Chapters XXXIV, XXXV.

² Vol. I, pp. 174-5. See also below, p. 675 *seq.*

³ Table XIV in Vol. I gives figures for rationed foodstuffs going to catering establishments of various types in December 1944, expressed as percentages of total supplies.

⁴ For instance, the Minister said at Slough in September 1941: '... In some places there has been some doubt in the minds of caterers as to whether we are creating a government organisation to put them out of business. That is the last thing in the world we want to do. ...'

'The development of Community Feeding is settled Government policy, the object of which is to ensure that people who find difficulty for any reason in obtaining nutritious food should, as far as possible, have the opportunity of getting at least one hot meal each day. For a variety of reasons, e.g., the rise in the cost of living, the evacuation of womenfolk, the transference of male labour, and the expansion of female labour in industry, real difficulties are being experienced and it is of paramount importance in the interests of public morale and as part of the war effort that everything possible should be done by the Government to meet the problem'.

This argument harked back to the original Ministerial discussions of June and July 1940, when Mr. Bevin had asked that more canteens should be provided for industrial workers. The Ministry of Labour had undertaken to encourage and even to compel the establishment of factory canteens;¹ but there were many small factories where a separate canteen would be uneconomic, and to impose its provision a hardship.² The Factories (Canteens) Order of November 1940 was limited to munitions factories employing 250 or more workers, and in July 1941 the Minister refused a request by the Trades Union Congress that it should be extended to smaller concerns. There was therefore a hiatus in the provision of meals for war-workers, which (said the Ministry of Labour) was for the Ministry of Food to fill; and this obligation had been recognised at the time of the abortive National Kitchens Scheme. The principle of collaboration with the Ministry of Labour's Factory Inspectors and Welfare Officers was carried over into the new campaign for municipal communal feeding.

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Food maintained that its duty was to the population as a whole, and that communal feeding centres should not be opened merely to serve industrial workers. The housewife, the family transplanted from its city home to new surroundings, and the old-age pensioner, all might stand in need of the sort of cheap meal that the commercial caterer could not provide. Of this need, however, the people on the spot were, in the last resort, the best judges; indeed, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the Ministry of Food to compel a local authority to open a restaurant.³

II

The campaign for communal feeding centres at first made slow

¹ Industrial canteens are the concern of the Manpower History in this series.

² No direct financial assistance was given towards building and equipping canteens, but capital expenditure ranked for some relief in respect of Excess Profits Tax.

³ By the Local Authorities (Community Kitchens and Sale of Food in Public Air Raid Shelters) Order (S.R. & O. (1941) No. 103) every local authority was 'required . . . to perform the functions of setting up community feeding centres'. The Ministry explained, however, in a letter to local authorities covering copies of the Order, that the word 'required' was not to be interpreted in the sense of compulsion. Cf. the use of the same word in relation to War-time Associations of Dairymen (above, pp. 234-237).

progress. Although Liverpool had agreed in August 1940 to pioneer communal feeding experiments in poorer districts, no centre was opened there until November. The newly appointed Director of Communal Feeding, touring large cities in September 1940, found that most municipalities agreed that communal feeding might be desirable—elsewhere. Nor were all the Ministry's own Divisional Food Officers markedly enthusiastic. What held authorities back most was finance. The Ministry had begun in the belief that capital costs would be slight, and centres self-supporting; it was stated more than once that no Treasury grant would be required. The London County Council, however, had insisted on a guarantee against operating losses before starting the Londoners' Meals Service; it was not long before the Ministry recognised that some similar arrangement must be made for the rest of the country, and envisaged that the Treasury might have to bear the whole capital cost.

By November 1940, when the campaign became nation-wide, and Lord Woolton sent out his personal appeal to the Civic Heads of all local authorities above the level of parish councils, asking for their help in establishing communal feeding centres,¹ the financial obstacle had been overcome. Shortly afterwards a circular to local authorities set out the basic principles that the Ministry expected them to follow, and the extent to which it would direct and assist them. More particularly, it laid down the elements of a financial scheme for British Restaurants that remained fundamentally unchanged until the passing of the Civic Restaurants Act of 1946.

The financial scheme offered reimbursement (a) of approved capital expenditure on restaurants (at a rate finally fixed at a hundred per cent., after some consideration of a lower figure); (b) of 'approved operating deficiencies', coupled with the proviso that restaurants should be run on a fully self-supporting basis, including allowance for amortisation of capital expenditure. This offer was qualified by references to the loss being 'unavoidably incurred', and to the Ministry's right to withdraw it in individual cases; and was thus more guarded than the unqualified undertaking given to the London County Council in September. Nevertheless, its reference to 'unforeseen circumstances' was open to a broad interpretation. The expansive tone of the Minister's letter of 5th November, and the attitude of

¹ 'Communal feeding centres' was their official title; a number of others, equally clumsy, were considered. Mr. Churchill himself produced the happy solution in a minute to Lord Woolton, dated 21st March 1941: 'I hope the term "Communal Feeding Centres" is not going to be adopted. It is an odious expression, suggestive of Communism and the workhouse. I suggest you call them "British Restaurants". Everybody associates the word "restaurant" with a good meal, and they may as well have the name if they cannot get anything else'. Churchill, *op. cit.* Vol. III, p. 663.

In January 1918 the Director of National Kitchens had written to the Food Controller: 'I do not feel quite happy with the title "Communal Kitchens". The word communal is hardly attractive enough. Its association with Socialism is too well known, and I am afraid it is rather a handicap'.

some of his officers in urging communal feeding upon local authorities, gave rise to the belief that the Ministry would bear all losses except those due to gross inefficiency; and there was some recrimination later when it began to insist that British Restaurants should pay their way, and even that their commercial success should be assured before they opened.

The circular suggested that local authorities might wish to manage their own schemes without financial assistance, in which case they might call on the Ministry for advice; or that voluntary organisations might be willing to manage centres. The response to the latter suggestion was negligible, except in London where about forty restaurants were being run by voluntary organisations early in 1943. There were 170 independent local authority schemes, mainly in the North-Eastern, South-Eastern and London Divisions. In the course of the war, about a dozen local authorities repaid to the Ministry the capital cost of their restaurants and assumed full financial responsibility for them.

The London County Council remained a law unto itself in these matters. The financial agreement of September 1940 had provided for unconditional reimbursement of trading losses by the Ministry, but no arrangement had been made about equipment or staffing expenses. Over a short period the Council was able to use its own resources, but when it began to convert the service into a permanent one, and pushed towards the goal of the two hundred centres¹ for which Lord Woolton had asked, it had to request the Ministry to reimburse expenditure on equipment, subject as usual to eventual repayment out of the charges for meals. In February the Board of Education began to press for the withdrawal of teachers from the Londoners' Meals Service, because the compulsory education of children left in London had been resumed, and they had to be gradually replaced at the centres by staff whose wages would fall on the Londoners' Meals Service account. The Council thought a generous scale of staffing necessary, as it regarded its meals service as the nucleus of its emergency feeding scheme,² capable of immediate expansion in case of need, and found it necessary to pay high wages to attract enough staff. In consequence, the wages bill for the Londoners' Meals Service was estimated in July 1941 to equal 57 per cent. of the cost of raw food (or over 4d. per meal), which was a higher proportion than that paid by any other local authority; the Council's estimates also included a large allowance for administrative expenses at headquarters. The Ministry of Food still stood committed to cover the Council's operating losses, and pressed it to

¹ This was reached in July 1941. Altogether 345 centres were opened, but the greatest number open at one time was 242 in May 1943. In March 1945, 188 were open.

² See above, pp. 369-372.

submit notional figures separating expenditure on 'emergency' and 'day-to-day' services, mainly to ascertain whether the latter was being run on a paying basis.¹ It was eventually established that while the service was running at an annual loss of about £75,000, a sum amounting to between £71,000 (the Ministry's figure) and £97,000 (the Council's figure) might be charged to emergency feeding, so that the day-to-day service could be considered as paying its way.

When the circular of November 1940 was drafted, it was intended that the task of considering plans and estimates for individual restaurants should be delegated to Divisional Food Officers; Ministry headquarters would supervise finances in general by requiring the submission of monthly accounts. Divisional Food Officers were to act as general advisers to local authorities on practical details, and Assistant Divisional Food Officers were to be appointed to handle communal feeding work. These arrangements were seriously embarrassed by shortages of men with the right experience and technical knowledge to scrutinise financial estimates and details of equipment for cooking centres. Plans had at first to be passed to headquarters for approval, though in May 1941 it was found possible to devise standard scales of capital costs for restaurants of varying sizes,² enabling powers of approval to be delegated to Divisional Food Officers. The lack of adequate technical staff, at headquarters as well as in the Divisional Offices, was a serious, though unavoidable, weakness in the Ministry's organisation, and many difficulties that arose in the examination of final claims by local authorities for capital expenditure might admittedly have been avoided if technical officers could have been appointed to divisional staffs.

Efforts were made to overcome the inexperience of Divisional Offices by the issue of a series of circular letters containing miscellaneous information about the planning and management of restaurants; the grant of authority to Divisional Food Officers to approve proposals was accompanied by detailed notes on types and

¹ In February 1943 the Mayor of Kensington, which ran its own restaurants, wrote to the Minister to point out that, although prices charged by his borough's restaurants were usually lower than those of the Londoners' Meals Service, they were able to show a consistent profit in contrast with the L.C.C.'s losses.

The L.C.C. was able to show that the higher cost of its meals was mainly due to higher expenses for raw food and wages; it served larger helpings than Kensington, and employed more supervisory staff, as well as local agents and regional quartermasters on managerial work, who would be responsible for organisation in emergency. It stated that its meals service was then (July 1943) practically paying its way, in spite of having to cover emergency overhead expenses estimated at £81,000, and if this amount were met by the Treasury, the price of meals could be reduced by 8d.

<i>Approved scale of capital costs</i>	<i>Capital cost</i>
<i>Estimated number to be served</i>	<i>per head</i>
Up to 250	£6
251-500	£4
501-1,000	£3

Estimates exceeding this level of expenditure had to be referred to headquarters.

amounts of equipment required in setting up restaurants, and on the securing of premises and staff, and in July 1941 copies of model kitchen lay-outs were distributed. Almost all the items of equipment included in these came from the Ministry pool of equipment for British Restaurants, which was established in April 1941. It had been obvious from an early stage in the expansion of communal feeding that local authorities would depend very greatly on government help for equipment, and it was decided to extend to communal restaurants the pool system that had been established for shelter feeding equipment.

The information service included notes on the planning and preparation of meals, in which it was hoped that British Restaurants would set an example. In February 1941 Catering Advisers¹ were appointed to work alongside the Divisional Food Officers in assisting local authorities with the practical details of setting up and managing their restaurants; they were first appointed to the headquarters staff, each covering more than one Division, but later, when their numbers were increased, they were transferred to the staffs of Divisional Offices.

The organisation built up in the Ministry of Food to deal with communal feeding, at headquarters and in the Divisional Offices, may seem over-elaborate in proportion to the extent of communal feeding development. To some extent this was inevitable, for having undertaken to lay out a considerable capital sum (amounting in the end to about £4,000,000) in setting up British Restaurants, the Ministry was bound to supervise its expenditure; it also indicates the amount of help that most local authorities needed in managing communal feeding enterprises. The larger authorities were able to appoint special catering officers to manage their restaurant services, but in many cases the task had to be assigned to someone without catering experience to be run as a sideline to his other duties. The general attitude of the Ministry was to press full responsibility for the operation of British Restaurants into the hands of the local authorities, and to act merely as an adviser apart from its general supervision of financial management and catering standards. This was consistent with the legal status allotted to them in the Order of January 1941² by which the Minister of Food required and at the same time empowered them to set up communal restaurants as principals. It was on the ground of the independent status of local authorities that the Ministry was able to insist that they bore their own losses except in 'approved' cases.

The grant of powers to engage in communal feeding had been forecast in the circular of 15th November 1940, but the issue of the Order had been held up by discussion on the 'propriety and legality'

¹ Later called War-time Meals Advisers.

² S.R. & O. (1941) No. 103 already cited (p. 383, n.3).

of permitting the sale of rationed food without coupons for consumption off the premises. Cash-and-carry sales amounted to not more than ten per cent. of the total of British Restaurant trade in the course of the whole war, but the proportion was more significant at the time because the Londoners' Meals Service had only recently established a dining-room service, and about one-third of its trade was still cash-and-carry. During the delay in the issue of the Order, powers were granted by letter to a number of individual towns. No scheme was definitely held up for lack of legal authority, but the Ministry suspected that a number of laggardly authorities took advantage of the lack of it to delay preparing schemes.

The Ministry's financial offer, in fact, produced very little effect at first. In mid-January 1941 it was reported that 'local authorities in the vast majority of cases have not by any means welcomed the idea of Community Kitchens. The reaction has varied from passive resistance to luke-warm acquiescence'.¹ It was decided, therefore, to 'go slow' on propaganda for communal feeding for the time being, and to concentrate on a new emergency feeding programme. Local authorities appeared more willing to work on plans for emergency feeding than the everyday communal feeding centres, especially after the stimulus of an air-raid, and the Ministry might therefore be able to 'press the idea of community kitchens through the guise of emergency feeding'.

However, the impetus already given to British Restaurant development proved sufficient to carry it through without much slackening of pace. By 10th April plans for nearly 250 restaurants had been approved, and nearly as many more were under consideration, but only 73 were in operation apart from the 150 or so in the Londoners' Meals Service. In May, when the most urgent part of the emergency feeding programme had been completed by the distribution of food and equipment for shadow feeding stations, the communal feeding drive was resumed on the same lines as before, although Divisional Food Officers were now asked to extend their efforts to all towns with over 5,000 people.²

III

The development of the Ministry's organisation meant that it could conveniently take over certain communal feeding services that had grown up under the aegis of other Departments. There was a

¹ Up to 20th January 1941 schemes for 136 centres in 43 towns had been received.

² The Minister was uneasy about the choice of so small a unit for consideration. He thought that ministerial pressure to set up British Restaurants should be 'confined to the larger and more densely populated towns'.

meals service for 'evacuee' mothers and children below school age, run in conjunction with the Meals-in-Schools scheme, and therefore the responsibility of the Board of Education; the Ministry of Health had caused centres to be set up to provide meals at low prices for adults billeted in reception areas. At the end of January 1941 it was proposed that the Ministry of Food should take over the latter and enlarge them to serve members of the general public also. The Minister of Health was quite ready to hand over the responsibility provided that its successor continued to increase provision for 'evacuees',¹ but the question of charges for meals presented difficulty, for the Ministry of Health and the Assistance Board (which financed some of the adults in billets) refused to consider any increase in the low rates then current. As this would have struck at the Ministry of Food's principle of a self-supporting basis for communal feeding services, the Ministry of Food insisted on the limitation of cheap meals to those producing a Ministry of Health certificate.

The discussion gave occasion for a new statement of principle on the recurring problem of responsibility for feeding services controlled by various government departments. In the words of a Ministry of Food minute: 'where the provision of food is incidental to the provision of another service, for example shelter, beds and education, then the central authority responsible for the major service should continue to be responsible for the secondary service (food).' An effort was made, however, to secure co-ordination of communal feeding and school meals services; a Board of Education circular to local education authorities requested their co-operation by admission of the public to school dining-rooms, arrangements for children to take meals at communal feeding centres, joint use of kitchens for school and communal meals, as well as by making school premises available for emergency feeding after raids.²

The transfer of authority for 'evacuee' feeding centres was complicated by their diversity. Most were financially controlled and managed by local education authorities in conjunction with their school feeding arrangements; but some were run by voluntary societies, which were not always under the financial control of the local authority. The Ministry of Health complained in May 1941 that progress with communal feeding centres for 'evacuees' had slowed down since the Ministry of Food took over, but owing to discrepancies between Ministry of Health figures of centres in existence at the time of the change-over on 1st March, and Ministry

¹ There were said to be about 300 centres at that time.

² The introduction of the education authorities, which were in many cases county councils, into communal feeding affairs necessitated the despatch to them of the circular of 15th November 1940, as they had not previously been included in the circulation list. This led to some friction between county and county district authorities, as described above, p. 374.

of Food figures, it is impossible to verify this. The Ministry of Food statistics show a total of a little over two hundred 'evacuee' centres operating in May 1941, increasing slightly during the summer, falling sharply in November,¹ and disappearing altogether a year later, when the need had gone, and centres were either closed or taken over as ordinary British Restaurants. In May 1943 the price concession to 'evacuees' was withdrawn except in cases of special hardship.

The school canteens serving the general public made up only a small part of the total of feeding centres. Numbers increased gradually to just under a hundred early in 1943, out of a total of about 2,100 centres, and then declined rapidly.

In August 1941 the Ministry of Labour appealed for the extension of British Restaurant service to provide more than mid-day meals. With the growth of new war factories and the 'direction' of labour into them came an extension of compulsory billeting, which, as householders could not be compelled to provide meals for their unwelcome guests, might mean that communal breakfasts and suppers might be needed as well as dinners. Divisional Food Officers were therefore asked to do their best to persuade local authorities to experiment with evening meals, and perhaps breakfasts, wherever a potential demand seemed to exist, under the promise of reimbursement of any losses arising from the experiment; though Ministry of Food headquarters remained sceptical about the demand for an extended service in British Restaurants, and suggested that the provision of breakfasts and suppers at factory canteens would be a better solution. These doubts were largely borne out by the results of the experiment during 1942. Demand for breakfasts was slight, and, such as it was, probably came less from evacuated workers than from fire-watchers and others who found it convenient to have breakfast out. Demand for suppers increased until early 1943, when there were over a hundred British Restaurants open in the evenings, although the total by this time had been enlarged by restaurants which, like commercial establishments, had found the service of afternoon teas and light snacks to be a profitable side-line that often compensated for a loss on mid-day meals.²

Nevertheless, it was found that some British Restaurants, even though they served only a few meals under the extended service arrangements, could show that the meals were genuinely needed. The divergent views of the Ministries of Labour and Food on the purpose of British Restaurants were thus made apparent; the latter became anxious about the losses ensuing when only a few breakfasts were provided, while the former thought the existence of even a

¹ It was discovered at this time that a number of centres previously included in the total were serving schoolchildren only.

² A good many British Restaurants in northern towns served evening meals.

minute demand a sufficient justification for the service. However, liaison between the two departments at regional level was well maintained, and it was often found possible to contrive meals for workers in difficulties, whether by opening British Restaurants, or by sending hot meals from restaurants to the factory, or by making temporary arrangements while billeted workers were settling down. The problem tended to solve itself as the special demand from billeted workers diminished,¹ and in January 1943 a working agreement was reached by which the billeting authority would try to avoid sending workers to lodgings where meals could not be supplied.

The chief innovation in British Restaurant development during 1941 was a scheme for the supply of meals from cooking depots² to restaurants that would be equipped only with the essentials for serving and preparing hot drinks, plus ovens and boilers for providing meals in emergency in case the cooking depot service should break down. Its advocates spoke as if no more fully-equipped British Restaurants would be required. Difficulties over the supply of equipment had aroused fears that the rate of opening might have to be slowed down, and the use of the depots seemed a possible solution; there was also obvious economic advantage in applying to everyday use a costly emergency provision. But the cooking depot programme lagged behind that for British Restaurants; the heavy equipment required, and the premises, were harder to secure. Moreover, even before the depots came into operation, the plan met with a very cool reception from both Divisional Food Officers and local authorities. They felt that food brought from a distance could not be as good as food freshly cooked on the premises; and their suspicions of the inferior quality of cooking-depot meals were at least partly justified by experience.

Practical difficulties were encountered in the correct use of the heavy, solid-fuel equipment installed at the depots; in one Food Division a special training course for cooking-depot workers was instituted to deal with them. There were also troubles at the serving end, mainly arising from the use of insulated containers³ for transporting food. Choice of dishes was limited; it was difficult to assess in advance what quantities would be required, and hence to avoid either

¹ In Coventry, for instance, at the end of February 1942, a daily average of 2,145 evening meals for the three restaurants operating the service was returned, compared with an average of 3,082 mid-day meals for the same three restaurants, and the figure of 2,300 breakfasts for one of them.

A year later, the average for evening meals had fallen to 350, and the figure for breakfasts to 450.

² See above, p. 375 *seq.*

³ Difficulty was found in evolving a satisfactory design for the containers. Light metals such as aluminium were not available for their manufacture, and the amount of insulation required made the containers very heavy to carry. The Board of Education received complaints from the Women's Voluntary Service that members working on the School Meals Service had injured themselves in carrying containers.

waste or shortage; food could not be kept hot long enough once the containers had been opened, and partially-filled containers lost heat in transit. In time, less obvious disadvantages of a container service were detected. At the end of 1941, the Scientific Adviser's Division carried out an inquiry into the effects of transport in insulated containers on the food value of vegetables, which showed that a rapid and substantial loss in vitamin C content took place in cooked potatoes and cabbage during storage.¹ (The conclusion that larger portions of vegetables should be served to offset this loss was perhaps not as 'practical' as the Division supposed, for labour to prepare them was limited, as was the appetite for them of at least some consumers.)

More alarming was the risk of food poisoning, certain outbreaks of which were definitely traced to contamination of British Restaurant meals prepared in cooking depots. Stainless steel was unobtainable for lining the containers, and tinning was frequently defective and became worn in use so that cracks developed in which stale food could lodge. Local authorities had to be advised to avoid sending out left-overs, and 'made-up' dishes such as mince, in containers, and strict instructions about cleaning and sterilising were issued. Later, steam sterilisers were included in the list of equipment available to British Restaurants in the Ministry Pool.

Apart from these special difficulties, and prejudice, the local authorities naturally preferred to have the whole process of providing meals under direct control. The Ministry stoutly declared that cooking-depot meals compared favourably with British Restaurant meals, and that no unfavourable comparison had been made between neighbouring restaurants where the two methods were in operation. None the less, local authorities put up a strong, and on the whole successful, opposition to the use of cooking depots for supplying British Restaurants, using in support of their case the argument that any economies in wages of restaurant staff produced by the supply of meals from outside were more than offset by heavy transport expenses. Garaging expenses for vehicles lent to local authorities were often high, and most authorities also had recourse to local hiring, often at high rates. This contention was used by the Ministry itself in an appeal to the Treasury to allow meals supplied by cooking depots to be freed from amortisation charges.²

¹ For boiled potatoes, the average vitamin C loss was sixty-five per cent. after five hours, but the majority of the loss in fact occurred in the first two or three hours. For cabbage, divergent results were obtained from two sets of experiments: average losses of 48 per cent. and 76 per cent. were recorded, but on the second occasion variations in the vitamin C content were observed in different parts of the container.

On a less theoretical level, a number of complaints were made of the poor standards of vegetable cookery at cooking depots, and it was suggested that cooking depots should prepare vegetables but that British Restaurants should cook them.

² This was agreed to in October 1942. See later discussion on finance of British Restaurants.

The chief value of the cooking depots as a contribution to day-to-day feeding was to school canteens,¹ though even this was much lower than had been expected. The ratio of about 60:30:10 for proportions of meals going, respectively, to schools, British Restaurants, and industrial and miscellaneous other canteens, remained fairly constant to the end of the war, even after half the original total of cooking depots had been transferred to local education authorities. Only 47 depots were still operating under the Ministry's supervision when the War-time Meals scheme ended in March 1947, and only 6 were maintained by local authorities under the Civic Restaurants Act.

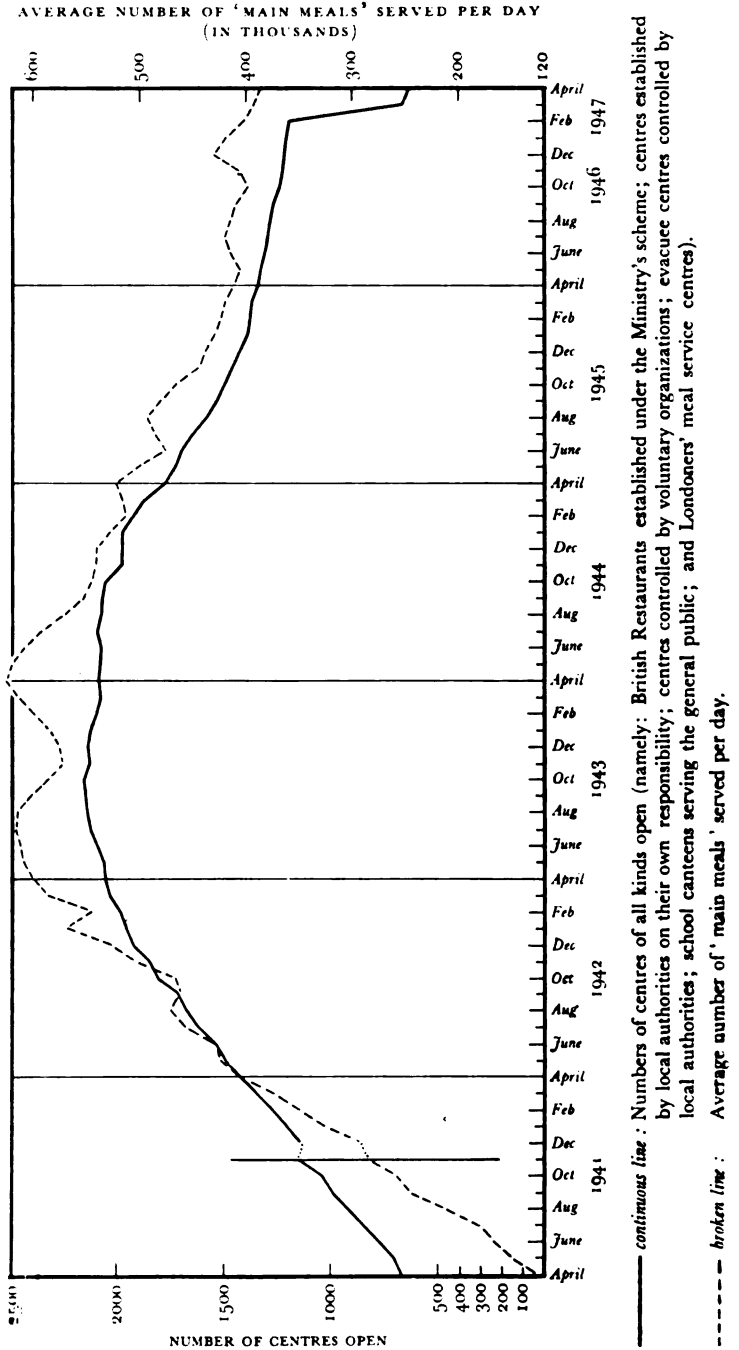
In midsummer 1941, there were just over two hundred British Restaurants operating² under the Ministry's scheme, and another 120 by voluntary organisations and by local authorities on their own financial responsibility. By this time, the movement was gaining momentum, and more centres were being opened every day. In September, the Ministry celebrated the opening of the thousandth Restaurant.³ A quarter of a million meals were now being served daily. Until the beginning of 1943, when the two-thousandth Restaurant was opened, openings continued at the steady rate of sixty to seventy a month, with the majority of the new establishments operating under the Ministry's scheme, so that about eighty-five per cent. of the total were now Ministry-sponsored. One quarter of them were in the London Division, and another quarter in the three northern Divisions; the Midlands accounted for another 250 centres. The surprisingly large total of two hundred restaurants in the Southern Division (centred on Reading), was probably the result of its large population of 'evacuees'; but no general conclusions emerge from the pattern of provision as a whole. There was, for instance, no marked difference between rural and industrial districts. Analysis of the numbers of British Restaurant meals served in County Boroughs in January 1944 showed provision for up to 1¼ per cent. of the population, but varying widely from place to place. In Manchester, meals served were only about one-third, in terms of population, of cities as diverse as Canterbury and Birmingham. These differences reflect, no doubt, various local circumstances: the extent of the 'eating out' habit, the size of the industrial unit (and hence the provision of canteens), the enterprise of the local authority, and the state of the local catering trade.

¹ Below, pp. 421-423.

² Not including 200 Londoners' Meals Service centres.

³ The figure was inflated by the inclusion of communal feeding centres that were shortly afterwards found to be catering exclusively for schoolchildren, and not reckonable as British Restaurants at all. In November these were excluded from the return, thus producing an apparent reduction in the total of restaurants open, although there were actually sixty more.

FIGURE VI
Communal Feeding



CHAPTER XXIV

Communal Feeding: The British Restaurant Movement (2)

I

COMMERCIAL caterers had begun very early to scent danger in the communal feeding programme, and it was in response to their protests that the Ministry had defined more closely its limited war-time aims.¹ The caterers complained of unfair competition by British Restaurants in districts where new establishments would be unnecessary if only the original caterers could get adequate supplies of food and labour; and they alleged that the British Restaurants' low prices were only possible because they enjoyed special advantages and preferential treatment, in the form of government subsidies, a more favourable basis of food allocation, and special attention to requests for staff from Labour Exchanges. Of the first point, more must be said later; but the others were not well founded. British Restaurants had the same allowance as other catering establishments, apart from priority allocations of certain minor items of unrationed food that were granted to certain establishments with no pre-war performance; and no definite instructions were issued to Labour Exchange staffs for handling applications from British Restaurants, although it may have been suggested to prospective employees that work in British Restaurants would be more worth while.

The Ministry claimed that British Restaurants had been created to supply hot meals at the lowest possible economic price to a class of patrons who before the war did not use catering establishments at all,² and that they were run on a self-supporting basis, without special privileges. Nevertheless in January 1942 the Minister promised to have an inspection made on the spot, should local caterers protest against a prospective British Restaurant, so as to establish whether an adequate service could be provided by private enterprise. The caterers fought a good many proposals under this arrangement, but were seldom successful. They maintained, however, a running fire of

¹ See above, p. 382.

² Such surveys of British Restaurant patronage as were made (e.g., in Birmingham, as reported in *British Restaurants*, 1946, by the National Council of Social Service), tended to support the Ministry's contention that customers were mainly working-class, although it was official policy to discourage any effort to exclude others.

criticism, launching a fresh attack on any new departure in British Restaurant management, such as the service of afternoon teas, the use of restaurants for private functions, advertisement, and especially on the spread of the Londoners' Meals Service to the 'black-coated' areas of central London, which they regarded as their own preserve. On this point their arguments might be said to have special force, as the Londoners' Meals Service was known throughout the war to be running at a loss, although this was partly if not wholly due to allowances for emergency use.¹ After the heavy air attacks, which damaged or destroyed many shop premises in the City, it became very hard for workers there to get a meal; because of the difficulty of obtaining permits for materials to re-establish shops, and reduced trading margins, private caterers were slow to re-start service. It had been agreed in September 1941 between the Ministry and the London County Council that caterers should be notified in advance of plans for new Londoners' Meals centres, and this arrangement remained in force after the conclusion of the general agreement with the trade in January 1942.

In the Ministry view caterers' opposition to British Restaurants, so long as war continued, need not be taken too seriously; it was regarded as part of a general grouse against war-time difficulties and Ministry restrictions generally. Caterers had to recognise that British Restaurants provided an insurance against emergency which they could not have supplied themselves, for—as experience in the early days of shelter feeding had shown—few of them were prepared to face the financial risks and, at best, small profit margins that the provision of an emergency service could offer. Moreover, a substantial number accepted British Restaurant service as a *war-time* measure so long as it kept to what they regarded as its proper function—serving working-class areas where cafés were fewer and trade less attractive.² There was, indeed, little to encourage commercial caterers to enter new markets. Excess Profits Tax was a deterrent to the expansion of existing businesses; indeed, what with the war-time boom in demand, the closing of establishments through bomb damage and the call-up, the shortage of labour and premises, most caterers had as much trade as they could handle, and could not complain too seriously about competition from British Restaurants.

The controversy serves now, however, as it did at the time, to focus attention on the basis and principles of British Restaurant

¹ See above, pp. 385–386. The service during and since the war has been a favourite object for attack in certain sections of the Press.

² The National Council of Social Service's pamphlet, *British Restaurants* (1946), includes some information obtained from a questionnaire sent out to its members by the Incorporated Association of Purveyors of Light Refreshments. 430 out of the 560 who replied expressed approval of British Restaurants as a war-time service, although some of these thought they should be restricted to industrial areas.

financial management in comparison with those of commercial catering. Was it true that, as the caterers complained, the British Restaurants enjoyed special advantages, and how far did those enable them to keep costs and charges low? The special features of British Restaurant finance may be separated under two headings: those relating to the establishment of the restaurants, and those affecting their subsequent management.

So far as the first point is concerned there can be no doubt that British Restaurants enjoyed a specially privileged position. They had the benefit of interest-free loans and a guarantee against the risks of promotion; they were able to draw on the Ministry pool for equipment, which was supplied on favourable terms although charged in the accounts, and to call upon the Ministry's advisers for help in setting up their restaurants. No private caterer, however, could have afforded to explore a new market and develop a new low-cost technique without financial backing. The Ministry might have made available loans and equipment to commercial caterers who undertook to introduce a British Restaurant type of service, thus introducing a new class of privately-owned catering establishments operating under government supervision;¹ but it might not have been easy to ensure that the private caterers maintained British Restaurant standards and prices, and it is unlikely that the terms of trade would have attracted many into the scheme. Industrial caterers, doing a type of business similar to that of British Restaurants, were usually large concerns controlling many canteens, and hence able to operate with small profit margins; and their prices tended to be higher and their standards lower than those of British Restaurants. After the conclusion of the agreement with the commercial caterers in early 1942, it was understood that they should be allowed the chance of putting up a scheme for serving cheap meals in any districts where they lodged objections to a prospective British Restaurant. There is only one instance—Rhyl—of such a scheme being proposed; and this was turned down as inadequate.

There has already been some discussion elsewhere on how far the British Restaurant was genuinely economic and how much it owed to artificially reduced running expenses.² The circumstances of individual British Restaurants varied so much that it is impossible to

¹ A proposal of this kind was made in October 1941. It was suggested that firms willing to serve meals of British Restaurant standards and prices should be helped to obtain canteen equipment, and permits to make structural alterations to their premises. Further contact with the caterers suggested, however, that they were less concerned about shortages of equipment than supplies of food and staff (e.g., in July 1942 the Association of Purveyors of Light Refreshments complained that the existing premises and equipment of its members in the Westminster district were not fully utilised owing to food and staff difficulties), and the proposal was not put to them.

² Gordon Taylor, 'The Future of British Restaurants' in *Agenda*, May 1944, and a reply to his arguments in *British Restaurants* (already cited).

assess the value of reduced costs to the British Restaurant movement as a whole. Some restaurants had the advantage of free or low-rent premises supplied by the local authority; but for some of these it was offset by the high expenses of upkeep and extra difficulties of management in unsuitable quarters. The employment of voluntary labour was a cost-saving factor in some restaurants, but a survey made by the Ministry in 1943 indicated that only forty per cent. employed any voluntary labour, mainly in rural districts where extra help was needed for an hour or so only for serving meals. The Ministry discouraged the use of voluntary labour, which it regarded as a mixed blessing; moreover it wished to demonstrate to caterers that British Restaurants could be run on business lines. It seems likely, therefore, that the influence of voluntary labour on their finances was slight.¹ Because of the inclusion of British Restaurants within the field of the Essential Work Order in 1942, local authorities wishing to have their restaurants scheduled had to agree to pay wages at rates suggested by the local Joint Industrial Council (in the absence at this time of any nationally agreed rates for the catering trade), and in March 1944 it was stated that at least three-quarters of the local authorities were paying J.I.C. rates.² On the whole the hours and wages in British Restaurants compared favourably with those offered by commercial restaurants working at similar price levels.

Economies in administrative expenses were made possible by combining British Restaurant work with other responsibilities of local government officials. These expenses were allowed for in the accounts by adding a predetermined extra sum to the ascertained running costs,³ together with 'reasonable and necessary expenditure' on the salaries of any staff specially appointed for catering duties. In practice, however, a good many authorities did not make any such allowance in their account, but bore the expenses on the general rate fund.

Only one detailed study of the financial management in war-time of a group of British Restaurants has so far been published.⁴ This concerns

¹ A survey made in 1943 in Eastern I Division, where voluntary help was extensively used, showed that payment of W.V.S. helpers at 1s. an hour would have meant an average increase of the cost of meals by 1d.

² In 1943 the scheduling of British Restaurants under the Essential Work Order was suspended in the course of discussion between the Minister of Labour and the industrial caterers on a national scale for catering wages.

³ This sum was calculated as follows:

- 5 per cent. on the first £5,000 of expenditure
- 4 per cent. on the next £5,000 of expenditure
- 3 per cent. on the next £10,000 of expenditure
- 2 per cent. on the balance of expenditure

—in any financial year, excluding provision for amortisation.

⁴ This was made by the London Council of Social Service in 1943 and is described in their pamphlet *The Communal Restaurant* (1943). Since then another analysis of revenue accounts of civic restaurants has appeared in 'The Finance of Civic Restaurants', by Gilbert Sugden (*Local Government Finance*, October 1949). This was prepared from the results of a questionnaire answered by fifty authorities on accounts for the year ended 31st March 1948, and shows that the majority of the authorities concerned made profits of up to ten per cent. Six incurred losses.

thirty communal restaurants managed by voluntary committees in the London area, which served meals at an average charge of 1s. Running costs were worked out, including allowances (on the J.I.C. scale), for the value of free help, and for rent and rates where buildings were available rent-free. Over-all accounts for the thirty restaurants showed a profit of .4d per shilling (fifteen showing a profit, one ending all square, and fourteen showing a deficit).¹ The analysis indicates that even at such low prices a communal restaurant may be able to pay its way; turnover being apparently the decisive factor. Every restaurant in the group with an annual turnover of over £3,000 showed a profit; restaurants with a turnover of between £2,000 and £3,000 showed either a small profit or a small loss; restaurants with a smaller turnover without exception made a loss. The Ministry itself considered that the minimum daily service to enable a restaurant to be self-supporting was 100-150 meals. Given this minimum turnover, good management, and the full use of accommodation and equipment (which pre-supposed good judgment by the local authority in estimating the volume of trade), it was possible for a British Restaurant to serve meals for little over a shilling each and pay its way.²

II

From the beginning of 1942 onwards the Ministry laid far more emphasis on the 'self-supporting' principle than in the earlier days. Reminders began to appear in communications to local authorities and Divisional Food Officers that British Restaurant undertakings must be made self-supporting as soon as possible after opening.³ Efforts were made to place restaurants as far as possible on all fours with commercial restaurants in financial matters. The policy of discouraging voluntary labour on this and other grounds has already been mentioned: on the other hand, the rate of amortisation for which provision had to be made in British Restaurant accounts was reconsidered, since here they were thought to be at a disadvantage. In 1942 the period allowed was, as it had been from the beginning, five years for heavy and two years for light equipment; this was now

¹ Only eight showed an actual deficit, before notional amounts for rent and wages had been deducted.

² Gilbert Sugden (*op. cit.*) found it impossible to draw up a 'blue print for financial success in civic catering' from the trading accounts studied because of the variety in local conditions. He concludes, however, that success in catering mainly depends on efficient management, which will be able to control expenditure on the cardinal items of provisions and salaries and wages without damaging demand.

³ A circular of April 1942, announcing arrangements for an audit of British Restaurant accounts since the beginning of operation, required trading accounts to be returned quarterly instead of monthly to Ministry headquarters, *except in the case of restaurants that were not self-supporting.*

described as 'absurdly short' in comparison with commercial standards of allowances for depreciation and in view of the probable life of the equipment.

In any event, the money was just not there. At the end of the financial year 1941-42, a net profit of only £10,000 was available, against which amortisation charges of £130,000 had to be set; moreover costs were expected to rise, mainly because of the higher wage rates that had to be paid under the Essential Work Order. Since the Ministry could not force local authorities to cover amortisation charges, it was thought realistic to adopt a more 'reasonable' amortisation period for all equipment; this was therefore extended to eight and one-third years. The requirement that charges for meals from cooking depots should include amortisation in respect of the capital cost of the depots was also dropped, so as to encourage day-to-day use of the depots and compensate for the expense of transport and the inferior quality of meals.

The War-time Meals Advisers were found to be the most effective instruments for improving British Restaurant management and inculcating the 'self-supporting' principle. They were asked to regard the achievement of a sound financial basis for all restaurants as one of their chief aims, and were provided with a standard form of report designed to supply all relevant information, including percentage costs of food and wages¹ in cases of deficiency. These reports were studied by a special section at headquarters. Reminders of the importance of financial solvency grew stronger; in May 1943 it was announced at a conference of Advisers that British Restaurants must pay their way or close down. It proved difficult to disabuse local authorities of the belief that the Ministry would reimburse all trading losses; the unavoidable 'approved operating deficiencies' of the original circular of 1940 had to be defined more clearly, as those resulting from the opening of a British Restaurant, say in a period of emergency after an air raid, or to serve a small number of workers for whom a factory canteen was subsequently opened.² Many local authorities were very reluctant to adopt the only effective method of checking losses, that of increasing prices charged for meals. In certain Food Divisions³ headquarters control of deficit cases was introduced to short-circuit the delays of normal procedure, and to avoid the personal difficulties involved when correspondence with local authorities was conducted by the Divisional Food Officer.

During 1942, proposals for new British Restaurants also began to

¹ A statement of British Restaurant and cooking depot trading results issued in May 1944 analysed various items of expenditure as percentages of income, and suggested 45-50 per cent. for raw food and 30-33 per cent. for wages as reasonable charges.

² Up to May 1944 the Ministry had agreed to reimburse losses in twenty instances.

³ North Western, North Midland, Midland, London and North Eastern.

receive more careful scrutiny; in July the formal letter of approval issued by Divisional Food Officers to local authorities preparing restaurants was redrafted so as to discourage unapproved expenditure above the original estimate. Proposals for small restaurants, in rural districts and small towns, were watched in case their potential custom should be not enough to make them pay. So much had the climate of opinion changed since 1940 that alarm was expressed that there should be British Restaurants existing or proposed in places like Tenby or Burford; it was even said that 'some local authorities were guilty of an excess of enthusiasm'. Nevertheless, even by these severer criteria, there were only a handful of British Restaurants that ought not to have been allowed to open.

These measures had their effect on British Restaurant finances. The net deficit of £124,000 in trading results to the end of the financial year 1941-42 was converted into a net profit of £44,000 for the year 1942-43. 'What might have been a serious financial failure had been retrieved.' Trading results continued to improve until mid-1944, and at the end of the financial year 1943-44, accounts showed a net profit of £90,000 for the whole period of operation after allowances of £650,000 had been made for amortisation; but during the third quarter of 1944, British Restaurant custom declined sharply and the majority of restaurants began to show losses.¹

As 1943 advanced and it became clear that the peak of British Restaurant development had been passed, post-war considerations began to have their weight in the shaping of policy. The commercial caterers, alarmed by Press speculation about British Restaurants continuing after the war, appealed to the Minister to renew his earlier undertaking² that they were planned solely as a war-time provision. Any formal commitment, however, was avoided; it was merely stated that it would be for the Parliament of the time to decide on the future of British Restaurants when the temporary powers of the Ministry of Food, under which it had authorised local authority undertakings, should expire. An instruction, however, was issued to Divisional Food Officers that the Minister 'no longer desired pressure to be applied to local authorities' to provide new restaurants, and more important, that special attention should be given to applications for licences from private caterers in any district where new British Restaurants were proposed.

Early in 1944 the unlikelihood that the Ministry would recover any

¹ These figures are taken from a statement of trading results prepared in War-time Meals Division in April 1945. They differ from figures covering the same period which appear in summaries of trading results produced in 1944, but are quoted as representing later information.

² In his reply to a caterers' deputation on 12th January 1942, Lord Woolton 'stated that they had been brought into existence solely to meet a war-time need, and that he saw no reason to anticipate their continued existence after the emergency'.

large part of the capital cost of new British Restaurants, in view of the length of the period of amortisation and the favourable turn of the war, was put forward as a reason for checking further expansion. Although the rate of opening new restaurants had dropped considerably, many authorities planned to transfer their restaurants to new premises, now that the old ones (frequently schools) had to be returned to their original purposes; in a number of instances new temporary buildings would be required, each at a cost of £3,000 or more.¹ It was agreed, however, that new schemes and transfers of premises must continue to be judged solely according to the war-time criterion of need, combined with good prospects for financial success. After all, the Ministry had very early abandoned the belief that capital costs would be recovered.

This middle-of-the-road policy continued until the end of the European war; but it became clear that the Government would have to make up its mind fairly soon whether to authorise municipalities to run British Restaurants in peace-time. In early 1945 the Corporation of South Shields promoted a parliamentary private bill that included a clause empowering it to maintain community feeding centres after the expiry of the emergency powers under which the Community Kitchens Order had been issued. At the same time an energetic Press controversy began between the opponents and advocates of British Restaurants. Obviously, however, nothing could be done until after the post-war General Election. An Order² issued on 9th May 1945 prolonged the emergency powers of local authorities to control, *inter alia*, community feeding centres, and there the matter rested until the new Labour Government took office, and began the discussions that eventually took shape in the Civic Restaurants Act.

The Civic Restaurants Act offered alternative methods by which local authorities wishing to continue operating restaurants could acquire from the Ministry of Food the capital assets of their existing undertakings. About three hundred authorities took advantage of the offer, and 460 closed down; it was estimated that the total capital costs of the British Restaurant service had been something over £4 million, and that returns, including transfer prices from local authorities and profits,³ should bring down the net capital losses to somewhere in the region of £1 million. The losses on cooking depots, after allowing for those taken over by local authorities for school meals or (more rarely) for restaurant services, amounted to some £900,000.

¹ For instance, it was then expected that twenty L.C.C. meals centres might have to be rehoused in the coming year at a cost of £100,000.

² S.R. & O. (1945) No. 505.

³ Under the terms of the circular of 15th November 1940, these were at the disposal of the Ministry. It was estimated that after allowing a reserve for the reimbursement of unavoidable trading losses, they would amount to about £700,000.

III

After the formation of the Ministry's pool for British Restaurants in April 1941, the only important development in the procuring of equipment was the introduction of central purchasing for various Government Departments by the Ministry of Works. As early as December 1940 the Ministry of Food, realising the demands on equipment that would be made by communal feeding of all kinds, took the initiative in discussions on central buying, but at that time no other Department was interested in the possibility, and the Ministry had to make independent arrangements through the Ministry of Works for inviting tenders and placing orders. In March 1941, however, the Board of Education asked for a quota from the Ministry of Food's pool, and later in the year the Ministry became for a short time the sponsoring Department for the supply of equipment for the school meals service and for the colliery canteens run by the Miners' Welfare Commission. In August 1941, the question of central purchasing of equipment was re-opened by the Ministry of Food, and discussion was begun on rationalisation of production and allocation of material between Departments. A technical committee was also set up to consider the standardisation of canteen equipment, and after consultation with the manufacturers drew up a schedule¹ with detailed specifications of a minimum number of items required for kitchens, and prepared specimen lay-outs for guidance in designing canteens. It was agreed that Departments other than those purchasing through the Ministry of Supply (that is, non-purchasing civil departments including the Ministry of Food) should submit six-monthly estimates of requirements of equipment to the Ministry of Works, which in consultation with the Ministry of Supply would place orders according to industrial capacity, and if necessary decide priorities between Departments awaiting deliveries.

The introduction of central purchasing, although unavoidable in view of the competing demands of various communal feeding programmes, led to serious delays in deliveries of equipment to British Restaurants. However, the list of British Restaurant equipment available from the pool was extended until by September 1942 it included all essentials, and local authorities were no longer allowed to make independent purchases from other sources.² Model indent forms showing the quantity of equipment appropriate to standard types of

¹ Published in March 1942.

² The comprehensive list of equipment for British Restaurants issued in September 1942 included gas- and electrically-heated ranges and boilers, in addition to solid fuel equipment, but in view of the important part played by British Restaurants in the emergency feeding plan, it was insisted throughout the war that seventy per cent. of the equipment of any restaurant must be fired by solid fuel. It was agreed, however, that coal-fired ranges and boilers might be adapted for gas-firing in such a way that they could be quickly reconverted.

restaurant were prepared for the guidance of local authorities in assessing their requirements, and of Divisional Food Officers in checking them before passing to headquarters.

Finding suitable premises for British Restaurants, as the Ministry had discovered during its abortive National Kitchens experiment of 1940, was always a difficult problem for local authorities, as they came rather late into the field and found many buildings already requisitioned or earmarked for other purposes.¹ From the beginning an embargo was placed on new permanent buildings, and Divisional Food Officers were instructed to see that structural alterations were kept to the minimum, especially when they meant using steel or timber.² To ease the situation it was decided to use prefabricated buildings, and towards the end of 1941 a small number of Nissen huts was ordered from the War Office for use as British Restaurants and cooking depots, but the supply of these was abruptly cut off at the beginning of 1942.³ In their place the Ministry was able to secure supplies of Nashcrete huts of precast concrete, which were made available for British Restaurants in May 1942.⁴ At the end of 1944 there were about 170 prefabricated British Restaurants in existence; they had proved successful in use, being clean, light, and reasonably well planned for their purpose, in contrast with some of the older buildings that had been adapted as restaurants. They also provided good scope for mural paintings, which some local authorities had executed by local artists and art students. This was one feature of an interesting side-line in British Restaurant development initiated in May 1942 by a letter from the Minister to civic heads, which aimed at brightening up the restaurants by attractive schemes of decoration, good lighting, well-designed fittings, and the hanging of pictures and posters. Later in 1942 a professional artist was retained by the Ministry to advise authorities, in collaboration with the Arts Council, and the British Institute for Adult Education, which initiated a scheme for lending pictures to British Restaurants in the London Division.

During 1942, shortages of building labour for British Restaurants became even more hampering than difficulties over raw materials,

¹ On 1st April 1941 Clerks of Councils were advised that the Minister had delegated to them his powers of requisitioning under the Defence Regulations houses or other buildings for purposes of communal or emergency feeding schemes, subject to the previous approval of the Divisional Food Officer. In January 1942 this power was extended to land as well as buildings; by this time it had become necessary to use temporary buildings, and difficulty was experienced in finding suitable sites because of the conditions that landowners wished to enforce.

² Application for these had to be made to the Ministry's Ancillary Materials Branch.

³ Some local authorities had actually prepared sites and laid concrete foundations for Nissen huts when the orders were cancelled. In March 1942 it was decided to allow authorities whose Nissen huts had been cancelled to erect brick buildings.

⁴ The huts were obtained in sizes to seat 150, 250, and 500 people, and prices of about £1,000, £1,500, and £2,500 respectively for supplying and erecting were quoted by Nashcrete Ltd. in 1942.

and local authorities were advised to consult regional officers of the Ministry of Works before inviting tenders for contracts. From May 1943, fortnightly estimates of the manpower needed for projected British Restaurants and cooking depots were required from local authorities for transmission to the Ministry of Works, and from the end of that year monthly returns of the labour actually employed.

IV

There were few important differences between methods of food procurement in British Restaurants and those used in commercial restaurants. Rationed foods were issued on almost the same basis as to private caterers; during the controversy with the catering trade in the latter part of 1941, this was one of the main arguments used by the Ministry to rebut the complaint that British Restaurants were privileged institutions. In fact, the only advantage enjoyed by British Restaurants over commercial establishments was the priority allocation of certain unrationed foods, arranged for various undertakings which had come into existence since the war, and had no 'previous performance' against which they could, like other catering establishments, be allowed a sixty per cent. quota.

In the spring of 1941 some British Restaurants began to experience serious difficulties in getting supplies of unrationed foods. At that time they were included in the list of organisations¹ entitled to apply for priority allocations, under a scheme that had been in operation since December 1940, but owing to the inadequacies of the arrangements by which applications were considered and supplies issued, the working of the scheme was very erratic. A new scheme, introduced in August 1941, provided for the registration by Divisional Food Officers of all eligible canteens, and for the standardisation of quantities allocated according to the number of meals served.² This worked more satisfactorily and assured for British Restaurants a share of the goods concerned; the introduction of the points rationing scheme in December 1941 put them on an equal footing with other catering establishments, in securing a share of most other foods not so far included in the rationing system.

¹ These were: N.A.A.F.I. and other military canteens not supplied by direct contract, hospitals, local authorities for civil defence services, police, fire services, communal feeding or other emergency feeding centres, bodies specially authorised by the Ministry to provide for emergency feeding, including shelter feeding, and canteens serving industrial undertakings.

² The priority foodstuffs were: baked beans, biscuits, cake and flour confectionery, cocoa powder, starch food powders, chocolate and sugar confectionery (only for hospitals and industrial canteens), coffee essence, and fruit juices and squashes. Shredded suet appears to have been added to the list later.

British Restaurants received special consideration by a Ministry Committee on Catering Establishments appointed in 1941 to examine the possibility of providing extra food for workers through canteens or restaurants as an alternative to differential rationing; but it was decided to treat them on equal terms with commercial restaurants. Restaurants of any type, including British Restaurants, certified by their local Food Control Committee to be serving over sixty per cent. of their meals to manual workers were to qualify for category B ration allocations,¹ which included a rather more favourable allowance of meat than that granted to unprivileged establishments. British Restaurants not satisfying this condition received no special advantage.

In 1944 it was proposed, in order to avoid the apparent discrimination, to exclude British Restaurants from the priority scheme for unrationed foods. By this time the argument that British Restaurants, as new establishments, could not secure supplies was losing its force, and in any case new commercial establishments received no priority. However, there was a unanimous protest from War-time Meals Advisers all over the country against any suggestion of dropping priorities for shredded suet and starch food powders, as puddings made from these were staple features of the British Restaurants' menus. These were therefore allowed to remain; but priorities for other items² were discontinued except for category B restaurants.

Centralised purchasing of food for British Restaurants, following the precedent of the pool of equipment, was sometimes suggested as a means of reducing costs, improving quality by skilled buying, or even 'steering' the consumption of certain foods (a favourite Ministry project): but in practice it was little used. Commodity Divisions of the Ministry did not favour interfering with the established channels of trade in food purchase, as this would have aroused fierce opposition from the trade; it would, moreover, have required a considerable organisation to arrange for breaking bulk to distribute in small quantities to the smaller authorities. (The larger authorities, controlling a number of restaurants, already used central buying to a certain extent, or at least bought by wholesale.) Many authorities, anyway, would have been unwilling to surrender responsibility for food buying, especially of perishables, which offered their supervisors most scope for skilful and imaginative choice.

¹ The scheme divided catering establishments into three categories: A, canteens and other approved establishments serving heavy workers, B, other industrial canteens and all establishments (including British Restaurants) catering mainly for manual workers, and C, all other establishments.

Three scales of allocation were introduced for these categories; the chief differentiation was in meat, which, when the C category allocation stood at 1d. per main meal, was fixed at 1½d. and 2d. (minimum levels) for categories B and A. Extra supplies of bacon, sugar, and fats were also allowed to category A and B canteens.

² In consequence of extensions of points rationing these were now reduced to flour confectionery, soft drinks, and coffee essence.

V

The first object of British Restaurants was to serve a substantial meal at the lowest possible economic price. This meant simple menus, the use of the cheaper types of food, and the adoption of the cafeteria system to save labour expenses. Specimen menus,¹ planned to provide a balanced diet, were circulated to local authorities from time to time, and the War-time Meals Advisers were expected to keep in touch with the Ministry's Food Advice Division to ensure that any suggestions they made should conform with the Ministry's 'general line'; but as local authorities were directly responsible for British Restaurants, theoretical advice on nutritional standards had to be presented with tact.

British Restaurants, however, were included in a survey of canteen meals, begun in June 1942 by the Ministry's scientific staff and continued for a year. Samples of meals from British Restaurants and industrial canteens were analysed to determine their nutritive value. The inquiry revealed wide variations in the quality of British Restaurant meals, especially in vitamin C content, and an unexpectedly low average calorific value of about 630 calories, falling far short of the 1,000 calories that had been suggested as the ideal. The ideal appeared to be unattainable; it was concluded that the food value of 'subsidiary' meals in making up the day's diet² was

¹ The menus and recipes were prepared by Ministry of Food dieticians, and were based on the general principle of the 'Oslo breakfast', recommended by the Scientific Adviser as desirable in planning communal meals. The aim was to provide in the communal meal a substantial proportion of all the essential nutrients required by the body, especially vitamins, iron, calcium, and protein, which are commonly deficient in 'poverty diets', and might be almost entirely lacking in the other meals of the day. This principle was stated in the foreword to *Canteen Catering*, a pamphlet containing advice on recipes and the planning of menus, published by the Ministry of Food in 1942 and was prescribed by the Board of Education for planning menus in the School Meals Service. Nevertheless, the majority of British Restaurants and their clients appear to have been wedded to the conventional type of meal.

² The idea of a thousand-calorie meal was based on the hypothesis that the average man required a daily caloric intake of about 3,000 calories, which it was assumed would be obtained from three meals of approximately equal size. Surveys made by Scientific Adviser's Division of the habits of various types of worker showed that many were taking five or six meals a day, and that the calorific value of, for example, a mid-morning snack might be greater than that of a mid-day meal. 'In practice the average communal meal only supplies about 22 per cent. of the calorific requirements.' It was found that, mainly because of the shortage of fat, a meal providing 1,000 calories had to be so bulky that it could not be eaten with comfort by the average person. An experiment was devised to supply various groups of people with meals of differing calorific values, to determine how much they would voluntarily eat. A group of soldiers on active outdoor work ate meals providing nearly 1,200 calories; but another group of two moderately active men, and three schoolchildren of thirteen, who were given a meal providing 1,000 calories, could only manage an average of 674 calories. 'The schoolboy ate the full 1,000 calories but there was evidence to indicate that this was not achieved without an effort.' A third group of three sedentary men and three moderately active women ate an average of 656 calories.

'This experiment seems to show that, excepting for men on active outdoor work, the average amount which people are prepared to eat of a midday meal based on the current catering allowances is not far from the 630 calories which has been found, by analysis, in fact to be the average value of British Restaurant meals.'

greater than had been supposed. Otherwise, the chief practical result of the survey was to indicate those British Restaurants that consistently served poor meals, and attempts were made to rectify this.

Over practical cooking standards the Ministry could claim some authority, for on these might depend the success of a restaurant. The occasional visits of the War-time Meals Adviser were useless unless the restaurants had good cooks, and these became increasingly difficult to find as more women were directed into national service or voluntarily left catering for better-paid work elsewhere. The problem was not confined to British Restaurants. Complaints about the meals in communal feeding establishments of all kinds, especially works canteens, became common, and in March 1942 Lord Woolton himself suggested that the Ministry of Food should either take control over all communal catering organisation, or at any rate collaborate with the Ministers immediately responsible in a stricter inquiry into canteen conditions. The former suggestion was not welcomed by officials, who thought it better to start courses of instruction for British Restaurant cooks, and perhaps thereafter for cooks at factory canteens; the proposed approach to other Departments was dropped for the time being. It turned out, however, that all available instructors were fully occupied in conducting courses for canteen cooks run by the Board of Education and the Ministry of Labour. These courses were occasionally used by local authorities for training cooks for British Restaurants about to open, and to enable cooks already at work to get some extra training; but it was difficult to get women to agree to give up their free time to attend lectures. The Ministry therefore planned to organise its own team of specially-trained mobile cooks, called Cook Advisers, who could either deputise for British Restaurant cooks while they attended full-time courses, or if preferred, train cooks in their own restaurants. A training course for Cook Advisers was held in December 1942, but it proved difficult to recruit suitable candidates; only twelve were appointed, and these worked with varying success in the restaurants (local authorities invariably preferred to have their cooks remain in their restaurants for training instead of attending outside courses). Meanwhile, War-time Meals Advisers were becoming difficult to find, and in May 1943 it was decided, as the duties of Cook Adviser and War-time Meals Adviser frequently overlapped, to combine the two posts.

At the end of 1942, the question of a wider control of communal feeding standards was raised by the Minister of Labour, who wrote to Lord Woolton, making the same criticisms of the quality of catering in industrial canteens, especially those managed by industrial caterers. Mr. Bevin proposed that a corporation on the model of the National Service Hostels Corporation¹ should be formed to take over the

¹ This was established in 1941 as a non-profit-making body to manage hostels for war workers.

management of canteens, but the Ministry of Food, though not definitely opposed to the plan, was wary of approving a measure that would patently affect the interest of the commercial caterers, at a time when the Catering Wages Bill was before Parliament, and this argument was used by Lord Woolton to persuade Mr. Bevin to defer his proposal. A conference of Ministers interested in industrial canteens¹ agreed that they were better run by employers than by industrial caterers, and that canteen committees, to enable workers to have a say in their management, were desirable; but the only concrete results of the discussion were the introduction by the Ministry of Labour of a new Canteens Order,² and a revision by the Ministry of Food of arrangements for licensing factory canteens. The licensing of new industrial catering establishments was transferred from Food Control Committees to Divisional Food Officers; all applications from industrial caterers, moreover, were to be referred to Headquarters so as to allow some check on the expansion of business by firms already in bad odour with Ministry of Food enforcement officers or Ministry of Labour canteen advisers.

The Ministry of Food gave a good deal of publicity to the improvement in standards that was expected to result from the new licensing system, and from closer supervision by the Ministries of Food and Labour. Later on the Ministry called conferences to discuss problems of industrial catering and emphasise the Ministry's interest in seeing that food allowances were used to provide appetising and nutritious meals. These conferences served also to reassure the contractors who had been upset by public criticism and by the refusal of the Ministry of Labour to protect their staffs under the Essential Work Order. Nevertheless, it was the Ministry of Labour that retained the substance of responsibility for industrial caterers.

VI

The Ministry of Food's direct influence on communal feeding was thus for practical purposes confined to the British Restaurants. Their effects are difficult to estimate; the only certainty is that they must have been limited, because of the comparatively small volume of British Restaurant business. An honest attempt was made by most local authorities, encouraged by the War-time Meals Advisers, to keep up a decent standard of plain, wholesome, and reasonably varied

¹ The Ministers of Labour, Supply, Aircraft Production, and Food.

² This applied to factories, engaged on essential work and employing more than 250 people. It empowered the Chief Inspector of Factories to direct an employer to establish and maintain a canteen; and to serve a notice requiring defects to be put right if the canteen was unsatisfactory in any respect.

meals, served in clean and often attractive surroundings. They contrasted favourably with the type of semi-snack meal which was all that would otherwise have been available in many working-class districts, and compared well with the average cheap meal served anywhere.

British Restaurants were thought by some contemporaries to be 'one of the most interesting social developments of the war'.¹ They were described as 'essentially democratic in price and in clientele'; surveys made in London and Birmingham showed that their British Restaurants were patronised by a substantial proportion of professional and other black-coated workers, as well as industrial workers. It was said that many British Restaurants had their own homely atmosphere, subtly different from that of a commercial restaurant; the comparatively small scale of cooking in the self-contained restaurants, and the practice of individual service of customers, gave the food more of a 'home-cooked' flavour than, for instance, that of the mass-produced meals served in cheaper commercial restaurants of the 'tea-shop' type. It seemed to some enthusiasts that British Restaurants might become the nuclei for community centres, which figured prominently in schemes for post-war reconstruction.

Others were more sceptical. The War-time Meals Division itself, in August 1943, thought it necessary to disabuse some of its colleagues in the Ministry's General Department of any idea that 'communal feeding offered considerable scope for the general improvement of consumption standards'. At its peak, the influence of the movement was small.

'So far as the distribution of British Restaurants is concerned, all the 28 local government areas in the British Isles with populations of over 150,000 now have them, but only eight of these areas have more than ten Restaurants in operation and several have six or less, which can obviously make very little impression on the population as a whole. Of the 1,593 local government areas, 838, or more than fifty per cent., have no British Restaurants at all. A high proportion of these are of course in rural areas . . . but there are still two County Boroughs, and 82 other Municipal Boroughs in England and Wales, as well as five large Burghs in Scotland, without any British Restaurants. . . . These figures may not give a proper indication of the significance of British Restaurants. . . . They do reveal, however, the comparatively small proportion of the total population affected by British Restaurants.'

A Canadian observer,² moreover, held as early as 1944 that the British Restaurant would fall into decline as soon as temporary war-time factors—shortage of food, employment of women outside the

¹ *The Times*, 22nd August 1942.

² Gordon Taylor, *op. cit.*

home—were removed. The cheapest communal meal, he noted, was considerably more costly than home cooking could provide; and he expected the habit of eating at home (outside London, and to a lesser extent other great cities) to re-assert itself.

As early as the beginning of 1943, indeed, it had become clear that the limit of increase was being approached. The rate of new opening dropped steadily, though the totals of British Restaurants operating under the Ministry scheme showed a rather higher rate of increase, as a number of local authorities with their own schemes were applying for the Ministry's financial guarantee. In April 1943 as a result of a Parliamentary question a first report on closures of restaurants¹ was prepared. The movement reached its peak in September 1943, when there were 2,160 restaurants serving about 630,000 meals daily. (The peak number under the Ministry scheme, 1,859, came a little later, in December.) Numbers then began to decline slowly but steadily to the beginning of 1945, when there were just over 1,900 Restaurants open; in May there were about 1,800, and in September 1,500. Closures then followed rapidly; altogether about five hundred Restaurants ceased to operate during 1945. After mid-1946, however, the rate of closure dropped to about ten a month until March 1947, when the Ministry's financial agreement was terminated. A final spate of closures left about three hundred authorities operating about 850 Restaurants on their own responsibility under the Civic Restaurants Act, which came into force on 1st April 1947.² A year later 770 Civic Restaurants were open, serving just under three million meals a week, including half a million school meals; by February 1949 the number was 678.³

It is perhaps still too early to say whether a remnant of British Restaurants will in fact establish themselves as permanent heirs of the war-time movement; even, perhaps, too early to forecast the permanence of factory canteens beyond the period of food shortage. What does seem clear, however, is that no new secret of inexpensive catering was revealed by the Ministry of Food's experiment. Aided by the provision of capital, by the enthusiasm engendered of war-time, and perhaps above all by the shortage, not only of ingredients but of opportunities and facilities for eating at home, British Restaurants were able to provide an ancillary service that, for all its protests,

¹ Up to March 1943, a total of 158 restaurants of all kinds, half of which, however, had been temporarily opened in emergency, had been closed. 37 British Restaurants and 17 'Cash and Carry' centres had been closed for lack of support; not a high rate of mortality, all things considered. Up to the end of the war in Europe, 386 had been closed.

² The Act empowered local authorities to run catering establishments on their own financial responsibility, with the proviso that if trading accounts should show a loss over three successive years, the Ministry of Food should have power to order their closure. In June 1946, the Ministry had offered terms under which authorities could compound to have British Restaurants transferred to their responsibility.

³ Sugden, *op. cit.*

the catering trade could not have provided—indeed, in view of the capital risks, would have been ill-advised to try to provide. In effect, the assumption by the Ministry of Food of capital risks, and the elimination of profit, enabled an expansion of catering facilities, limited by shortages of labour, materials, and perhaps demand, and by the insistence that running losses be avoided. British Restaurants were, that is to say, a marginal form of catering activity, serving the marginal customer who would otherwise have been unable or unwilling to eat out. For such—and they were many in war-time—the Restaurants were a real boon; and it would not be right to decry the movement merely because its scale and influence were so disproportionate to the flourish and *panache* with which it was launched. Moreover, it is at least arguable that the value of British Restaurants may not be measured solely in terms of the facilities they provided, but that they constituted a bulwark of food policy as a whole. They were, that is to say, an emblem of ‘fair shares’; a feature to which the Ministry could point when faced with criticism of ‘luxury feeding’ and unrationed restaurant meals. They helped to give substance to the claim that there was no part of the community that was not the Ministry’s especial care.

CHAPTER XXV

Miscellaneous Communal Feeding Arrangements

I

THE PARCELLING out between Departments of responsibility for canteen provision for various sections of the community should, theoretically, have left the Ministry of Food responsible only for the types of feeding that have already been described, i.e., those catering for the population at large; and, of course, for providing food for all. In practice, however, the Ministry's War-time Meals Division was called upon for active assistance with several types of feeding problems that proved intractable in the hands of the Department charged with them. In helping with these, the Ministry was helping itself; for the firm and on the whole successful¹ stand it was taking against differential rationing depended on their solution.

The biggest problem was that of farm workers. They usually work singly or in small groups; there are few farms in England employing more than a handful of workers, except at harvest and other times of special activity. For this reason it was impossible to make the employers responsible for providing a canteen service. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the natural protector of the farm worker, was unable to devise any solution, and in July 1941 appealed to the Ministry of Food to do what it could to establish British Restaurants in rural areas, which would benefit farm workers as members of the rural community in general. In fact, it was later found to be practically impossible to organise any feeding schemes for farm workers alone; a few canteens were organised for their employees by farmers, individually or in groups, with 'category A' allocations of food, and some groups of workers had meals sent from British Restaurants or cooking depots, but their numbers were small. The feeding scheme that was eventually devised was analogous, that is to say, to British Restaurants rather than to factory canteens.²

¹ The most important exceptions were the grant of special cheese to 'canteenless' workers, and the 'modified' Seaman's Ration Book. See below, Chapters XXXIV, XXXV.

² After the Pie Scheme had been in existence for some time, doubts were expressed at the Lord President's Committee about allowing all country-dwellers the chance to try them. It was explained that because of the impossibility of limiting the sale of pies to agricultural workers the meat entitlement of the scheme had been fixed at 1½d. per meal (or pie), that is, the category B allowance, instead of 2d., the heavy workers' allowance to which agricultural workers as such would be entitled.

The Ministry of Food had hoped that British Restaurants might be set up in country districts, but few rural district councils had shown interest in them, and it seemed unlikely that they could be made to pay. Headquarters asked Divisional Food Officers to investigate the position of country dwellers and to consider the provision of meals, in consultation with voluntary organisations and the agricultural trade unions; but up to November few schemes had been started, and in fact not many Divisions admitted that they were necessary. The Ministry concluded therefore that mobile canteens providing for the distribution of meals and snacks over a wide area would stand the best chance of success. This conclusion was reinforced when the Women's Voluntary Services reported a successful experiment, started in the Sevenoaks Rural District,¹ for the manufacture and sale of *meat pies* by voluntary workers in their own homes, with the approval of the local council but without official financial backing. The idea appealed to the Ministry by its simplicity and flexibility, as well as by its independence of overburdened or lethargic local authorities; in February 1942 it was announced that voluntary organisations or individuals² would be authorised to run 'Pie Centres', licensed as catering establishments for the manufacture and distribution of meat pies and snacks. These were granted the 'category B' allowance of 1½d. of meat per packed meal supplied.³ Where pies could not be baked 'at home', organisers of schemes were urged to try and arrange for them to be made by a local baker (rather than be ordered from a manufacturer) so as to economise in transport, allow a closer control of the use of supplies and of prices, and maintain local interest in the scheme.

Divisional Food Officers, who had already been sent lists, supplied by the farm workers' unions, of places deserving special attention, were asked to encourage pie schemes, and the Women's Voluntary Services and Women's Institutes circulated details and explanatory notes of the scheme to their branches. Although the pie schemes were not welcomed by the National Union of Agricultural Workers, who, failing supplementary rations for agricultural workers, would have preferred more British Restaurants as bases for a mobile canteen system, they soon gained a modest success.

By July 1942 several hundred of them were reported to be operating in the Southern, South-Eastern and Eastern Divisions, and a weekly total of about half a million pies was being sold; but the Ministry of

¹ A similar scheme had been organised by the W.V.S. in Cambridgeshire during the harvest of 1941.

² Local authorities were already authorised to run pie schemes as part of a communal feeding scheme.

³ Allowances of other foods were made on the category B scale, so that, as well as pies, goods such as sandwiches and fruit tarts could be made. An extra supply of fat was allowed for pastry-making.

Agriculture and Fisheries pointed out that this number did not go very far, since the total of farm workers was about 650,000, and the pies were available to all country dwellers. At the same time the National Union of Agricultural Workers made another plea for extra meat rations, and put forward through the T.U.C. their request for mobile canteens to deliver hot meals to agricultural workers, so that the Minister of Food had to promise another investigation into the possibility of opening more British Restaurants in the country. Only about 80,000 British Restaurant meals from about 80 centres a week were being served in country districts; it was thought difficult to extend the service much further without opening more restaurants, for which financial success could not be guaranteed. Inquiries made by the Ministry suggested that although there was much grumbling among countrymen, they had little serious cause for discontent. Hot meals services were on the whole not wanted; the facilities to start them existed, but the custom did not. Pie schemes, on the other hand, seemed to fill a need.¹ By the beginning of 1943 weekly sales exceeded a million, and in 1946 reached 1,300,000; moreover, schemes were invariably a financial success; it was remarked that pie schemes could not help making profits, which sometimes proved an embarrassment to their voluntary organisers. A feature of later development was, not unexpectedly, the increasing intrusion of wholesale pie manufacturers into the market. Early in 1945 it was complained that they tended to oust local traders as suppliers, and that the interest of the Women's Voluntary Services was waning. By mid-1947, though the schemes were still flourishing, distribution had often been taken over by a retailer, so that their special character had largely been lost.

II

The coalminers were another problem group of workers. In March 1941 a deputation of Members of Parliament from mining constituencies had asked the Minister of Food for extra rations, especially of meat; but in accordance with its general policy, supported by the Ministry of Labour and the T.U.C., the Ministry wished to give any extras by way of pithead canteens. The Mines Department adopted Lord Woolton's suggestion that the Miners' Welfare Commission

¹ Demand for pies varied over England and Wales (no scheme was begun in Scotland, where, in view of the existence of a system of paying a part of farm wages in kind, they were thought unnecessary). The biggest sales were in the chief agricultural districts of the east and south and the north Midlands. There was little demand for pies in the north or in Wales.

should be brought in to use its funds¹ to establish canteens, and delegated to the Commission the task of organising them; the Commission in turn informed district Miners' Welfare Committees that grants would be available from the Miners' Welfare Fund to enable them to install canteens, and that the Ministry of Food would supply the food on the same basis as to canteens serving heavy industries; the colliery companies would be expected to make premises available at the pithead.

The delegation of canteen organisation to the Miners' Welfare Commission, reinforced in December 1941 by an Order² giving the Commission powers to direct colliery owners to open canteens, brought about a peculiar situation in the control of miners' feeding. According to an arrangement already in force for welfare enterprise in general, canteen organisation became the responsibility of joint committees representing management and workers, against whom the Commission had no powers of enforcement or inspection; so that although the Commission could, at least in theory, insist on the opening of a canteen, it could take no direct action if any shortcomings were reported.³ Another consequence of this twofold delegation of responsibility by the Mines Department and the Miners' Welfare Commission was that neither appointed any technical or supervisory staff for pithead canteens. As the Minister of Food had placed the services of his staff at the disposal of the Commission in May 1941 this led to the entire burden of advising Canteen Committees on the establishment and management of canteens being put upon War-time Meals Division.

In the opening stages of the development of pithead canteens, therefore, the Division acted on behalf of the Miners' Welfare Commission in applying for permits for steel and timber, and for a time also included the Commission's requirements of equipment in its own bulk requisition submitted to the Ministry of Works.⁴ It was arranged that War-time Meals Advisers should collaborate with District

¹ The Miners' Welfare Commission was a statutory and incorporated body appointed by the Mines Department of the Board of Trade to administer the Miners' Welfare Fund, which was derived from welfare levies of 1d. per ton on all saleable coal and 1s. in the £ on mining royalties.

The use of the Welfare Fund represented a diversion of resources which, but for war-time restrictions on building, would have been used for more pit-head baths. There were those who felt that the industry should have made separate provision for its canteens, as other employers were obliged to do.

For an account of the Commission's work in this field, see *Miners' Welfare in War-Time* (the report of the Commission for the six and a half years ended 30th June 1946), pp. 20-31.

² S.R. & O. (1941) 1867.

³ 'The Commission has no power of enforcement against trustees who may run the enterprise inefficiently, and in some of the coalfields even the help and stimulus which the Commission has sought to supply through its District Welfare Officers are not well received.'

⁴ See above, pp. 403-404.

Officers of the Commission in visiting pithead canteens, and the Ministry promised to appoint additional staff for the purpose. The arrangement was an informal one, with no definite procedure for operation, and the Advisers possessed no powers of enforcing their recommendations, but it worked reasonably well, with variations of method from Division to Division according to private agreement of Advisers and District Organisers.

Considering that the Commission had begun virtually from scratch, the provision of canteens made rapid progress; by the end of 1943, 95 per cent. of the men employed in coal mining were reported to be provided for. There were about 900 canteens, compared with a total of about 1,000 collieries employing more than 50 men; less than half of these canteens, however, served full meals, the remainder serving snacks and 'snap'.¹ It was estimated that about 80 per cent. of the miners with canteens actually made use of them, although it was thought that the underground miners did not much use the full meals services. The general standard of catering, however, was less satisfactory. Manageresses and staff were often untrained, many kitchens were badly run, cooking was poor, and entitlements of food were not fully used. Records and accounts were usually kept by secretaries of Canteen Committees working at home in their spare time, and were not available for Advisers to inspect. The miners continued to be dissatisfied about food; at the end of 1943 the T.U.C. reported to the Ministry that at miners' meetings everywhere they were met with a list of grievances, and that usually food was the first one mentioned.

Part of the trouble was, of course, that a feeding policy adopted on general grounds was being applied to an industry where conditions were exceptional. Canteens serving hot meals were not really suited to underground miners, who generally did not want to wait for a meal when they came up from the pit.² Efforts had been made, some of them very successful, to get suitable 'snaps' prepared at pitheads for the men to take down with them; but what they still wanted, and had never ceased to ask for, were extra rations in the home. The Ministry and the T.U.C. were still determined to prevent any breach in the uniformity of domestic rations,³ but the fall in the output of coal was causing concern, and it was felt to be essential to do something to improve miners' feeding arrangements. The Ministry therefore suggested in December 1943 that the Ministry of Fuel and Power

¹ This was the name used for the packed meals miners took down the pit.

² Mr. David Robertson, M.P., conducted an experiment to supply miners at the coal-face with a hot meal during their mid-shift break, but it was not a success (*Miners' Welfare in War-Time*, pp. 23-4).

³ The T.U.C. hinted at this time that it might be prepared to consider the issue of extra rations to miners only, but the Minister said that this would be impossible (although it did not prove so later).

and the Miners' Welfare Commission should be prepared to undertake responsibility for improving and extending the pithead canteen service, by providing supervisory staffs with more authority than was possessed by the War-time Meals Advisers.

In May 1944 a conference was held between representatives of the Ministries of Food, Fuel and Power, and the Miners' Welfare Commission, but although the Ministry of Food was most anxious to hand over inspection of pithead canteens and had suggested that War-time Meals Advisers could be transferred to the Commission, the position was left virtually unchanged by the meeting. Plans were made to establish closer control between War-time Meals Advisers and Miners' Welfare staff by regular meetings and reports; the Commission tried to secure for Advisers more effective control over canteen management by requesting that Colliery Canteen Committees should allow them access to canteen records, and by promoting a staff training scheme in model canteens under their supervision, but little progress was made. Meetings between Miners' Welfare and War-time Meals staff, though useful when held, had been few since the inaugural month, difficulties in gaining access to canteen records continued to be reported, and the plan for model canteens had on the whole proved a failure, for Advisers found it easier to train staff in their own canteens.¹ Nearly a year later War-time Meals Division complained that 'despite all the work carried out in colliery canteens, advice and help were not everywhere proving effective because War-time Meals Advisers often found that their recommendations to Colliery Canteen Committees and Secretaries were not heeded'. It was not until 1946, with the nationalisation of the mines in prospect, that the Ministry of Fuel and Power took over the responsibility carried for so long by the Ministry of Food by setting up its own canteen section with a regional staff, to which were transferred many of the Ministry of Food's headquarters and technical staff with experience of colliery canteens.

III

Road transport drivers and railwaymen were two more groups of workers whose normal feeding habits were affected by food shortages and who appealed to the Ministry of Food for help; their natural sponsor was the Ministry of War Transport, although responsibility was never formally vested in that Department. Transport drivers on the trunk haulage routes had been in the habit of 'pulling in' for a quick meal, often of bacon and eggs, at small roadside cafés which,

¹ Twenty new War-time Meals Advisers had to be appointed to cope with the extra work.

now that their usual food supplies were reduced or unobtainable, found it difficult to cater for their customers. The majority of railwaymen seem to have been accustomed to take a packed meal to work with them; railway canteens—including those recently set up under the Factories (Canteens) Order which applied to those employed in railway engineering shops—catered for a certain number, but still left over half a million unprovided for.

Each of these problems had a fairly obvious solution, which in the end was the one adopted; the transport cafés needed better food supplies, the railwaymen more staff canteens. The growth of the Ministry of Food's communal feeding movement, however, had attracted attention both inside and outside government circles; War-time Meals Division, therefore, was asked to arrange special facilities, and had to act as negotiator between the various departments.

The transport drivers presented their case to the Ministry of Food in the summer of 1941. It was at first thought that a special service of cafés with preferential supplies of food must be opened on their behalf: the industry suggested that special British Restaurants might be opened, but the Ministry objected that the normal British Restaurants service would not suit the requirements of the drivers, who needed a twenty-four hour service on main roads outside towns, and that local authorities might not be willing to open restaurants that would not be patronised by the general public. The creation of an *ad hoc* body to manage road cafés was then considered, and the Ministry of Food, the Ministry of War Transport, the National Service Hostels Corporation, and the Employers' Associations of the industry itself were proposed at various times as controllers of such a body, but none would accept the responsibility. The Ministry of Food finally suggested that the cafés should be left under their existing ownership, but that those at key points selected by the Ministry of War Transport should be granted preferential food supplies on condition that they provided an approved service under the supervision of the Ministries concerned. The conditions of the proposed service did not, however, find favour with the café proprietors, and this scheme had also to be abandoned: but the meetings at which it was discussed with traders served to reveal a number of difficulties, mostly concerning food supplies and the procedure for obtaining them. These difficulties were largely solved by the inclusion of road transport cafés among the establishments entitled to claim the 'category B' scale of food allowances, and by the issue of instructions, for the guidance of proprietors, on the making of returns and the allowances of food available.

The case of the railwaymen was brought to the notice of the Ministry of Food by the chairman of the Railway Executive Committee at the beginning of 1942; he presented a memorandum asking

that they should be supplied with meals from the Ministry's cooking depots. The Ministry held from the beginning that 'the real responsibility for defects in the existing arrangements for feeding railwaymen lay at the door of the Railway Companies themselves'. They had been, it claimed, 'wilfully and culpably negligent' in providing canteens, which were the obvious solution because the majority of railway staff worked in large groups at marshalling yards, large stations and goods depots. War-time Meals Division was willing to help in feeding small parties of men such as platelayers who might be working in remote places by supplying meals from the British Restaurants or cooking depots, but refused to allow its communal feeding facilities to be regarded as a kind of Aladdin's lamp that could be used to relieve the Railway Companies of their general responsibility.

The Ministry presented this view to the Railway Executive Committee which eventually agreed to make a start on providing canteens. War-time Meals Division offered technical advice and assistance in securing equipment, and promised to negotiate with local authorities to provide meals for railwaymen while they were waiting for their own canteens, but little advantage was taken of either offer, although the canteens were slow in materialising.¹ However, the difficulties peculiar to pithead canteens did not repeat themselves here; committees appointed from the railwaymen themselves were able to organise the canteens effectively without Departmental supervision or intervention.

The remainder of the work of War-time Meals Division on the provision of meals for workers lay in supplementing canteens, by providing meals from cooking depots or British Restaurants for small groups, or by arranging for a temporary service such as that for building workers employed on Ministry of Works contracts in remote districts. The co-operation of War-time Meals Division with the Canteen Section of the Factory Department of Ministry of Labour has already been described.² The Ministry of Labour staff was self-sufficient in all matters concerning supervision of canteen management and relations with employers, so that even when complaints were received by War-time Meals Division, they were dealt with entirely by the Ministry of Labour.

The Ministry of Food was briefly associated with the Ministry of Labour as the result of a request made by the Import Executive in June 1941 that they should consider the improvement of feeding arrangements for dock workers. The Ministry of Food had already

¹ In November 1942 the Minister of Food intervened with the Minister of Works and Planning to advise against a contemplated restriction of the railways' canteen construction programme.

² Above pp. 390-391.

become involved in this problem to some extent in Liverpool, where officials had discussed canteen provision with representatives of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, and efforts had been made to develop communal feeding facilities near the dock estate. The Ministry of Labour now pointed out that under the Docks (Provision of Canteens) Order 1941, it possessed statutory powers to require dock authorities to open canteens—powers, incidentally, which were not restricted to docks employing more than 250 men. The situation was therefore analogous to that in factories, and the Ministry of Food's responsibility was limited to having British Restaurants opened and meals supplied when necessary to supplement dock canteen services.

IV

Finally, the Ministry of Food had an important part to play in the provision of *school meals*.¹ By the summer of 1941 the number of school meals had been nearly doubled over a year, as a result of the twenty per cent. increase in the Exchequer grant to local education authorities, agreed upon by the Food Policy Committee in July 1940. The actual number of children receiving meals, however, was still less than half-a-million out of a total school population of five millions, and the extent of provision varied between different authorities from nil to thirty per cent. Expansion of the service had, moreover, been hindered by the meat supply crisis of early 1941; school canteens, through confusion rather than design, had sometimes suffered in the general raid on catering allocations that was taking place at that time.

When, therefore, Lord Woolton, in July 1941, approached the President of the Board of Education (Mr. R. A. Butler) with an offer of co-operation over school feeding, his initiative was felt by Board officials to be surprising, but opportune. It was clear that a joint policy was required in developing plans for communal feeding and school feeding; the Ministry of Food's programme had expanded so rapidly as to threaten the progress of school feeding by competing for decreasing supplies of equipment. Moreover, communal feeding schemes were more attractive to local authorities because they carried a hundred-per-cent. capital grant from the Ministry of Food, whereas grants-in-aid of school meals averaged only seventy per cent. In some places an uneasy union between the two schemes had been contrived by an arrangement for school-children to be served at a reduced price in British Restaurants, but this was financially unsatisfactory to local authorities, as well as undesirable on other grounds. It was also

¹ A full account of the School Meals Scheme belongs to the volume on Education in this series.

important to establish standardised allowances of food for school canteens; a task possible within the Ministry of Food's new system for catering allocations.¹

The two Departments therefore made joint proposals to extend school feeding by increasing grants by a further ten per cent. to an average of eighty per cent., and by enabling local education authorities to obtain equipment from the Ministry of Food's central pool. It was also proposed that the Ministry's chain of cooking depots, then under construction, should be used for the bulk supply of school meals when they were not required for emergency feeding, to make possible a rapid expansion of school feeding and avoid waste of fully equipped kitchens. It was hoped by these measures to increase the number of meals provided to about a million by the summer of 1942.

The scheme was immediately put in hand. The Ministry of Food placed orders for equipment to cover the Board's increased requirements, and at the beginning of January 1942 the Board was able to issue a general list of equipment, negotiated through the Ministry, that was now to be obtained by submission of orders to the Ministry of Works.² It was also arranged that schools earmarked for use as emergency feeding centres should use for their own meals services the equipment deposited in them for emergency. Local authorities controlling cooking depots were instructed to supply school meals to the orders of local education authorities at an agreed price fixed to cover overhead expenses and amortisation charges; the figure of a thousand meals a day was suggested as an economic output.

At first progress was encouraging; a 'one-day census' taken in February 1942 showed that over 600,000 children, 14 per cent. of those attending that day³ were getting school dinners. The next census, in May, showed a marked slowing-up at just under 700,000, and it was feared that the aim of one million meals would not be attained even by the autumn. (It was, in the event, virtually attained by the end of October.) The Board of Education pointed out that delays in the delivery of equipment, which had become worse since the beginning of the year, had retarded the opening of school meals centres. Hopes that the Ministry's cooking depots would make an early and sizeable contribution to the programme had been disappointed, partly because their establishment had fallen behind schedule, partly because most of them were too far off from the districts where there were most schools. (In Middlesex, for instance, no help at all could be got from cooking depots.) A little under 60,000 meals a day had been supplied to schools from cooking depots during

¹ Below, p. 682 *seq.*

² See pp. 403-404.

³ In England and Wales. The Scottish figures were 62,000 and 8 per cent. (excluding 'lunches' and 'soup meals'). The percentages were published in White Papers, Cmd. 6361 and Cmd. 6366.

June 1942, leaving unused capacity (on paper) amounting to 200,000 meals.¹ Apart from problems of siting and supply of meals from depots, the quality of the meals was frequently unacceptable—'mass produced, partly pre-cooked, monotonous, and wet'.² The Board of Education steadfastly refused, even under Ministry of Food pressure, to jeopardise the success of its new service by sacrificing quality to quantity. Local authorities, as with British Restaurants, preferred to install kitchens properly adapted to their purpose.

Early in 1943 further proposals for an expansion in the school meals service were made in connection with the Government's scheme for family allowances, in which a cash payment was to be supplemented by benefits in kind, principally cheap and free school meals and milk. The contribution to school feeding that could be expected from cooking depots was now reconsidered: by this time about 125,000 meals a day were being sent to schools,³ but it still seemed impossible even to envisage an output of more than a quarter of a million meals.

The supply of meals to schools by cooking depots under Ministry control reached its highest point in September 1943, when a total of over four-and-a-half million meals was dispatched.⁴ The following month there began a gradual process by which local education committees assumed direct responsibility for depots that were mainly used for school meals, and that were already being operated by the same local authority. This continued until March 1947, when in accordance with the Civic Restaurants Act the Ministry of Food relinquished control of all cooking depots: by this time only about fifty out of over three hundred depots were still operating under its control.⁵ In this way, the direct participation of the Ministry of Food in the school meals service came to an end.

¹ It has been estimated that 400,000 meals a day could ultimately be supplied from cooking depots.

² pp. 375-378, 391-3 discuss the problems of cooking depots generally.

³ In March 1943, about 100,000 children daily were also being fed from or in British Restaurants.

⁴ No daily estimate is available for this month, when some schools would have been on holiday for part of the time. The figure may have been about 200,000.

⁵ The majority of these remaining depots were now handed over to local education authorities.

C:
Rationing as an
Administrative Problem

Part I: Before the War

CHAPTER XXVI

The Genesis of The British Rationing System

I

THE FOOD COUPON', wrote Sir William Beveridge¹ of rationing in 1918, 'was honoured like a banknote'; the same was to be true in the Second World War.² Rationing, that is to say, was a means of distribution as well as of restriction; it measured and met, as well as curtailed, demand. Distribution was governed from below; information of rationed requirements was passed up the chain, corresponding allocations, controlled at every stage, passed down. The devices for restricting and measuring demand were therefore the core of the rationing system.

Demand may be restricted by requiring the consumer to surrender some sort of official token against the ration. In Britain this took the form of a detachable coupon in the ration book or card, or of a printed space to be cancelled indelibly by the retailer. At the retail stage, either of these serves to secure fair play between customer and trader, ensuring that the ration can be obtained only once. Beyond that stage, they stand for fundamentally contrasted methods of distribution. The more obvious method, from its analogy with money, uses coupons—whether by converting them into wholesale vouchers, paying them into a coupon-bank, or making them the basis of a retailer's written *permit*—as the means of controlling supplies. These are thus related to actual sales, though with a time-lag that will depend on the administrative machinery and the length of the distributive chain. In the Second World War, variations on this method were used for the Points Scheme,³ for sweets, and, after 1942, for tea.

The second method, which was the norm in both World Wars, discards the coupon as the determinant of retail supplies. Instead, the consumer is tied to a particular retailer, whose supplies are related

¹ *op. cit.*, p. 231.

² Except for meat at the beginning of 1941. (See p. 675 *seq.*) The comparison had, however, lost its force; though the food coupon was still honoured, the banknote had become inconvertible paper.

³ The problems peculiar to points rationing were discussed in Vol. I, Chapters XV and XXIII. From the present point of view, it is no more than a variant of a coupon-replacement scheme. For the similar system applied to clothing, see *Civil Industry and Trade*, pp. 325-327.

to the number of *counterfoils* lodged with him. In principle this system is less exact than the other. Supplies must be based on the number of customers registered with a retailer, not on what they actually buy; on an assumption about his *future* performance, not on the fact of his *past* performance. Assumption and performance are not likely to correspond. First, not all the retailer's registered customers may buy their full ration; though this is less likely to happen when accuracy is most required, i.e., when rations are short. Secondly, and more important, the time factor affects a counterfoil system more than a coupon system.

Suppose that a permit for supplies be issued every eight weeks, based on the number of customers registered with a retailer on a certain date. This date has to be one several weeks before the permit is due to come into force because time must be allowed for it to pass up the chain of distribution. During this interval, and subsequently during the currency of the permit, the pattern of demand will fluctuate. Removals take place, people away from home for short periods present temporary ration documents to strange retailers and leave their rations with their usual retailers, there are births, deaths, and enlistments. The permit must remain unaltered throughout this activity because the machinery of allocation is not instantly variable; yet, lest any consumer be deprived of his supplies, there must be provision for allowing the retailer extra, on proof of need. Hence the supplementary permit, which is a response in part to new demand (e.g., from new-born children), in part to transferred demand that cannot immediately be subtracted from other retailers' supplies. At all times, that is to say, except immediately after a general re-registration of consumers with retailers, duplicate rations have to be issued. The retailer who is expected to make a sale because the customer is registered with him, receives supplies for it in advance, on his main permit. The retailer who actually makes the sale may also receive supplies for it, in arrear, on a supplementary permit. This problem of *inflation* will not arise under a coupon system because only the retailer who makes the sale and collects a coupon for it can receive replacement.¹

Any rationing system seeking the utmost economy of supplies will obviously use the coupon. On the other hand, registration furnishes advance information of the maximum regular demand on an individual retailer,² and puts the ration in a definite shop, chosen by the consumer. The rationing system introduced in July 1918 and January 1940 was neither a pure coupon nor a pure counterfoil system; it sought to combine the economy of the former with the guarantee of

¹ The two systems have been contrasted in essence; in practice the difference is not so clear-cut. A registration system, for example, cannot do without the coupon altogether, for it is needed for people who cannot be tied to a retailer.

² A point that was particularly important in the distribution of perishable foods.

the latter. Supplies were based on registration, but retailers were required to account for their sales by means of coupons, and to submit periodical returns of performance from which it was hoped to detect any surplus. The motive power of distribution was, however, the counterfoil. The coupon was used merely to check the retailer's return. In both wars the outcome was the same—the shedding of the coupon. Paradoxically, it was on the first occasion that this was done from conviction, on the second from necessity. The reasons for this, and indeed for the adoption of the registration scheme at all, are to be sought in the origins of rationing in the first World War.

II

Rationing as a uniform national system did not begin until July 1918, but it had its genesis in the sugar shortage that had prevailed for nearly two years. Until December 1917, sugar was distributed on the datum principle; wholesalers received supplies according to their performance in 1915, and were expected to supply retailers in the same way. Such a system cannot meet changes in demand caused by shift of population or of custom; and maldistribution of sugar was already giving rise to discontent in 1916, when supplies were enough to have provided all civilians with 1 lb. a head per week. When, at the end of that year, they had to be cut to 60 per cent. of the 1915 quota, the situation grew serious and out of it came rationing.

Officials of the newly created Ministry of Food were ready as early as December 1916 with a scheme for rationing sugar, but Government permission to 'ration' was not secured until June 1917. In the meantime, the problem was considered by a succession of committees,¹ through whose proceedings it is possible to trace the development of thought on rationing machinery. On 5th January 1917, it was suggested that 'every Local Authority . . . should appoint a Food Committee and open a Food Office'. A report of 31st January pressed for immediate rationing of sugar, the setting-up of a divisional organisation by the Ministry, and of Food Offices by local authorities. It also suggested that the local authorities might work through committees, or persons specially appointed as Local Food Commissioners. The report of 31st January also foreshadowed the birth of the 'registered customer': 'We consider that in order to secure an even distribution of supplies, the public should be recommended as far as possible to deal regularly with one retailer'. At that time it was feared that people might not submit to such a restriction;² but the committee

¹ Beveridge, *op. cit.*, Chapter IV, *passim*.

² *Ibid.*, p. 199.

that reported on 4th April revealed that most of the schemes submitted to it included the use of some form of registration of *households*¹ with a particular retailer, and it appeared to favour a re-casting of sugar distribution on these lines so as to avoid the full scheme of compulsory rationing.

Under this scheme each local authority would appoint three or more 'Local Food Commissioners' to set up and administer Food Offices, and the Ministry would appoint Divisional Food Officers² to supervise this local organisation. Consumers would receive individual sugar cards with detachable weekly 'tickets', i.e., coupons, to be applied for on a Householder's Application Form. The cards could be used with any retailer, and traders' supplies would be based on the number of coupons collected. It is of the essence of a coupon scheme not to be self-starting, and the proposal of the Ministry for ensuring that retailers had stocks to meet the ration is of especial interest. Retailers would be required to make an initial return of their stocks and the amount they expected to receive during the next three months as datum quotas. A comparison between these returns and the number of applications for sugar cards would indicate if additional supplies were needed in a district. These would be released by Divisional Food Officers from reserve stocks. As there was to be no tie to the retailer, consumers should be able to find sugar eventually. If they could not, they might return their unused sugar tickets to the Food Office and nominate a retailer from whom they wished to buy their sugar.

Once rationing had begun, retailers would send to Food Offices the tickets and caterers' authorities they had collected; and the amount of sugar they might obtain would be based, for six four-weekly periods, on the number they surrendered in the first four weeks of rationing.³ In effect, distribution would be frozen for nearly six months with the first four-weeks of rationing as a datum period; but Food Offices were to be allowed to issue new vouchers during the six months if a retailer could prove his need for increased supplies, and could also take into account seasonal variations in trade.

This scheme was put before the War Cabinet by Lord Devonport at the end of May 1917, but with an alternative: a scheme for re-casting sugar distribution by getting each *household* to nominate a retailer and then supplying him according to the number of *household*

¹ Writer's italics.

² In the end they were called Divisional Food Commissioners.

³ The arrangements for distribution beyond the retailer were the same as the voucher system used in the points scheme in 1941. The retailer's application for vouchers would have told the Food Offices (1) his average weekly supplies under the datum system; (2) his sales during the first four weeks of rationing; (3) how much sugar he thought he would need in the future; and (4) his stocks at the time of application. The four-weekly basis of supplies was also re-discovered in 1941.

sugar cards lodged with him. This was not a rationing scheme at all, for, if a retailer had sugar to spare after meeting the basic household allowance, he could sell it to anyone. The War Cabinet accepted it as the milder of the two. (The Ministry of Food would have preferred the rationing scheme, but its immediate aim was to secure its indispensable local machinery—the local Food Offices—and these were common to both schemes.)¹ In this embryonic form the tie to the retailer, later to become the foundation of the rationing system, was a device for *avoiding* rationing, and it was in this guise that the whole scheme was presented to local authorities when, in August 1917, they were asked to set up their Food Offices.

The sugar distribution scheme was timed to begin on 31st December 1917.² The stream of instructions that poured upon Food Offices from September onwards did not at first say what was to be done about 'migratory households or detached individuals'.³ Consideration of these inconvenient types was even then causing the scheme to be completely re-cast. Lord Rhondda decided that there should, after all, be formal rationing based on individual sugar cards; but he turned it over, not to the critics within the Ministry, but to a Director of Registration⁴ transferred from another Department.

There followed an episode decisive in the whole history of British rationing. The Director of Registration endeavoured to sweep away, not merely the household card, but the local basis for the issue of ration documents. He held that registers of card-holders compiled and maintained by local authorities would not provide adequate safeguards against fraud and duplication, and would, moreover, without some central co-ordinating machinery, break down under the weight of population movements. He proposed to compile a central register⁵ of individuals, that would issue to each a permanent document of identity (the *Ration Paper*); this would entitle the holder to obtain sugar coupons⁶ from a Post Office. As with the earlier schemes for full rationing, there would be no tie to the retailer, and therefore

¹ Beveridge, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

² Retailers' authorities were to be issued by 23rd November. Five weeks were then allowed for the adjustment of the flow of sugar down the chain of distribution. The timetable set dates for the completion of every stage of the introduction of the scheme. This careful attention to timing was a notable feature of rationing in the first World War. Even the Ministry's earliest rationing scheme had a complete timetable of twenty stages, with imaginary dates for each, for the introduction of rationing between February and April 1917.

³ They dived as deeply as parish teas, cookery classes, servants on board wages, and householders who included prospective servants in their applications. The quotation is from Coller, *op. cit.* p. 89.

⁴ Mr. (later Sir) S. P. Vivian; Registrar-General for England and Wales, 1921-45.

⁵ Coded by birthdays.

⁶ The Ration Paper looked like a cheque and bore twelve ringed spaces, one of which was stamped when coupons were issued. Eight weeks' supply of coupons was issued at a time; it looked like a sheet of postage stamps.

no problem of breaking and re-establishing it when removals took place.

In October 1917 Lord Rhondda accepted this plan and the task was begun of covertly¹ transforming the plan already announced, in such a way that every sugar consumer would be brought on to the central register. People who had not yet received ration documents had to apply for Ration Papers direct to a *Sugar Registration Clearing House* in London, and so would obtain sugar by coupons from the first. People who already held household cards had to obtain *Declaration Forms* from their retailers for each member of the household. The retailer would issue an individual *Sugar Ticket* for each completed form, and then send the forms to the local Food Office; the Food Office would check them and send them to the Sugar Registration Clearing House, which would thus be able to check removals that had taken place since the scheme was inaugurated; subsequent removals were taken care of by requiring holders of Sugar Tickets (which were, of course, valid only with the retailer who had issued them) to hand them in, on moving, to a Post Office in exchange for sugar coupons valid anywhere. These surrendered tickets would also, in due course, bring the holders Ration Papers; so also, eventually, would the Declaration Forms (though this could not be publicly avowed, as the household scheme officially still held the field). When rationing began on 31st December, people might hold household cards and individual Sugar Tickets that were tied to a retailer, or sugar coupons that could be used anywhere.² At length, through the gradual operations of the clearing house, the coupons would come to supersede the others, and the tie-to-the-retailer be dissolved.

'There was war in Heaven over rationing' (wrote Collier afterwards) '... a real war in Palace Chambers, Vivian and his flappers fighting against Tallents and his Local Food Committees'.³ The Local Authorities Division attacked the scheme on the practical ground that it put too much work on the retailer, and also, more theoretically, because it abolished the registered customer, and substituted a central register in London for possible local registers as the effective instrument for checking duplication. 'Foreign experience', it was vaguely claimed, 'appears to be in favour of the tying of the customer. This tied system makes for regularity of supplies. . . . Foreign experience appears to be wholly in favour of the local register as opposed to any central system of registration'.

¹ The new scheme was announced as those arrangements for dealing with removals etc., that Food Offices had already been promised. 'It is proposed to indicate', began the circular, '... the nature of the arrangements previously announced as contemplated by the Sugar Registration Scheme for dealing with the case of removals'.

² Retailers' supplies were, when rationing began, based mainly on the original household registration.

³ *op. cit.* p. 88. The 'flappers' were the girls specially recruited to staff the central Clearing House.

This advocacy of the tie of the *individual* consumer calls for some explanation, for the original rationing scheme of May 1917 had not provided for it, and it had only appeared in practice because individual rationing had been superimposed upon a scheme in which households were tied. However, it had been Lord Devonport, himself a grocer, who had declared against it on political grounds, and it seems possible that his advisers had hankered after it all along. At any rate, public acceptance of the household scheme meant that the political obstacle no longer existed. More important, perhaps, Food Control Committees were now in existence and the influence of the local authorities who appointed them favoured the retention of local control.

In November 1917, a committee on rationing machinery was set up to try to reconcile the opposing schools of thought.¹ It suggested an omnibus system that combined individual ration documents with detachable coupons, the tie to the retailer, and (though not unanimously) a central register of individuals and permanent Ration Papers. The actual coupons would be issued locally from time to time² on local registers of households maintained by local offices. The committee was unable to reconcile the opposing views on the division of responsibility between central and local authority; for the Director of Registration would not concede that Food Control Committees should undertake the maintenance of local population registers and the issue of ration documents. The uniformity indispensable to the maintenance of a central register required that these tasks should be directly under the control of Headquarters.

Food Control Committees were in fact already busying themselves with such duties as these, and it would have at best been difficult to deprive them, having requested local authorities, not six months previously, to set them up for this very purpose. Events that winter made it impossible. In October 1917, shortage of tea and fats was added to that of sugar, and in the New Year came the sudden meat shortage. During December, January, and February, food queues in London on Saturdays were estimated at 500,000 strong. The machinery for centralised rationing, except for sugar, could not be ready until March—an estimate that proved sanguine—and meanwhile press and public, which had, of course, no idea of the convulsive state of the Ministry,³ grew impatient. At the beginning of November, a Food Control Committee took matters into its own hands and set up its own local rationing scheme. Others rapidly followed suit, and at

¹ For the rejection by this committee of a 'points' scheme, see Vol. I, p. 6.

² The Committee suggested cards that would run for three months. It also considered a scheme under which one-third of the cards would expire every month instead of all being renewed at the same time.

³ Though the *Birmingham Daily Post* did describe it, on 5th December, as a 'disturbed anthill'. Birmingham was a pioneer of local rationing.

the end of December, local rationing schemes for such foods as tea, meat, and fats, were officially sanctioned and encouraged. These schemes, were, of course, based on documents issued on local registers, and most of them used the tie to the retailer. In February 1918 came the decisive event; the success of the brilliantly improvised London and Home Counties Rationing Scheme, which was the work of the Ministry's Local Authorities Division. This scheme became the basis of national meat rationing in April and of the national rationing system in July. 'It is a sober statement of fact', wrote Sir William Beveridge, 'that the Ministry of Food made its . . . reputation by putting accidentally into practice one system of rationing while it was formally engaged in devising a different system';¹ and (he might have added) publicly committed to a third.

III

The controversy so resolved had more than a contemporary significance. Twenty years later, the Director of the Food (Defence Plans) Department of the Board of Trade was to write:

'My colleagues who are particularly concerned with rationing procedure have urged me to resist at all costs any proposal, from whatever source it may come, that the registration of consumers should be carried out in any future war on a national, i.e., a central, basis'.

The enduring influence of the events of late 1917 can be shown to have arisen from misunderstanding. It came to be thought, very soon, that the Director of Registration had contemplated the issue of all rationing documents from London; that he was opposed to the setting up of local food offices and, therefore, that his system must inevitably preclude the use of the tie to the retailer. 'It was finally decided', stated a document of May 1919, 'that the task of issuing ration books to the civilian population of England, Scotland and Wales from one central office would be almost an administrative impossibility'; the secret Official History of the first Ministry of Food compared unfavourably the cost of one central register with that of 1,800 local registers; and, in 1937, an official of the Food (Defence Plans) Department wrote that 'Since we are quite certain that in food rationing we must tie the consumer to the local retailer—National or Central Registration might well prove . . . a dangerous obstacle to our schemes . . . the Central Lists would never be up-to-date enough for our purposes'. These were misconceptions, due to failure to

¹ *op. cit.*, p. 229.

distinguish between two senses of the word 'registration', and to ignorance of the final version in which 'centralised rationing' had been put forward, before events overtook it.

'Registration' may mean either (1) the compiling of a register of people entitled to receive ration books; or (2) the tying of a consumer to a particular retailer. The first process aims at ensuring that each person receives only one set of ration documents; the second at ensuring the accurate and regular distribution of food supplies. The first results in a register of *consumers*; the second in a register of (retail) *customers*.¹ The two objects are distinct, and hence the two registers need not be compiled in the same fashion; that of customers can hardly not be local, that of consumers may well be in greater or less degree central. The abortive rationing system set out in December 1917 did, in fact, provide for a dual system of this kind.

Even the centralised sugar scheme had provided for the actual ration documents—the sheets of sugar coupons—to be issued locally, through post-offices; it was only the document of identity—the Ration Paper—that was sent out from the central clearing house, and this not from conviction, but from necessity. The Director of Registration had been charged, not with devising a theoretically perfect scheme, but with converting secretly and against time a fundamentally unsound one (because of the household basis), into something that would work.

'... it is a complete fallacy', he was to write many years later, in controversion of the received accounts in *British Food Control* and the secret Official History, 'to discuss the Central Register system... as one which, in its original form, was ever intended to function in a comprehensive scheme of rationing. In that form it was purely an emergency device for preventing, as it did, the otherwise inevitable breakdown of the sugar rationing system. It was planned to take its place, after the necessary adaptations, in a subsequent comprehensive scheme with the wholly different function of a Central Index in a system comprising local offices and local registers. . . .

'... in its original, emergency, form, the Registration Clearing-House had to receive and deal with applications *centrally* in the absence of any local agencies which could be trusted to co-operate in the procedure adopted'.²

¹ A consumer need not be a retail customer. He may, if he wishes, hold a ration book but take all his meals in catering establishments.

² This statement of the case was, perhaps, not quite fair to the local authorities. It is true that they had protested vigorously to Lord Rhondda against the intrusion of any central element into the sugar distribution scheme; but they may well be excused for thinking that in the autumn of 1917 the Ministry did not know its own mind. Nor was the secrecy on which the Minister insisted compatible with a full and candid explanation to them of his intentions. Moreover, the local operations of rationing did not end with the issue of *consumer* documents; local offices would have been needed also to handle the coupons sent in by retailers, and to deal with local distribution generally. These were matters that Mr. Vivian was, it seems, prepared to leave to local Food Control Committees; but the mind boggles at the prospect of two sets of Food Offices, for distinct purposes.

The controversy over the tie to the retailer appears to have been misinterpreted also; the Director of Registration seems to have regarded it as unnecessary to distribution, rather than undesirable, though he opposed reliance on it as a *main* precaution against fraud. It would, he agreed, be a valuable adjunct to, but not a substitute for, a central register of consumers. Although the centralised sugar scheme, like other rationing schemes before it, dispensed with the tie, it appeared in the compromise proposals of December 1917.¹ Twenty years later, the compromise had been forgotten; a mere preference for the coupon over the counterfoil not only appeared as a heresy, but had been interpreted into a belief that 'centralised rationing' must necessarily exclude the tie to the retailer.

The antagonists of 1917 were, it is clear, each emphasising the aspect of the rationing problem that seemed to him the more important. Mr. Vivian was intent upon the security of the issue of documents to consumers; Captain Tallents, on the effective distribution of supplies to retailers and their customers. To the one a central register of consumers bulked the larger; to the other, the tie to the retailer and the local offices to administer it. The partial reconciliation of the two points of view in December 1917 was all but overlooked;² future judgments on 'centralised rationing' were based on an extreme and doubtfully authentic version of what had actually been proposed. They were further clouded by the fact that the engine of central control in 1917 had been inefficient; the Sugar Registration Clearing House had been overwhelmed by applications in the first few weeks of its existence and when it was abandoned, had succeeded in producing only some 3,000,000 Ration Papers.³ The mediocre success of an improvised piece of machinery, however, had little real bearing on the general problem that it would eventually have been set to solve.

One further influence on the future remains to be mentioned. This history is not, in general, concerned with personalities; but it is not possible to ignore the part that the one-time Director of Registration was to play in the history of rationing in the Second World War. As Registrar-General of England and Wales, Mr. (later Sir) Sylvanus Vivian reappeared as the advocate of a new and better Central Index—the National Register. Thanks largely to misunderstanding of what his rôle had originally been, he acquired for the rationing planners a slightly sinister reputation, as one who had once turned rationing inside out and might, if not kept at bay, do so again. The thread of the ancient controversy runs through the years of planning and the

¹ Hence the attachment of counterfoils to the second eight-weekly sheet of sugar coupons, valid from February 1918. See below p. 440.

² It is mentioned briefly on p. 195 of *British Food Control*.

³ And evoking a memorable cartoon in *Punch* (5th December 1917), reproduced in Collier, *op. cit.* facing p. 88.

early years of rationing; indeed, it was not until the Ministry of Food had forgotten old history that the problem could be resolved in a rational way.

IV

The rationing system that emerged from these events had certain features requiring description, for they were to be important in the future. One fact should be kept in mind: Food Control Committees had led the way in rationing, and they remained 'overmighty subjects' who were allowed considerable discretion and on occasion took a great deal more. It would not be possible to establish rationing practice certainly and in detail without making a study of what was being done in at least the larger Food Offices.

In July 1918 there were three main ration books; the general adult's, the child's, for those under six, who got less meat, and the traveller's, which could be used without registering with a retailer and so had no counterfoils.¹ In addition, there were supplementary books for very heavy workers, heavy workers, and adolescent boys (aged 13 to 18) that contained extra meat coupons.² In November 1918, a special book allowing extra jam was issued for those between 6 and 18.

The adult ration book contained named coupons for meat (including bacon),³ sugar, and fats. For each of these foods there was a registration counterfoil which the retailer detached and *kept*. There were also spare pages of coupons and counterfoils, a page of spaces for cancellation (designed for bread), similar spaces on the back cover, and a 'reference leaf' that served partly to identify the holder of the book and partly as an application form for the next issue of ration books. It will be noted that the ration book provided for registration combined either with coupon-cutting or space-cancellation.

The first ration books were issued against Household Application Forms similar to that used for the household sugar scheme in August 1917. The books were 'written up' before issue by filling in *on the*

¹ In the autumn of 1919 this book reverted, so to speak; it contained *weekly* counterfoils for butter and sugar, and a page of 'spaces' for meat.

² These coupons were, however, valid for bacon only. There were also books for servicemen on leave and separate leaves of extra fats coupons for vegetarians and invalids, of meat coupons for invalids, and of lard coupons for self-suppliers of butter.

³ The device of giving the meat coupon a money value was a last-minute inspiration of the London and Home Counties Rationing Scheme. Meat rationing was thus very flexible. Demand could be adjusted to supply by varying both the value of the coupon and the number of coupons that could be used for butcher's meat. It should be remembered that coupons had to be surrendered for meat meals in restaurants. (Hence the need for attending to details like naval drafts in transit needing meat at railway stations.)

reference leaf the name of the Food Office, the name and address of the holder, and the serial number of the book. Food Control Committees were left to make their own arrangements for getting the books into the hands of the public, though the Ministry recommended personal application for rural areas. When the second issue was made in November 1918, reference leaves were collected by house-to-house volunteers, handed to retailers, or sent in by post. A Ministry circular of August 1919, however, declared that a fourth method had proved the most effective: 'to invite the public to bring them to specially opened stations; and the places generally used as Polling Booths were found to be the most convenient. . . . This method is strongly urged for the consideration of Committees. . . . *A mere invitation to the public to return their Leaves through the post has proved in the past ineffective*'.¹

The precautions against fraud were local knowledge,² frequent re-issue of documents, the tie to the retailer, and, most important, the checking of the applications against an existing register. In July 1918 this register had (presumably) consisted of the applications for meat cards under the national meat rationing scheme of April; after July 1918 it consisted of the Household Application Forms sent in for the first ration book, and after November 1918, of the reference leaves from the first edition of the ration book sent in as applications for the second. The check was possible only because the address to which the book had been issued, and the stamp of the issuing Office, had been placed on the reference leaf in advance; so that if a ration book holder should change his address without notifying his Food Office, and then apply for his new book at another Office, the original application could be traced. In 1940 and 1941 the second Ministry of Food (which found the public as unresponsive as ever to 'a mere invitation to return their Leaves through the post') tried, with harassing results, to carry out the 1918 check without the preliminary precaution of filling in the reference leaf in advance.³

In May 1919, it was thought that rationing would soon cease, and no new ration book was issued. Rationing had therefore to do without

¹ Writer's italics.

² This was probably more extensive in the First World War than in the Second because many local dues, such as rates, were still collected by house-to-house calls.

³ A feature of the 1918 rationing system was its adoption of differential rationing. This was the subject of considerable dispute. It was opposed by the T.U.C. but supported by Food Control Committees and the Triple Alliance Unions. The Consumers' Council roundly declared that 'the conclusions of scientific experts were not in themselves a sufficient basis for the exclusion of practically all working women and all adolescent girls from the supplementary meat ration'. (See Beveridge, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-215.) The policy was held to because it was thought, in the spring of 1918, that bread might have to be rationed, and was facilitated when the time came by a glut of American bacon. The supplementary rations were little taken up and were abandoned after a few weeks. A committee classified some 500 trades and occupations for the guidance of Food Control Committees but in practice there was some confusion, e.g., some Committees gave all workers associated with heavy industry the heavy worker's ration book whether they were doing heavy work or not.

the coupon. The expiring book was used as evidence of registration and the retailer cancelled a space, preferably on one of the spare leaves, to show that the ration had been bought. When it became apparent that rationing of meat, butter, and sugar must continue, this system was regularised by new documents issued in the autumn of 1919. The Ministry, intending to rely on registration alone, issued a Ration Card that consisted only of counterfoils; but retailers insisted, as they were again to insist in 1938,¹ that the onus of fair distribution must not be laid on them. The Ministry thereupon devised an ingenious Purchaser's Shopping Card, issued through retailers, to accompany the Ration Card. It consisted of spaces-for-cancellation representing, from top to bottom, five persons' weekly rations or, from side to side, one person's ration for thirteen weeks.

Counterfoils, coupons, and spaces for cancellation represented the various methods, proposed or adopted, for the adjustment of supplies and the control of the retailer. The Ministry's early schemes, from 1916 onwards, were based on the coupon. The household sugar scheme of August 1917 was at the other extreme. It was a pure counterfoil system basing supplies on the number of registrations—or rather, since the retailer was not to return his part of the sugar card (the retailer's 'docket') to Food Offices, on his statement of how many registrations he had. He was to receive a generous 'margin' (15 per cent.) and additional margins if necessary to meet any 'anticipated special demand'.² He was to receive an 'Authority'—one for each supplier—to which four four-weekly vouchers were attached. The Authority he would keep; the vouchers he would send to his suppliers as they became valid. He was not to be required to make any returns. Nothing so mild as this scheme was to be seen again until tea was rationed in 1940.

The centralised sugar scheme that was superimposed on the household scheme reverted to the coupon principle. The documents used by consumers were the eight-week sheet of *Sugar Coupons* obtained by Ration Paper, the individual *Sugar Tickets* given them by their retailers in exchange for Declaration Forms, and the *Sugar Permits* given to Servicemen on leave. Supplies were based initially on the number of registered customers (which could now be checked from the Declaration Forms); they would eventually have been based entirely on the coupons and permits collected. Retailers were given the Authorities and vouchers already described, but now had to make fortnightly returns of stocks, sales, and purchases, as well as a declaration of stock held when rationing began. Control was to be exercised through a formidable ledger account system. A file was maintained for each retailer. His account was opened by his initial declaration of

¹ Below, p. 449.

² For instance, the arrival of a fishing fleet or an influx of holiday-makers.

stock; to this were added his fortnightly returns. The account was credited with the coupons¹ and sugar permits² that he sent in, and debited with the Sugar Tickets, i.e., the registered customers, he lost. This last process was intended originally to continue until the last registered customer had been extinguished. Even when policy changed, so that the second eight-week sheet of coupons issued by post offices actually carried counterfoils for registration, this was only to give the holder priority with a retailer and supplies continued to be based on coupons.

This system of keeping a running record of a retailer's dealings would have been a very tight form of control. All sales made to holders of sugar coupons and Service permits could be checked; so could the retailer's initial statement of the number of Sugar Tickets lodged with him; his losses in registered customers, i.e., people holding Sugar Tickets, were notified to Food Offices from the Clearing House; his gains had to be represented by collected coupons. Admittedly, the initial stock declaration that started his account could not be checked, but Food Control Committees were urged to supplement the ledger system by surprise inspection of stocks. The essence of the system was that it gave the Food Office the advantage of the long memory. How far it went into operation is uncertain. It was propounded in January 1918, and abandoned in July; it was complicated,³ and Food Control Committees were prone to go their own way in such matters. But it was, at any rate in theory, the highest point that the control of the retailer reached in the first, or the second, World War. The principle of the ledger account was not seen again in its most drastic form until it reappeared in tea rationing in 1949, when also it had the advantage of coupons as evidence.

The national rationing scheme of July 1918 differed from all its predecessors. It was equipped with coupons, counterfoils, and retailers' returns of stocks, sales, and purchases; at first sight, it might appear to be based upon the coupon. Indeed, an official description of it in May 1919 implied as much:

‘ . . . the supplies given to retailers were based only in the first instance on the number of registered customers, and in obtaining renewal of supply the retailer had to surrender the coupons collected by him. . .

¹ There was a weekly coupon return to which the actual coupons were stuck.

² The naval and military permit system was very ambitious. The permit gave the maximum quantity that the holder could buy, but also contained a space for recording the actual amount bought. The retailer was credited with the latter. The permits were then sent by Food Offices to the Clearing House which totted them up so that the sugar they represented could be deducted from the bulk supplies given to the Services.

³ The complication of the system will be seen when it is remembered that a retailer might sell to caterers or manufacturers, or himself be a caterer or manufacturer. Stocks intended for retail sale could not be kept apart and the ledger account had therefore to take caterers' and manufacturers' Authorities into consideration.

[and to] . . . carry forward to the next distribution period any stocks over and above those required to supply the ration'.

The announcement of national meat rationing, in April 1918, said: ' . . . the supplies allowed to a retailer . . . will be based in the first instance on the number of his registered customers . . . and subsequently upon his actual sales'.

The instrument for bringing supplies down to sales, however, was not the coupon, but the retailer's return. A circular to Food Control Committees in June 1918 stated that the purposes of standardised returns were, 'providing a check upon retailers' sales by reference to the coupons returned by them', and 'affording a basis for the allocation of future supplies'. Later in the same circular, however, the second point was worded rather differently: the returns would be used as the basis of future supplies, 'in some cases at any rate'. Examination of the actual returns suggests that practice soon came to vary from food to food. By April 1919 the return for meat, originally a detailed account of past performance, had become no more than a statement of the number of registered customers and requirements for the next fortnight, which, the form declared, would be the basis of future supplies. On the other hand, the four-weekly returns for sugar and fats did not bear a declaration to this effect; only a warning that they were 'liable to be checked against the coupons sent in'. Even supposing that the sugar and fats returns were in fact used in calculating the retailer's permit (i.e., by deduction of excess stocks from what he might buy), this still would not mean that supplies were based on sales. They were based on the retailer's own statement of performance—not necessarily the same thing.

Where, then, did the coupon come in, if it were not used to measure demand? Merely, it seems, as a deterrent. The Sugar Registration Clearing House was turned into a coupon-checking centre to which Food Offices were instructed to send *not more than* 5 per cent. of the coupons.¹ The coupon was related to supply only in so far as it was used to encourage accuracy in the retailer's statement.

Three other considerations indicate that the 1918 system may not have been so severe as its impressive documentation suggests. First, retailers received generous 'margins' (10 per cent. for sugar, 5 per cent. 'turn-of-the-scale' allowance for butter). Secondly, for butter at least there was a distinction between the basic supply and a 5 per cent. emergency supply given *in advance* for occasional sales. It was the latter that had to be rigorously accounted for by coupon, or special permit to sell, before it would be renewed. Thirdly, as sugar Authorities ran for twenty-four weeks, and the first butter permits under

¹ They were weighed against a quota of counted coupons. Beveridge (*op. cit.*, p. 216) says that prosecutions resulted from this checking. The main fraud was to increase the weight of the coupons by wetting or greasing them.

national rationing were based on the number of registered customers and ran from September to December 1918,¹ the opportunities for adjusting permit quantities were limited.

After May 1919, coupons were given up and the rationing system loosened; supplies were based on the number of registered customers and retailers allowed to dispose of any surplus among them. When it became clear that rationing must continue, the supply situation demanded that it also be tightened up. From October 1919, retailers had to deposit the registration counterfoils in Food Offices,² and a return was made to some sort of ledger account system. Food Offices were to keep a day-to-day record of each retailer's losses and gains in registrations, and revise their permits and vouchers every four weeks. This system, stated the Ministry, was already in use in some large Food Offices, and 'a return to the Coupon System can only be avoided if this revision of permits and vouchers is systematically undertaken at the end of each four-weekly period'.³ The food position steadily improved and the return to coupons never became necessary.

The rationing system of 1918 has more than an academic importance because it was to be used again and much history was to be repeated. Paradoxically, its very success created difficulties in the future, because brilliant improvisations were not always recognised for what they were, and too little account was taken of the good fortune, from the supply point of view, that accompanied them. As the Registrar-General wrote in 1936:

'the local rationing schemes instituted in the spring of 1918 worked successfully, and could probably be relied upon to do so in a future war if the pressure of food shortage could also be relied upon not materially to exceed that experienced in 1918'.

He was thinking of the accuracy of the ration-book issue, not of the control of the retailer, but the remark holds good. The example of

¹ Moreover, the first sugar Authorities issued under national rationing were, to save work, written for the quantities that had obtained for the previous four-week period. But the margin was reduced from 15 per cent. to 10 per cent., and Food Offices told to reduce quantities if the fortnightly returns received during the previous two months under the centralised sugar scheme showed stocks in excess of average four-weekly sales. Retailers, it was stated in the exordium to the instructions, were known to have accumulated large stocks.

The rationing of butter and margarine under local schemes had been made compulsory from 16th June 1918. National rationing began in September.

² This had been discussed in March 1918. It is not clear why it was not adopted then.

³ At the same time the Continuing Authority system for sugar was taken further (and applied to butter). Instead of separate Authorities for each supplier, each with its four-week vouchers attached, one Authority only was given, with a basic voucher for each supplier. The Authority was revised, if necessary, in the light of the four-week casting-up of accounts. Losses and gains in registrations were notified to retailers by means of credit and debit Notes, duplicates of which were sent direct to the Sugar Records Section that controlled wholesalers' allocations. A good deal of complaint was caused by retailers not sending on their Notes to their suppliers, thus leaving the latter with reduced allocations but no idea of which particular retailers the reductions applied to.

1918 needed to be followed with caution, because it was neither extensive nor long-lived:

'It is essential to bear in mind', wrote the Food Controller¹ on 5th October 1919, 'that rationing during the height of the war was by no means complete. The following articles only were rationed: meat, bacon, sugar, jam, butter, margarine and lard. The following staple articles were never rationed: bread, milk, tea, condensed milk, cheese, potatoes, green vegetables, eggs, fish and fruit; though tea, cheese and condensed milk were closely controlled in distribution'.

Moreover, as bacon was de-rationed in July 1918, pork and offals by December, and margarine in February 1919, the full rigour of the system, assuming this to be as severe as it looked, was not felt by retailers and Food Offices for very long.² The history of rationing in the Second World War is largely the story of how the 1918 system had perforce to be adapted to a food shortage that in intensity and duration did 'materially exceed that experienced in 1918'.

¹ Mr. G. H. Roberts.

² A third difference may, perhaps, be assumed. Woman-power was not mobilised to the extent that it was in the Second World War, and the 1918 system probably enjoyed more favourable labour conditions. It was to be noted in the Second World War that suggestions for tightening-up rationing often came from Northern Ireland, partly because the need there was greater (because of the Border) but partly because labour was not so scarce there.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Revival of the System, 1936–39

I

THE HISTORY of rationing in the second World War may be said to begin in May 1936, with the appointment of the Beveridge Committee¹

‘to consider and report what arrangements may become necessary in time of war for rationing . . . the individual consumer . . . and what preparatory steps should be taken forthwith . . . to enable these arrangements to be brought into force as quickly as possible’.

The recommendations of this committee amounted to ‘reproducing with certain modifications the scheme which worked successfully in the last war’. Rationing should be based on the individual ration document, local administration, and, above all, the tie to the retailer, ‘the only safeguard against queues and the only fair guide to distribution’.

The modifications were important. First, Food Control Committees should be advisory rather than executive, existing mainly as appeal tribunals and to give a useful appearance of local autonomy. Secondly, the committee did not think that rationing would need the coupon, and envisaged a ration book consisting of counterfoils and spaces for cancellation.²

‘In the late war emphasis was laid at first on the coupon to be detached. . . . Experience showed that the essential part is the counterfoil—making the retailer’s list of customers, and therefore the basis of supplies to him. Effective rationing is possible without coupons, but not without registration . . . as a guide to distribution. Detachable coupons can be used as a supplementary check upon retailers, by requiring them to account by coupons for all the supplies sold by them. But the use of such coupons involves delay . . . in the shops’.

This was a pure counterfoil system, such as the first Ministry of Food attained in October 1919; but it was looser, for the committee proposed that, as in the scheme of July 1918, the retailer should keep the counterfoils lodged with him (and, in effect, make out his own

¹ Vol. I, pp. 9, 37.

² Except for a page of meat coupons. In 1918, meat was rationed with bacon, and they were usually bought in different shops. Also meat meals in restaurants were rationed.

permit and send a copy of it to the Food Office).¹ Thirdly, the committee considered that the supplementary ration books used in July 1918 might be dispensed with, and the needs of special classes of workers, and of growing boys, be met by communal feeding in canteens and schools. Fourthly, it suggested a link between rationing and the system of National Registration being prepared by the Registrar-General.² His proposed Central Register of the population and Identity Cards might be used for the initial issue of ration books, and the two services might then continue to give each other mutual support.

The last suggestion, interesting in itself in view of the controversy over the Central Index and Ration Papers of 1917, was important as influencing the scope of any peace-time preparations. Sir William Beveridge, emphasising that rationing must be a late, not early, stage of food control, had earlier expressed the opinion³ that it could not be introduced until about four months after the outbreak of war. This would make it possible 'to choose a date for the introduction of rationing and to adjust that date to the progress of other measures, such as national registration'. It followed also that it did not seem

'necessary or desirable to print in advance any of the millions of documents that will be required for rationing. It will be sufficient to keep them ready in specimen, subject to last minute revision to meet the circumstances of the moment. When rationing has been decided on, printing and the setting up of the local Food Offices can proceed together'.

The committee therefore recommended the following peace-time preparations: a review of the Civil Emergency Food Organisation so that it could instantly be converted into the divisional organisation of a Ministry of Food; the preparation of a list of local authorities to be asked to set up Food Offices, and the drafting of their instructions; the drafting of specimen ration books, a Household Application Form, retailers' and caterers' buying permits, and instructions to the public, retailers, and caterers.

This work was begun by the Board of Trade while the committee was still sitting, and was taken over in November 1936 by the newly-established Food (Defence Plans) Department.⁴

¹ Why is not clear; for the committee had before it the statement of the secret Official History to the effect that this practice was too loose. The explanation may be that the reform of October 1919 took place after Sir William Beveridge had left the Ministry of Food.

² Who was a member of the committee. The relations between rationing and National Registration are dealt with below, Chapters XXVIII-XXXI.

³ To the Committee on the Course of Prices in a Major War, which reported in 1933 (Vol. I, p. 8).

⁴ Which included several of the Board of Trade officials already at work on the rationing plans.

II

Sir Stephen Tallents in his autobiography¹ tells how the rationing planners had set about their task in the First World War:

'Well before the end of 1916, Beveridge and I had begun to think about it. At the outset we made an appointment together to have a first round with the subject in the quiet of a Sunday morning. It is very difficult now, with the edifices of two completed rationing schemes standing between that time and this, to recapture the completely clean mental canvas upon which the first sketches for rationing had to be drawn. But I remember with unusual vividness sitting down alone that Saturday, with a blank mind behind my eyes and a blank sheet before them, in an attempt to get to grips with the essential requirements of rationing. At the end of that conflict I saw the problem as fundamentally simple. I was convinced that, though its practical solution would demand the immensely careful imagining and testing against facts of some large and many minutely detailed operations, the vital thing was going to be to keep that simplicity continuously in mind. We met next morning, Beveridge with his notes on a couple of sheets of foolscap and I with mine on a single bit of writing paper. We took his foolscap as our working draft, but we had both independently been led to much the same plan.'

Between the 'rationers' of 1918, with their clean slate, and those of 1936 stood the 'edifice' created by the former, a wholly successful and popular rationing system. Its forms, documents, and instructions lay in carefully preserved historical files; its essence had been lucidly distilled by the Beveridge Committee; it was remembered with affection by those who had served it and by those who had experienced it. 'The rationing system of 1918', wrote Sir William Beveridge, 'was welcomed mainly as a means of guaranteeing supplies; its efficiency as a means of restricting consumption to a level of real hardship was never tested'.² What consumers, and for that matter retailers, remembered with distaste was not rationing, but the hardships and queues from which it had rescued them. The 'legend' of the first Ministry of Food was well-deserved; nevertheless, a rationing system introduced at the end of a war, with the worst food shortages behind it, must be deemed fortunate.

Early in 1937 the Food (Defence Plans) Department decided that the rationing system it would prepare would be largely that of July 1918. Its members were well aware that conditions in a future war

¹ *Man and Boy* (London, 1943), p. 236.

² *op. cit.*, p. 230.

might be more stringent than any experienced in the last; they were, moreover, naturally loath to be accused of ancestor worship. 'If we merely said that we wanted . . . to print ration documents such as were used in the Great War, it might be thought that we were lacking in originality and initiative.' Nevertheless, the alternative—jettisoning a tried system for which there was no *proved* substitute, and perhaps committing the country at war to a period of precarious experiment—appeared too risky.

One precedent would not be followed. The Department agreed with the Beveridge Committee that there should be no more 'overmighty subjects'. Rationing would, from the beginning, be a uniform national system. If initial air attack were to render rationing necessary in some regions and not in others, this could best be met by adapting a national system to local needs and not by improvising purely local schemes. The Department also agreed with the Committee that the tie to the retailer was essential to effective rationing. It reopened many old debates—for instance, on the merits of household as against individual documents—but registration, the basis of the Ministry of Food legend, went virtually unquestioned.

With two of the Committee's ideas the Department did not agree. It accepted the axiom that rationing was the 'top storey' of food control, and must be preceded by complete control of supply; but not the corollary that it need not be introduced for several months. Rationing might be needed, even if there were no early devastating air attacks to prevent a rise in prices, to prevent panic buying and hoarding, to conserve stocks and shipping space, or merely to reassure people that all was under control.

The Department attempted a compromise. An intermediate scheme, to run for thirteen weeks only, would be introduced on the outbreak of war. Its documents¹ would be printed in peace-time; those for the permanent scheme could be left in draft to be revised and printed while the intermediate scheme was running. However, the Stationery Office could not guarantee that the printing of the documents for the permanent scheme could be completed, in war-time conditions, in less than six months—three months after the intermediate scheme would have expired.² There was clearly no

¹ They were to be ration cards with counterfoils for registration and spaces for marking-off. Being based on registration, the scheme would not have met the problem of time it set out to solve; see below, p. 469 *seq.*

² 'I have been appalled', wrote the Deputy Controller of the Stationery Office, 'at the demands made on us to estimate what we can do if and when an emergency arises, all of them actuated of course by . . . reluctance to spend money in advance, and all of them assuming that available material and plant can be earmarked for one service only, in apparent ignorance that all the other questioners expect to have a priority claim on the same material and the same plant. As each questioner is operating secretly I may not openly set off one against another and I have had to take refuge in a blank refusal to give such estimates and a private warning that such proposals are merely heading for chaos'.

point in going on with the intermediate scheme; a scheme that had to run for six months might as well be the permanent one. The Department concluded that the documents for the permanent scheme must be printed in peace-time, so that it might be introduced within three to four weeks of the outbreak of war. In July 1937, the Treasury and the Food Supply Sub-Committee sanctioned the spending of £57,000 on the printing of ration books and Household Application Forms.¹ Although the path of preparation had thus been cleared, the task before the planners was in one way made more difficult: there would be no provisional scheme to start rationing off with, and so gain time in which to revise the permanent one to meet war-time circumstances. They had instead to temper precedent with prophecy, to draft documents 'for use under hypothetical conditions when the political situation is unknown and the requirements to be met at best are only estimated'. Consequently, precedent came to play a larger part in the rationing scheme than it otherwise might have done.

III

It took a year to draft the ration book; 'we do not want', said the Treasury, 'to have to scrap £55,000 worth of cards because, after they have been printed, someone brings forward a bright idea for improving their form'. There were two main problems to be considered; what foods to provide for, and how to provide for them. The Department's first thought was to provide for nineteen. But on reflecting that it would surely not be necessary to deal with so many 'in the first six months of any war we were likely to win', and that the printing of such a ration book would cost far more than £55,000, it 'whittled its precautions down from the extreme to the reasonable'. In January 1938, it sought the advice of butchers' and grocers' organisations on a draft ration book that contained pages of counterfoils and detachable coupons (named—'lest the organisation should be stamped as unready') for meat, bacon, butter and margarine, and cooking fats, four spare pages of counterfoils and coupons, and two sheets each of four counterfoils. Thus eight foods could be controlled by counterfoil and coupon, and eight by counterfoil alone.

The coupon was thus to be kept, in face of the Beveridge Committee's recommendation; Rationing was to start again from July 1918, and not continue from the point it had reached in October 1919. The reason given was that

'It is always assumed that a certain number of persons will not consume the whole of their ration. . . . If we accept . . . cancelling a

¹ £55,000 on ration books, £2,000 on Household Application Forms.

space instead of collecting a coupon we invite the retailer to claim the full ration for all customers on his books whether in fact they have purchased the full amount or not.'

A good deal was to be heard in future about this hypothetical entity. To leave it in the hands of the retailer, argued the Department, would be wasteful¹ and, by encouraging him to sell 'off-ration', would undermine belief in the fairness of the rationing system. His supplies must therefore be adjusted to sales: 'only by this means can the utmost conservation be assured'.

The Department was prepared to experiment, however, with less scarce or less essential foods. These would be tied by counterfoil alone, leaving final distribution to the retailer. (At first sight there appears little difference between this and a registration system. Under the latter, however, the consumer is entitled to a guaranteed and regular share and no more—hence the provision of a space to be cancelled when the share is bought. Under the former, he may receive either a varying and irregular share of what is available or, as in the household sugar scheme of 1917, a prescribed minimum share with an additional share of any surplus—if he can get it.) Thus there might be two schemes running side by side: a rationing scheme for the main foods, and a distribution scheme for lesser foods. However, this was strongly opposed by retail traders on the ground that their customers would fail to distinguish between the two, and would expect a guaranteed share of the 'tied' foods. Still more did they object to the distribution scheme itself because this placed the onus of fair distribution on them.² They held that a food ought to be fully rationed by counterfoil and coupon, or left alone. Officials discarded their innovation with regret—'for merit was seen in it'—and re-drafted the ration book with pages of named coupons for the 'certainties' (meat, bacon and ham, butter, margarine and cooking fats, and sugar),³ spare pages of unnamed coupons for the 'possibles' (perhaps tea, cheese, and milk), and four spare counterfoils for the 'unexpected'. The last, they explained, would not be applied to butchers and grocers, but might be used for bread, vegetables, potatoes, and fish. The book also contained a 'reference-leaf' (an application postcard for obtaining the next edition), and spaces on the inside covers for recording the names of the retailers with whom the holder had registered.

In view of retailers' opposition in both wars to coupon-cutting, it is odd to find them rejecting a simpler system. But what they had

¹ In 1917 it had been argued that, unless this surplus were retrieved, it might be necessary to reduce ration levels. (This did happen to the meat ration early in 1941.)

² Except for the representatives of the Scottish butchers who urged that the 'tying' system should be used for all foods.

³ Sugar had been added for psychological reasons only—to reassure people who might remember the sugar shortage of 1917.

rejected was the use of distribution, as distinct from rationing, schemes. The incident of 1938 was an attempt to deal with a problem that early in 1941 became acute—that of finding a halfway house between full rationing and either no control of distribution at all or rough-and-ready distribution on the datum principle. Retailers had not rejected, because they had not been offered, registration combined with spaces for marking-off instead of detachable coupons. In fact, the chief difference between the new ration book and that of July 1918 was that all provision for space-cancellation, as an alternative to coupon-cutting, had disappeared.

After consultations with the Post Office and the Stationery Office, the draft ration book was duly approved by the Food Supply Subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defence, in July 1938. On 4th August the book was formally sent to press; printing, however, was not finished until a year later. The summer of 1939 was punctuated by anxious enquiries from the Department about the receding date for completion; as early as February 1939, it had been thought prudent to print temporary ration cards.¹ The delay was due partly to the late arrival of three special machines that had, at the suggestion of the Stationery Office, been constructed for ration-book printing.² The printing of some 78,000,000 ration documents³ was a massive task; both the Stationery Office and the Department were worried about the possibility of a breakdown in war-time. With normal working, the documents could be printed in six months, with double shifts, four months; as the three machines were placed near London, the margin of safety seemed small. The Stationery Office therefore suggested that three more machines should be ordered and set up in the West Country. But this was rejected by the Treasury and the

¹ The temporary scheme had been devised to meet the 1938 crisis; Divisional Food Officers were supplied with lists of local printers and specimen cards. Early in 1939, when it seemed possible that war might break out before the ration books were ready, it was decided to print the temporary cards in advance. They were dispersed to Food Executive Officers in March.

² The ration book was elaborately printed: the machines were designed to print letterpress and 'security' (i.e., forgery-proof) background in one operation. The Stationery Office suggested the construction of special machinery because, as its own presses were fully occupied, the work would otherwise have to be delegated to contractors. The special machines would always be at the disposal of food control, further editions of the ration book could be embarked on at short notice, and the work would be carried out more quickly, more cheaply, and in greater secrecy, if it were under direct control.

The special machines could not be ordered until the ration book had been approved, for their design depended upon the size of page. The machines were ordered the very day that the Stationery Office received the press copy.

³ This figure included all classes of ration book and the weekly emergency cards. A considerable administrative margin was allowed because (1) the population figures on which the numbers were based were those of the 1931 census; (2) the population would probably be on the move when the books were being issued; (3) ration book stores (of which there were 54) and Food Offices might be destroyed. The computation of such figures, e.g., of the number of heavy workers' and children's books to print, was difficult because of the absence of up-to-date figures; statistics of retail distribution, on which the number of retailers' forms could be based, did not exist.

Committee of Imperial Defence Sub-Committee on Stationery Requirements in War, on the grounds of expense.¹ They suggested instead that the machines might be moved from London when they had finished printing the second edition ration books. However, during the war ration-book printing turned out to be nearly continuous, and in 1942 the problem was solved by other means.²

The ration books were to be issued by post in response to a Household Application Form. The Post Office agreed to make a 'crash delivery' of the forms to every household within 48 hours. The writing and distribution of the ration books would, thought the Department, take about 14 days. The Stationery Office advised against giving them a cover with a flap and a slit, because this would increase printing costs, slow production, and take 15 to 20 per cent. more paper; the Department decided against the use of window envelopes because they would cost about £9,000 and delay distribution. It was decided, therefore, that the ration books must be posted without cover. In this case the Post Office required that they be sealed, lest other mail be entrapped in them, and it was decided that the fore-edge of the book should be lightly gummed. This apparently minor point was to have unforeseen consequences in 1940 and 1941, for arrangements were made to co-operate with National Registration that would have been easier to carry out had Food Offices been able to get at the reference-leaf application forms, inside the ration books, before they were issued.³

The main ration book was only one of many documents that had to be prepared. First, there were people who could not be bound by the tie to the retailer; special books had to be printed for travellers and seamen, and ration cards for servicemen on leave. Secondly, provision had to be made for breaking and re-establishing the tie to the retailer when a removal took place. The removal would be notified to the Food Office of the area into which a person moved. He would receive loose counterfoils to lodge with his new retailer, and the Food Office would affix, over the names of his old retailers on the inside

¹ £20,000-£23,000.

² See Appendix B.

The main dates in the printing of the ration book were:

1937	16th July	Food Supply Sub-Committee approved the printing of the ration book in advance.
1938	12th July	Draft ration book approved.
	4th August	Ration book sent to press; special machines ordered.
	10th October	Treasury sanction sought to spend a further £25,000 on other classes of ration book and various forms.
	2nd December	Other classes of ration book sent to press.
	10th December	Treasury permission received.
1939	January	First machine operating; second being erected.
	15th August	Main ration book dispersed to stores.

³ See p. 484 *seq.*

covers of his ration book, a sheet containing spaces for the names and addresses of his new ones. The next part of the process would be more troublesome. The new Food Office would have to copy the names and addresses of the old retailers from the ration book and send them to the old Food Office, which would acknowledge them by a copy of the person's register entry, and cancel his registrations. For stays of up to one month, 'emergency' cards would be issued; the coupons in the ration book would be cancelled but not the registrations. Stays of over one month would be treated as permanent removals.¹ For these processes there had to be printed the temporary ration cards, the loose sheets of counterfoils and of spaces for retailers' names, and various forms to be used by Food Offices—a removals notification to be filled in by the applicant, a notification incorporating a list of registrations to be sent from new to old Food Office, and a form notifying cancelled registrations to retailers.

Thirdly, sheets of additional coupons were printed for invalids and for those, like Jews and vegetarians, who practised a special diet. Fourthly, there was the children's ration book. This was for use up to the age of six. Its immediate significance was that it carried only half the adult meat ration, but it would also enable young children to receive special rations if such a policy were decided on. Six had been the age limit adopted in 1918; the Department contemplated raising it to eight, but after some discussion with the Ministry of Health decided to keep the old age limit.² Finally, supplementary books were provided for boys between 13 and 18 and for heavy workers. Differential rationing was always a controversial topic, and the Department was at a disadvantage compared with its predecessors of 1918 in that the latter had been planning to meet contemporary conditions. 'Once the rationing of bread is contemplated', wrote Sir William Beveridge in 1936, 'it becomes necessary to talk in calories. . .'. In the spring of 1918, it had seemed as though this condition was about to be fulfilled; to the Department in 1937, the rationing of bread was 'unthinkable'. Nevertheless the 'Government of the day' might want to introduce differential rationing, and must be enabled to do so.

¹ In 1918, the ration book could be used for stays of up to one month by means of the Visitor's Declaration Form. This form was handed to the retailer who then sent it to his Food Office as evidence of sales or, if necessary, his entitlement to extra supplies. Removals had been troublesome from July 1918 to October 1919 because retailers kept the counterfoils. The consumer had to be responsible for retrieving them and presenting them at his new Food Office.

² 'Children after the age of six are going to school and the demands made on their metabolism begin to be considerable', wrote the Ministry of Health. In that event, one might ask, why was not five—the age at which compulsory school attendance now began—adopted? As a result of war developments, the change to five was made eventually, in 1942 (pp. 651–2, below).

The Food (Defence Plans) Department was unaware of the origin of the half-ration of meat for children under six. It was, in fact, a vestigial survival of a complete plan of differential rationing, including bread and flour, drawn up by a Ministry of Food Committee in January 1918, and approved by the 'Royal Society experts' as giving sufficient calories. Beveridge, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

However, the Department's attempt in 1937 to 'talk in calories' with the Ministry of Health was not very successful. The nutrition experts could not state who would need extra rations, or what those rations should consist of, unless they knew what the level of ordinary rations was likely to be. The Department therefore felt itself to be forced back upon the precedent of 1918, and so printed a supplementary book for adolescent boys only, a distinction that had occasioned protest even then.¹

IV

When war broke out, the printing of the rationing documents that would be used by consumers was nearly complete;² the documents representing the other half of the rationing system, those to be used by retailers, were hardly begun. 'In any scheme of food control', wrote a senior official in May 1937, 'the disciplinary control of the retailer is a matter of first importance'. The Department proposed to discipline him, by means of first, licensing; secondly, coupons and periodical returns.

The experience of the first World War was held to suggest that the threat of revocation of licences was the most effective sanction that food control could hope for, notwithstanding that (as the weapon could not be used extensively lest it cause hardship to consumers), few licences had actually been revoked. Licensing of retailers³ would therefore be the first step in the introduction of rationing. Once rationing had begun, '... the form which appears to be essential to control is the periodical return'. The Department adopted the reforms of October 1919. Food Offices were to hold the registration counterfoils, and maintain a ledger account for each retailer of his gains and

¹ See p. 438, n. 3.

² The main consumer documents were:

	The general adult ration book (R.B.1).
	The child's ration book (R.B.2).
	The traveller's ration book (R.B.3). (This had no counterfoils for registration.)
<i>not</i>	{ The adolescent boy's supplementary ration book (R.B.4).
<i>used</i>	
	(These consisted of extra meat coupons)
	The seamen's ration book (R.B.6).
	The temporary card for one week (R.B.7).
	The servicemen's leave or duty ration card for two weeks (R.B.8); for three days (R.B.8A).

³ A subsidiary advantage of licensing was that it furnished statistics indispensable to detailed control. Divisional Food Officers had suggested in 1937 that a register of retailers might be compiled in peacetime, but the Department had felt that this step would be received with suspicion. When, early in 1939, the Department was preparing to print the licensing documents, it had to ask Food Executive Officers to estimate the number of retailers and establishments in their areas so that the number of forms to be printed could be assessed.

losses in registrations for each food. As in July 1918, only the initial allocations would be made on the number of registrations; later supplies would be adjusted in the light of the retailer's returns, from which Food Offices would derive his sales and ascertain his actual requirements.

The returns and permits were first drafted in 1937, and in the main were copies of those used in 1918. As they could not be committed to print until the Commodity Divisions of the future Ministry of Food had begun to take shape, they were not finally revised¹ until July 1939. Apart from the licensing forms, the printing of the retailer documents, including the indispensable *permits*, was rushed through after the outbreak of war.

The first step in the introduction of rationing would be the distribution by the Post Office of the Household Application Forms (R.G.1).² The ration book, having been 'written up' in Food Offices with the name and address of the recipient, would be sent by post. Consumers would then register with retailers by lodging counterfoils. Each counterfoil would bear the name and address of the consumer and the retailer, and would be forwarded by the latter to his Food Office. The consumer might deposit with his retailer whole coupon-pages, on each of which he must enter his name and address.

The retailer, who in the meantime would have applied to his Food Control Committee for a licence, would, when registration was completed, fill in *application forms* (the '1' series) for supplies of rationed foods. This he would have to do every four weeks. Food Offices would then issue *permits* (the '2' series). There would be one for each rationed food and, where a retailer was allowed more than one supplier for a food, a permit would have to be written for each. Permits would run for four weeks. The retailer would pass them on to his supplier and summaries of them, or authorities based on them, would ultimately reach the commodity divisions and release allocations to first-hand distributors. Finally, retailers would have to make four-weekly *returns* for each rationed food (fortnightly for bacon and meat). With these returns (the '3' series) they must send evidence of sales; coupons collected from ration books and temporary cards, and orders from establishments. Thus, to take sugar as an example, retailers would,

¹ The final revision by the Commodity Divisions did not result in any major change except that the composite forms for butter, margarine, and cooking fats were split into a separate series for each. This was because these foods were handled by different suppliers. It was also pointed out that the combined butter and margarine coupon would prevent Food Offices checking the sales of each. Any difficulty that might result from the combined *counterfoil* could be met, if necessary, by allotting one of the spare counterfoils to margarine.

² R.G.1 asked for name, address, age (if under 18), school (if under 18), and occupation. The adolescent boy's supplementary book would be issued automatically; special application would be needed for the heavy worker's. In the event, R.G.1 was not used (see Chapter XXVIII); as the supplementary books were not used either, perhaps this was as well.

every four weeks, make applications for supplies on S.1, receive permits on S.2, and render a statement of their dealings in sugar on S.3. The same series of forms held good for all rationed foods. A retailer would apply for supplies of margarine on Margarine 1, receive a bacon permit on B.H.2, render a statement for butter on Butter 3, and so on.¹

Side by side with the arrangements for retailers went those for *establishments*. The classification of establishments was that used in 1918,² and depended upon the circumstances in which they served meals. *Residential establishments*,³ for instance boarding houses, were those which had a fairly constant number of residents and did not serve meals to outsiders. These would register with a retailer by means of a *Preliminary Demand Note* (a '4' form) and thenceforth shop on the ration books of their residents. They would be treated, in fact, as large households, except that it was the household and not its individual members that registered. The distinguishing feature of *catering establishments* was that they served meals to non-residents.⁴ They would receive their supplies of fats and sugar in the form of allowances for meals served; for bacon and meat they were to collect coupons. If they bought retail, they would register by Preliminary Demand Note (sending one part to the retailer, one to the Food Office, and keeping one for themselves) and thenceforth use official Order Book forms (the '5' series). If they bought wholesale, two parts of the Preliminary Demand Note would go to Food Offices and they would receive permits. Unlike the retailers' Applications for Supplies, the establishments' Preliminary Demand Notes would be used only at the inception of rationing. Subsequently their supplies would be based on their own registers of consumption (R.G.M.1) and, in the case of meat and bacon, on coupons. *Institutions*, for instance hospitals, also had a constant number of inhabitants and did not serve meals to outsiders but, unlike residential establishments, their inhabitants did not take meals outside, and so did not hold ration books. They were therefore to receive supplies as allowances for the number of inmates, the allowance being the domestic ration.⁵ Thus residential establishments would receive supplies according to the number of ration books held, catering establishments according to the number of meals served, and institutions according to the number of inmates.

¹ Meat rationing would necessarily be different because meat was not a standard article. Food Offices would therefore issue only 'Notes of Authorised Weekly Allowance' (M.2) leaving the permits to be written by experts.

For the development of meat rationing see Part IV, below.

² It derived from the London and Home Counties rationing scheme of February (see p. 434 above).

³ This category was abolished in 1942.

⁴ Though they might be residential establishments too large to shop on ration books, e.g. boarding schools.

⁵ Unless they were subject to special institutional scales.

All establishments were to apply for registration; their classification was left to Food Control Committees, the general rule being that no establishment run for profit could be regarded as an institution.

It cannot be denied that the system was complicated. A retailer would have to fill in two forms every four weeks for sugar, butter, margarine, and cooking fats, and two every fortnight for meat and bacon. In addition he would have to cut out coupons and send them to the Food Office. It is difficult to reconcile the elaboration of this system with officials' own picture of the conditions in which it might have to operate. They had argued that air attack might create a situation that would call for rationing long before the four months envisaged by the Beveridge Committee; but they had prepared a system that required settled conditions for its proper functioning.

This incongruity may be explained in part by the survival of the forms and documents of July 1918. Once the 1918 system had been accepted in principle, the tendency was to adopt its detail as well. Officials were inclined to use the forms themselves, not their functions, as a starting point. The need to print the ration book in peace-time proved to be a disadvantage also, for its form had to be settled before the complementary machinery for the control of the retailer could be devised. The rationing machinery had been prepared in advance of the commodity schemes it was destined to serve; war broke out before work could be done in the important borderland where they met. The Department was not given time to survey its work as a whole. 'If', said the Director in April 1939, 'anyone had been able to foresee the size of the job or had brought this Department into existence two years before, we should have been in a very much better position to-day'.

That is not all. The planners were caught between past and future. On the one hand, there was the legend of 1918 to live up to. The consumer would once again expect to buy his guaranteed ration with ease; the rationing system must therefore be founded on the consumer-retailer tie. On the other hand, it could hardly be assumed that supply conditions would permit rationing practices more lax than those that, on paper at any rate, prevailed in 1918; officials would not, therefore, follow the Beveridge Committee into a simple registration system and dispense with the devices for adjusting supplies to actual sales. The result of this dilemma was an omnibus system that could effect the utmost saving in food only if saving in other directions—labour and paper—were not necessary.

The Department's own explanation was that it was its duty to aim at the maximum control, leaving the optimum to emerge from circumstances:

'Some people have urged', said the Director to a meeting of Divisional Food Officers in November 1937, 'that if a future war lasted three or

four years it would be necessary before the end to alter very drastically the plans we are preparing. We are taking quite a definite line on that point and the line is this; first, our plans must be such that they could come into operation immediately; secondly, they must contain within themselves means by which they can be adjusted and modified as the circumstances of the time require. . . . If, as a result of the preliminary work that is now being done, the nation gets through the first six months of war without a serious food crisis, there will be during that period ample opportunity for changes and modifications to be introduced in the arrangements which are brought into operation at the beginning. . . . I have heard it said', he continued, 'that all this planning will be quite useless because we shall all be bombed out of existence within a few minutes or few days. Everybody . . . however, will agree that when forced to prepare for war . . . we have to plan for victory, not defeat. We must start off with the assumption that we are *not* going to be bombed out of existence and that the organisation which we are instructed to plan will function . . . we start off with what one might ironically call the 'normal' conditions of war as they existed in 1918 . . . and then we consider what modifications will be necessary to adapt to abnormal conditions'.

In the event, adaptation, in the form of simplification, had to be begun when 'normal war conditions' still held. This was partly because the revived system was more severe than its prototype. There had not been much sign of the 'simplification of the details' promised in 1937; one set of retail forms, the periodical application for supplies, was an unconscious novelty. Moreover, there were no continuing Authorities, no generous margins, no coupon-checking centre to take the weight off Food Offices.

Lastly, there was one remarkable and far-reaching departure from precedent. Every rationing scheme projected by the first Ministry of Food had appended to it a detailed time-table of operations, from the time documents were issued to the consumer, through the process of registration with the retailer and the release of supplies higher up, to the point at which all was ready for rationing to begin. Although the Food (Defence Plans) Department's work—including the revolutionary decision to print, not one, but two sets of consumer documents in advance—had been dominated by the time factor, no such time-table was drawn up either for the permanent or temporary rationing schemes. Events were to show that this was not merely a formal omission; the Department had left out a vital part of the planning process.

C:
Rationing as an
Administrative Problem

Part II: The Issue and Renewal of
Ration Books: The Link with the
National Register

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Pre-war Negotiations and the First Ration Book Issue

I

THE ISSUE, and periodical renewal, of the individual consumer's ration document raise administrative problems of a peculiar kind. They constitute a recurrent operation in which millions of citizens have to be dealt with in a comparatively short time, and which is unique even for food control, whose problems are not usually problems of scale. It is an operation, moreover, on whose substantial freedom from fraud and duplication the security of the whole rationing system depends. Nowhere, however, before the war, was the devising of precautions against fraud and duplication in the ration-book issue systematically considered. The problem was met by two circumstances that must, taken together, be termed fortuitous. The first distribution of ration books was based on the novel expedient of a National Register, compiled in a way that precluded a dangerous degree of error; and the system of rationing itself, with a tie to the retailer, provided the means by which that Register was ensured of remaining substantially accurate. The history of subsequent ration book issues is, in fact, that of the relations between rationing and the National Register. It is a history made complex by administrative difficulties and misunderstandings, and political uncertainties.

There was a point, early in the pre-war preparations, when the ultimate solution of these problems was stated in a form that made its accomplishment look simple. At the time Sir William Beveridge's committee on rationing was set up, April 1936, the concepts of a National Register as part of the machinery for conscription, and of the registration certificate as 'evidence to justify the issue of food cards' (to quote from a memorandum of June 1922) were familiar doctrine; so much so that the Registrar-General for England and Wales naturally took his place as a member of the committee. The Registrar-General was convinced that a close association between national registration and food rationing would benefit both. The former would gain politically from an association with food rather than with conscription, and administratively from the tie to the retailer, with its concomitant need that changes of address involving a change of retailer be notified to a local Food Office. As for the latter,

if a centralised system of registering ration book holders did not exist, in the National Register, the future Ministry of Food would be constrained to invent one. It was true that the first Ministry of Food had managed to get along with purely local registers; but (argued the Registrar-General) time or acute food shortage would have revealed the weakness of such a system. In the more stringent conditions of a future war, a National Register, continuously maintained through a network of local offices, might be indispensable to the Food Controller.

The Beveridge Committee accepted these views without demur, for they fitted in conveniently with its rationing doctrine. The tie to the retailer was thought to be indispensable, and so the incentive for the National Register to make use of rationing was ready-made. Furthermore, it was not thought that rationing would need to be introduced for three months after war broke out, so that there would be ample time for an enumeration that could form the basis of the ration-book issue. The identity card might, therefore, be made into a voucher for the ration book, by means of a detachable counterfoil that could be forwarded by the applicant to the Food Office along with his form of application.

‘National Registration can help Rationing at the outset; and the link between them . . . may enable further advantage to be derived by Rationing from the national registration arrangements. Conversely, Rationing, when established, may be able to give help to national registration in keeping track of the removals of men of military age; . . . The extent to which mutual assistance can be given by the two systems will depend largely upon the opportunities for interaction which their respective arrangements will afford. . . .

‘Once rationing, with tie to a retailer, is established, no individual can get rationed food except from a known retailer nor can he change his retailer without knowledge and approval of a local Food Office; he cannot move from the area of one Food Office to that of another without the knowledge of both offices. In this, as in other ways, e.g., for enforcement of service on nationally desirable work, rationing, if desired, can be made a means to control civilian life in war.’

Even while the Beveridge Committee was sitting, however, the future of the National Register proposals became clouded by uncertainty. On the one hand, both the need for a National Register and its ‘structural requirements’, as defined by the Registrar-General, began to be questioned by those responsible for manpower policy in the next war; on the other, it was decided to explore the possibilities of establishing a Register in peace-time, in order to circumvent the difficulties of timing that would arise at the outbreak of war. These uncertainties were not resolved until after the Munich crisis, when it was decided that preparations for a National Register, to be compiled in the event of war, should be combined with the

normal preparations for the census of 1941. An announcement to this effect was made by the Lord Privy Seal (Sir John Anderson) in the House of Commons on 1st December 1938.

For two years, therefore, the basis for a firm collaboration between the Registrar-General and the Food (Defence Plans) Department did not exist. It might have been brought into existence earlier, had the former been able to persuade the latter that a National Register was essential for its purposes, but this he was quite unable to do, for a variety of reasons. In the first place, the Department was unwilling that the introduction of rationing should be delayed, as the Beveridge Committee had suggested, for several months after the outbreak; reliance on the National Register might, therefore, be dangerous. A peace-time Register would not meet the case, unless by chance war were to break out shortly after it was made; for the chief sanction to keep it up-to-date—rationing—would be missing, and ‘we obviously could not let a person starve because he or she had lost an identity card’. At this point the first objection shaded into the second; a fear that food control might be compromised by association, through National Registration, with conscription. The Department came to feel that the Beveridge Committee’s attitude smacked of the totalitarian state: ‘our job is to feed the people’, wrote a senior official.

The third objection went farther back; to the abortive Central Index of 1917, whose author was, of course, now Registrar-General. The accounts of this Index, both by Beveridge and in the secret official history of the first Ministry of Food, were certainly entertaining and probably tendentious;¹ uncritically read, they reinforced at this time the Department’s suspicions of the National Register, though their main criticism, that the Index took far too long to compile, was completely met by the census enumeration procedure now proposed. The more, therefore, the Registrar-General sought to have established the principle that National Registration was essential to rationing, the more the Department retreated into its shell; the most it would concede was that a National Register might be ‘useful’, and several of its members did not concede even that. Throughout the remainder of the pre-war period, hostility and suspicion underlay its dealings with the Registrar-General and (it must be said) warped its judgment on the merits of the National Register procedure. Thus it could never be brought to admit that an enumeration by trained staff was likely to prove far more accurate a basis for ration-book issue than an assembly of household application forms filled up by the public without expert supervision. Indeed, it would not admit the need for accuracy at all.²

¹ The Registrar-General had put on record, at the time of the Beveridge Committee, a categorical rebuttal of the version in the secret Official History. Above, pp. 435–7.

² This is implicit in a statement on the Department’s behalf, during the immediately pre-war discussions on whether rationing should be based on the Household Application Forms, that ‘about 80 to 95 per cent. accuracy’ might be expected from them.

II

However, the Department could not ignore the changed position brought about by Sir John Anderson's announcement, and shortly afterwards, on 7th December 1938, a *rapprochement* took place, as a result of which it undertook to consider the possibility of joint action *should rationing and National Registration begin at the same time*; the Registrar-General undertook to produce detailed proposals for linking the two services. His aim was to secure the food sanction as a reinforcement for National Registration's removals system. First, he suggested that a single notice of removal should serve both Food and National Registration Offices, each informing the other of the removal notifications received. This arrangement, ostensibly to save people having to notify the same removal to two Offices, was really based on the fact that they were unlikely to do so; it would secure for the National Register at least the removals notified to Food Offices by people who had to change retailers. The Department accepted this joint removals procedure but reduced it to a one-way traffic, on the grounds that Food Offices would be interested only in removals that meant a change of retailer and so must come to them direct.

The joint removals procedure would be useless unless Food Offices could find out the National Register coding of a person notifying a removal, for only through it could the Register trace him. Therefore (as the Department was not likely to allow the identity card to enter into food rationing machinery) the National Registration coding must be on the ration book. The Registrar-General's second proposal was, therefore, that the initial issue of ration books should be made, not from the rationing Household Application Forms, but from returns that would bear the National Registration number—the enumeration schedules.¹ The programme would be: the enumeration, the transcribing of the schedules to form the Central Index, and, finally, the handing over of the schedules to Food Executive Officers for the writing of ration books. This suggestion was more drastic than that made by the Beveridge Committee, which had not contemplated the complete supersession of the Household

¹ The Registrar-General pointed out that this method would prevent public dissatisfaction at being asked to fill up two forms asking for similar information within a short period. He also held that it would (a) discourage people from evading the enumeration and (b) provide a more accurate basis for the issue of ration books than the Department's own method (which he privately regarded as extremely rough-and-ready):

'... the necessity for getting food is relied upon as a simple solution of all difficulties. The whole weight of the deficiencies of a really inadequate system is thrown upon the public, who are left to go to the Food Office and get some form of return. Apart from the trouble and annoyance involved, there is and can be no check whatever upon duplication. If a man asks for an application form he has got to have it and a Ration Book is issued upon his application.'

Application Form.¹ The Department agreed; but with some misgiving, as the plan meant that an efficient start to rationing would depend upon officials of another department.

The disadvantage of using the ration book instead of the identity card as the link between the two services was that ration books would be renewed every six months. The Registrar-General's third proposal was, therefore, concerned with preserving the link at each reissue; that the National Registration number should be written, not only on the cover of the ration book but on the renewal form—the *reference leaf*—inside it. This proposal was 'defeated by a spot of gum'; the books were sealed,² and it would not be possible to get at the reference leaf. The Department suggested instead that the National Registration number should be written on the original household return (whence it could be transferred to the second-issue ration books); to which the reply was that provision had indeed been made for this to be done.³ The Registrar-General's efforts, however, to fill in the administrative details of this agreement brought fresh alarms. The first shock was a draft enumeration return headed 'National Registration/Food Rationing'. The Department promptly made it clear that no reference to rationing must appear on any National Registration document, and no impression must be given to the public or to National Registration officials that the two schemes were in any way inter-dependent. The Department also took exception to a circular stating that it was intended to make local administrative arrangements that would permit of co-operation between the two services, on the grounds that it knew of no such intention. (The Registrar-General held that to make arrangements that would 'permit of' co-operation could not reasonably be construed to mean that such co-operation was, in fact, intended, and he did synchronise his local organisation as far as possible with that of food rationing.)

It was the next sortie from Somerset House, however, that upset the Department most. There were, the Registrar-General pointed out, three possible situations to be met. Rationing might begin first; in which case the Household Application Form would be used, and some means of linking the two services at the second issue of ration books would have to be found. Rationing and National Registration might begin more or less at the same time; this would be covered by the existing agreement. But National Registration might come first. To meet this contingency the Registrar-General brought forward yet again the suggestion of the Beveridge Committee that a detachable part of the identity card might be used as well. The

¹ See p. 445, above.

² To meet postal requirements. See p. 451, above.

³ The 'original returns' in question (i.e., the enumeration schedules) would be formed into a Food Office register of ration book holders. See p. 486 *seq.*, below, for the consequences of this exchange of views.

ration books could then be written from the enumeration schedules even if there were a gap of months between the enumeration and the introduction of rationing; the detachable part of the identity card could be sent in when the time came to issue the books and the addresses on them could be corrected.¹ This, however, evoked the earlier fear of the link with conscription; the identity card proposal was seen as the means of carrying out the suggestion that defaulters could be rounded up by means of rationing. The identity card would become a voucher for a ration book; this, in turn, '... would *make* rationing dependent on N.R., and it might indeed be difficult ever again to assert its independence'; the 'corollary to linking the two by the voucher method' was the 'idea of starving people into submission'. The Department, which had hitherto attributed its reserve to the time factor, now revealed to the Registrar-General its fears lest the connection with the National Register should drag food into the political arena; but at bottom it was convinced that his hypothesis was an impossible one.

The Registrar-General, while not dismissing the political argument, did not see that the use of the identity card would be any more dangerous than that of the enumeration schedule since neither need bear any reference to rationing.² But the Department considered that its use would have to be explained to local National Registration Officers and a visible link would thus have been created. The Registrar-General was recalled to the limited December agreement that provided only for co-operation should the two services be introduced at the same time, and in February 1939 this was embodied in a written *concordat*. Its terms were:

1. That the use of the National Registration returns for the issue of ration books was administratively practicable;
2. That this use of them should be raised for Government consideration when the question of the introduction of rationing and National Registration arose;
3. That the two Departments should adjust their administrative preparations so that the use of the joint return was possible, but should do nothing to pre-judge the issue;
4. That the Food (Defence Plans) Department should prepare also for the use of independent returns in case the schedules should not be available or the Government should decide against their use;
5. That, when both services were in operation, a single notice of removal should serve both.

¹ This would also give the National Register a new 'datum line' for removals.

² The identity card was printed double-fold after all; the second half was used for National Registration purposes in May 1940.

The *concordat* was scrupulously observed, but the Department remained on the defensive against the Registrar-General's administrative preparations. For instance, he wished to instruct his local officers fully in the use of the joint return and he held the Department's refusal to do likewise to be virtually a breach of the *concordat*. The arrangements were 'contingent', but 'half the war plans now being made are preparations for contingencies which may or may not materialise. It is impossible to prepare for a contingency unless one is aware of it'. The Department held them to be 'hypothetical', and did not intend to translate them into instructions until the decision had been made to use them. The position bordered on farce; the *concordat* had laid down that neither department should do anything to prejudice the Government's freedom of decision when the time came; therefore advance instructions could be regarded as giving the impression that the joint procedure would be used while the lack of them could, with equal justice, be held to imply that it would not. This situation was complicated even more by the fact that the 'shadow' local National Registration Officer and the 'shadow' local Food Executive Officer were more often than not united, in the person of the Clerk to the town or district council.

The Department also rejected the idea of joint local enquiry offices, though it could not reasonably object to the Registrar-General's instruction that local National Registration Offices should be as near Food Offices as possible. It did, however, refuse temporary reciprocal notification of removals from National Registration to Food Offices during the period between the enumeration and the posting of ration books. The time lag would not (it thought) be long enough to justify it, and the responsibility for retrieving ration books from old addresses must be left to the public themselves. Finally, in April 1939, a last effort by the Registrar-General to secure the use of the schedules should National Registration come first was beaten off.

Nevertheless, by August 1939, definite connections between the two services had been achieved. First, the Registrars of Births and Deaths (who were quite distinct from the local National Registration Officers)¹ would, as in the first World War, give ancillary services to food rationing by collecting and forwarding to Food Offices the ration books of dead persons, and by issuing birth forms for obtaining children's ration books.² Secondly, the two local organisations had been made to coincide to some extent; the National Registration Officer and the Food Executive Officer were usually the same person, the local areas were the same, the offices were as near each other as possible and sometimes in the same building. Thirdly, a joint removals procedure had been agreed upon; but the method of issuing

¹ Except in Northern Ireland.

² See Appendix D.

the first ration books and, therefore, the time at which the link-up between the two services would take place, were still undecided.

III

The week preceding the outbreak of war was a confused and difficult one. The Registrar-General was naturally anxious that the two services should be linked from the first and, therefore, that the position of the National Register should be clarified as soon as possible. The need for a decision had to be urged upon his Minister.¹ At the same time, he had to convince the Food (Defence Plans) Department, in the first place that the decision would be made, in the second, that the enumeration could operate quickly enough to satisfy the needs of rationing. Thus to obtain an early decision on the need for a National Register, the services it could offer rationing were (as always) stressed, while, to prevent the Department flying off at a tangent and deciding prematurely to rely on the Household Application Form, a sanguine view had to be taken of the speed and efficacy of the enumeration.

As late as 28th August, National Registration's prospects were not encouraging. On that date a ministerial conference, under the Lord Privy Seal, was held to discuss the National Register. It was stated that it could be completed in three weeks, and that another two could see the ration books written from it. Against this it was urged that the Household Application Form scheme could operate in two weeks as against five. From the National Service point of view, the case for a National Register now seemed to have been over-stated; the militia call-up had shown that the Services could get their men without it, though it might be useful later for industrial conscription. The conclusion of the meeting was that though the National Register might give a more accurate registration basis, rationing was the more urgent matter and might not be able to wait until the Register was completed.

To allay these doubts the Registrar-General offered a 'thirteen-day minimum plan'. Five days would be needed for the distribution of schedules, seven for their collection and transcription. Therefore, one week from enumeration day, all schedules should have been handed over to Food Offices and ration-book writing should be in full swing. The Food (Defence Plans) Department considered that with only three days needed for the distribution and return of Household Application Forms, ration-book writing would, under its own

¹ The Minister of Health (Mr. Walter Elliot). 'The longer it takes to get that decision, the more difficult it will be to work the National Register to a date which will satisfy the Rationing people if their need is as urgent as they are disposed to represent it.'

plan, be nearly finished in thirteen days instead of just beginning.¹ These exchanges were later to look very unreal; the Registrar-General, in his anxiety to grapple rationing to the National Register as soon as possible, had over-estimated the abilities and underestimated the difficulties of his enumerators, while the Department's own timetable proved not merely sanguine, but fallacious.

The hasty change in Ministerial decisions at the outbreak of war, whereby the enumeration was to be made the basis of ration-book issue, has already been described;² it arose from the first of a series of discoveries about the mechanism of the rationing scheme that, because of their importance, will require analysis in some detail. The change was made in the belief that rationing would be postponed in consequence by only one week. The operation began as planned; but the early introduction of rationing never materialised. As a result, the *concordat* arrangements were applied, not to the situation for which they had been designed but to that for which the Registrar-General had earlier vainly tried to provide—the use of the enumeration schedules combined with a gap of several months between the enumeration and the beginning of rationing. Rationing did not begin until January 1940; but if Ministers had called for it earlier, it is doubtful whether, even without the link with National Registration, it could have been put into force.

It is as well, at this point, to understand exactly what the introduction of rationing entailed. The process may be divided into three stages. The first involved Food Offices, and ended in the issue of ration books to the public. The names and addresses of the persons to receive ration books were obtained (from the National Registration Schedules), the books were then 'written up' with name, address, and National Registration number, and, finally, posted to the recipients. The second stage involved the public, Food Offices, and retailers, and ended in the issue to the last-named of permits to obtain supplies of rationed foods. The public registered with retailers; retailers then selected their suppliers, listed the number of their registered customers and made application to Food Offices for

¹ The Registrar-General argued within his Department:

1. That he was prepared, if acute local shortages developed, to hand over the schedules untranscribed in those areas;
2. That though, with the Household Application Form, ration book writing might begin earlier, there was no guarantee that it would finish earlier, for completion would depend upon the speed of the slowest office;
3. That the schedules would be received at once or in large batches instead of trickling in from the public;
4. That the Department's timetable did not allow for postal delays (he had verified, by means of a telephone call to the General Post Office, that it might take as much as a fortnight to complete the delivery of ration books in all areas);
5. That the greater accuracy and professionalism of the enumeration would compensate for any slight delay.

² Vol. I, p. 111-117.

supplies: Food Offices then examined these applications, calculated the supplies due to retailers and sent them their permits. The third stage involved retailers, wholesalers, and the Ministry of Food's Commodity Divisions. Retailers posted their permits to wholesalers, who passed them up the chain of distribution until the information in them reached the Commodity Divisions. Only then could allocations of rationed foods to first-hand suppliers begin. Side by side with these arrangements for retailers ran similar ones for catering establishments.

Apart from the amount of office work to be done, these processes made repeated use of the post;¹ ration books were posted to consumers, forms on which to make applications for supplies, from Food Offices to retailers and back again; permits, from Food Offices to retailers, from retailers to wholesalers—and so on. It was all these stages that were covered by the assumption that rationing could be introduced within three to four weeks of the outbreak of war—which meant three weeks of operations at most, because the first week of war would be the evacuation week. What had not been worked out was the time each stage would take, or the extent to which one was dependent on another.

This accounts for the repeated postponements by the Ministry of the date at which rationing could begin. On 6th September, it had been realised that rationing could not begin after but three complete weeks, i.e., on Monday 2nd October. This postponement was due to the supply side; the only Commodity Division that had thought it could be ready in three weeks was Sugar. 'It is quite clear', wrote a senior official, 'that the earliest date on which we could start would be Monday, 9th October. The rationing machinery would all be ready earlier,² but we cannot get our Commodity Controls functioning in three weeks'. But if one takes 'rationing machinery' to mean the first two stages already described—those leading to the issue of permits—it is difficult to see how even this could have operated in three weeks. The timetable ultimately used allowed three weeks for the second stage alone—from the receipt of ration books by the public to the issue of permits. Moreover, the first stage—ending in the issue of ration books—was unexpectedly prolonged; on 24th October, the Ministry learned that the Post Office would need

¹ See Appendix H for a short account of the services performed for rationing by the Post Office.

² The rationing machinery would not have been quite ready in three weeks because the printing of forms was not finished. They were being printed by the million in the first three weeks of September. Permits were available at the end of the three weeks, but instructions to establishments and the revised manual of procedure for Food Offices were not available in the middle of October. Food Offices devoured forms far more extensively than had been expected, and there were constant complaints of shortages while the operations preceding the beginning of rationing were going on. There was also a chronic shortage of removals forms and many hurried reprints of them had to be made.

a minimum of one week to deliver the ration books and that in some areas this might take up to a fortnight. Even if the Household Application Forms had been used, and one accepts the pre-war calculation that the ration books could have been written from them in ten days, then the 'rationing machinery' alone would have needed, not three weeks, but nearly seven, to come into operation.

On paper it appeared that the link with National Registration would delay rationing only till the 16th October. But the last date for handing over the schedules to Food Offices was 6th October; ration book writing could not, therefore, begin for certain in all Food Offices until then. In other words, rationing might not be able to move for a month—it certainly could not move for three weeks because the enumeration was not until 29th September—and what the conference of 6th September had decided could not be done in three weeks had now to be compressed into ten days.

The explanation lies in the belief that the last stage of the introduction of rationing was concurrent with, not consequent upon, the first two. The Commodity Divisions had said that they could not complete their preparations in three weeks—by 2nd October; they now appeared to have five—until 16th October. However, they could not act until the results of registration with retailers were known. In effect, the new date was completely nullified by the decision to use the National Registration schedules and so postpone the beginning of the preparation of ration documents until 6th October. It was not until the middle of September that this became clear, when Butter Division intimated that it required ten days *after the issue of permits* to organise distribution in accordance with registrations; Meat Division asked for ten days after the issue of ration documents. On 2nd October another conference was held with the supply side; Trade Directors were asked what time was required to get the supply machinery working after the registration of consumers was completed. Meat Division, and Oils and Fats Division, asked for one week; Butter, two, Bacon, four, and Sugar, none. (The last estimate was, however, immediately followed, in a memorandum drawn up within Sugar Division, by the question, 'We must also consider what will happen at the beginning of rationing. . . . How are we to ensure that all retailers have enough sugar to honour all coupons in the first week?')

These replies left the Ministry with three courses of action: to postpone rationing indefinitely, to begin it without Butter and Bacon, or to begin with what was in the pipe line and risk initial defects. The last course was chosen and the timetable became: 6th October, handing over of the National Registration schedules completed; 16th October, ration books written up and *posted*; 23rd October, registration with retailers completed. Therefore ' . . . so far as local

Food Offices are concerned, rationing could be introduced on, but not before, 23rd October'. A fortnight was added for the Commodity Divisions' preparations and the date set for the beginning of rationing became 6th November.

However, the Minister's strong plea for rationing to begin on this date was rejected by the Home Policy Committee.¹ This was as well, for there were still flaws to be revealed. To begin with, most of stage two had been omitted; the Commodity Divisions' fortnight came directly after the completion of registration with retailers, and thus made no allowance for the time needed by retailers to make applications for supplies and for Food Offices to issue permits. Secondly, only ten days were allowed for both the 'writing up' and the posting of ration books and, as has been seen, it was later discovered that the Post Office might need a fortnight for its part alone.² Thirdly, on 4th October the Ministry discovered that the Registrar-General had set the date by which all the schedules were to have been handed over, not at the 6th but at the 16th of October.

It had been agreed, early in 1939, that the schedules should be handed over within *about a week* of the enumeration, and the Food (Defence Plans) Department had always made it clear that it could not accept the joint procedure if the gap were to be longer. At the end of August the Department had accepted the Registrar-General's 'thirteen-day-minimum plan' which allowed *exactly a week* for the handing-over. On 25th September 1939, the Registrar-General indicated that seven days was an average interval; some schedules would be handed over earlier, others a little later. But his instructions of 30th September to local officers gave 16th October as the last date; the mean interval of seven days had become a maximum interval of seventeen. This would have meant postponing rationing from 6th November by at least a week. The Registrar-General explained—in response to alarmed enquiries—that this was a final date for stragglers only; an explanation received by the Ministry with an uneasiness that was confirmed when it rapidly became clear that National Registration was falling behind even this timetable and that, at the rate the schedules were coming in,³ rationing could not begin before December. Some interdepartmental recrimination

¹ For the 'political' debates on rationing, see Vol. I, Chapter VIII.

² The Post Office's letter of 24th October giving this news was received with some dismay. It had probably been assumed that the Post Office's undertaking of a 'crash delivery' of Household Application Forms in 48 hours applied to ration books as well. But the latter were bulkier and, being addressed to individuals, needed to be sorted. The Registrar-General had taken steps to inform himself on this point two months earlier (p. 469, n. 1).

³ Bath had received only half its schedules by 20th October; Ayr had none until the 11th; Lincoln received its last on the 23rd and Wellingborough on the 25th. Southwark reported on 12th October that only 12 out of its 210 enumeration districts had been completed, and that in 3 districts the work had had to be done again because of enumerators' mistakes.

followed. The Registrar-General pointed out that he had considered 6th October to be an emergency date and the 'thirteen-day plan' to be an emergency plan; in the absence of any declared intention of introducing rationing on a definite date he had not perceived an emergency. The pre-war situation was, in fact, completely reversed, and the Ministry's position was considerably weakened by rationing's vague future.

The want of a definite date created difficulties for Food Offices also. On 3rd October, they had been told that ration-book writing could begin as soon as the schedules began to come in; on the 13th, they were given 23rd October as the completion date; on the 17th, they were asked to finish, if possible, by the 21st. This produced a spate of protest and complaints about the delay in receiving schedules. However, extensive use of extra staff and overtime enabled ration book writing to be completed in most areas by 25th October. The political decision to ration came three days later. By then there was a last potent reason for delay; it was not desired, for both practical and psychological reasons, to begin rationing in the middle of the Christmas trade. Even had the decision come earlier, rationing could not have begun until the third week in December, which would still have been too near Christmas. The principal factor delaying rationing was not, therefore, political hesitancy.

IV

The decision to ration did not end another set of troubles. By the middle of October, protests at the continued absence of rationing were flowing in from the retail trade (including Multiples and Co-operatives), Trade Unions, Divisional Food Officers of industrial areas, and the public. None regretted the delay more than the Ministry's Food Executive Officers. The strains of interdepartmental collaboration had already borne hardly on them. The lateness of the decision to use the National Registration schedules meant revising their careful pre-war preparations at the last moment; the ground for the use of the schedules had not been so thoroughly prepared as had that for the Household Application Form scheme, and administrative details previously overlooked, though minor, brought amending instructions at a trying time;¹ their planning had then been disorganised by the delays in handing over the schedules; finally, they had been subjected to hard driving both from Headquarters and their Divisional Officers to get the ration books written by

¹ For instance, in order to save people having to fill up two forms, the N.R. procedure for 'Persons omitted from the Registration' was substituted for rationing's 'Late Application for a Ration Book'.

25th October—which, in the continued absence of rationing, seemed unnecessary. But the difficulties on the circumference were due, above all, to the removals problem.

Until the public was safely registered with retailers, there was no incentive to notify changes of address to Food Offices. They should have been notified to National Registration Officers, but the Food (Defence Plans) Department had rejected the proposal to create machinery for passing them on. For the moment, with ration books written up but not yet posted and with the public not yet tied to their retailers, Food Offices were keenly interested in *all* removals; it was not merely a question of the ration book reaching the right address, but of the record that backed the ration book—the enumeration schedule—being in the right Food Office¹ as a safeguard against duplicate issue. This problem of removals between the enumeration and the posting of ration books had not been overlooked. Its magnitude, however, had been entirely unexpected; and it had been thought sufficient for people to be warned in a broadcast by the Registrar-General not to expect their ration books to ‘follow them about like a pet lamb’ but to make their own arrangements for having them forwarded from old addresses.² What had not been provided for (in England and Wales) was a gap of three months between the enumeration and the beginning of rationing, together with an absence of air attack that encouraged people to return home in large numbers long after the period allotted for large-scale population movements was over.³ As a result, by the middle of October, thousands of ration books bore out-of-date addresses and the enumeration schedules corresponding to them were now in the wrong Food Offices.⁴

The Registrar-General devised an emergency removals procedure so that Food Executive Officers would readdress ration books returned by the Post Office. If the removal notified were local, that is within the same food and National Registration area, the National Registration Officer notified the Food Executive Officer; if not, a special slip was sent to the Central National Registration Office at Southport, whence it was re-despatched to the National Registration Officer of the old area, who in turn passed it on to the Food Office.

¹ This aspect of the removals procedure is discussed on p. 480 *seq.* below.

² Even this simple procedure had its snags. It was discovered that some literal people were redirecting ration books to addresses abroad, and the Ministry had to ask the Post Office if its Postmasters at Liverpool and Glasgow could intercept them. It feared, of course, that the books might reach enemy countries and be forged.

³ Leeds, for example, had had 9,000 *notified* removals by the 27th October. In some Food Divisions the problem was made worse by the fact that enumeration coincided with the hop-picking season.

⁴ The similar problem of births and deaths was met by the Registrars beginning the agreed procedure from the 30th September. In the case of deaths this meant that they returned default forms only.

This still left a considerable problem. The machinery inevitably worked slowly—one Food Executive Officer complained that, by 31st October, he had still not received a single notification—but the main source of trouble was the absence of definite instructions on this interim period. The Ministry's circular stated only that, if Food Executive Officers had time, they could correct the addresses in advance; if not, they should use the new procedure only for re-directing books returned by the Post Office. It did not wish to tell its local officers to correct all the addresses in advance, partly because the task would have been enormous—most of the books were bagged ready for posting—partly because it feared that the issue of the books might be delayed. The instructions left a wide field for individual action and Food Executive Officers, fearing that duplicate issues might result from the use of local initiative, would have preferred a uniform procedure.

With the posting of ration books at the beginning of November came fresh trouble. The Registrar-General took this as the signal to discontinue the emergency removals procedure—which was not surprising since it had been designed only to enable Food Executive Officers to re-direct returned books. But the public could be anchored only by registration with retailers, not by the mere receipt of a ration book. The Ministry, not yet authorised to begin registration, was faced with another uncomfortable hiatus. Fortunately it was short. The official date for the completion of registration—23rd November—was exceeded by a few days because of the volume of removals, but, after two months, rationing machinery was back on the rails again.

V

The difficulties of the autumn of 1939 were due mainly to the Food (Defence Plans) Department's own planning, and only in a minor degree to the connection with National Registration. The Department had assumed throughout its work that rationing must be capable of being introduced within three to four weeks of the outbreak of war. On the other hand, all its rationing schemes, whether temporary, 'intermediate', or permanent, were founded on the tie to the retailer; in fact, the only difference between the 'rough and ready' schemes and the complete one was that the former would have used cards with spaces, instead of books with coupons, and would not have attempted to deal with special classes.¹ The Department had not benefited, in this respect, from the experience of its

¹ Except children and travellers.

forerunner. In October 1919 the Food Controller (Mr. G. H. Roberts) had written that 'In the experience of the Ministry of Food the institution of an effective system of rationing for any commodity takes from two to four months from the starting of the scheme to the full effect in the retail shops'. Rationing, of course, does not in itself pre-suppose the guaranteed distribution of the ration. But the first Ministry of Food had given it a positive as well as a negative character. Thus its successors, failing to perceive that speed and the guarantee were in contradiction, set out to introduce rationing within three or four weeks, armed with a system that could operate only after nine or ten.

In 1941 an experienced rationing official was to put 'the time it takes to ration cheese or any other commodity' at eight to nine weeks; this estimate assumed, however, that ration books were already in the hands of the public. Five weeks were allowed in the autumn of 1939 for the despatch of the ration books, the registration of consumers with retailers, and the issue of permits; and this period was not a whit too long. Two more weeks, even taking the pre-war estimate, would have been required for the return of Household Application Forms and the writing of the ration books; a further two weeks for the summarising and passing-up of permits to the first-hand stage of distribution and the release of allocations. If a week be added to cover the movements of population at the outbreak of war, making a total of ten, the conclusion is reached that the earliest possible date on which rationing could have been introduced was the second Monday in November. But this conclusion is itself a 'paper' one, for it makes no allowance for the difficulty that was to recur again and again during the war—that of getting completed forms out of the public by post.

It was one of the merits of basing the issue on the enumeration that this difficulty, and the inevitable inaccuracies that went with it, were avoided. The delays that resulted from so doing, namely the three weeks of waiting before the schedules began to be handed over, and the further ten days that were lost during the process of scrutiny and copying of the schedules before handing over, ought not properly, therefore, to be set fully against the account of National Registration, even if one ignores the Registrar-General's claim that these processes could have been speeded up or curtailed, had need been shown.

In short, the principal onus for the delay in rationing must be laid fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the Food (Defence Plans) Department, which had demonstrably failed to meet the requirements itself had laid down, when it rejected the Beveridge Committee's recommendation on the ground that rationing could not wait three months. 'Planning', Sir Sylvanus Vivian was later to write of the National Register itself, 'depends on conception'; and

it was a sufficiently clear conception of their task that the planners of the rationing machine are now seen to have lacked. Their pre-war conduct thus appears in a new light; the political acumen that avoided, even after the announcement of December 1938, any binding commitment to National Registration, as a negative substitute for positive administrative action. As for the *concordat*, they themselves thought of it as a gesture of pure, if reluctant, altruism; but the boot was really on the other foot, for it was they who benefited by being enabled to use, at the eleventh hour, a mechanism that had been fully thought out. The irony of this situation was to continue, for the one effective result of the political delays of the autumn of 1939 was to prevent the administrative delays from being exposed, and so enable rationing to perpetuate, in its subsequent attitude to National Registration, an inhibiting sense of patronage.

CHAPTER XXIX

'Brotherly Behaviour'¹, 1940 – 42

I

THE *concordat* of 1939 had committed the Ministry of Food to collaboration with National Registration. The help to be given under the concordat arrangements was, however, limited; Food Offices were to place the National Registration number on the ration book and pass on to National Registration Offices removals notified to them. This help was not enough; and the period from 1940 to 1942 was marked by a growing willingness within the Ministry's Rationing Division to apply the food sanction on behalf of the National Register. The willingness to help outstripped the means of giving it; the *concordat* framework was strained beyond what it could bear. On 22nd December 1942, therefore, the *concordat* was replaced by a new treaty, the *Heads of Agreement*. The local Food and National Registration Offices were 'fused' into joint offices, and the Ministry, hitherto the 'good neighbour', became instead the Registrar-General's agent, providing staff, equipment, and accommodation for local National Registration work.²

The two systems of registration that had run side by side until 1942 represented the opposing theories of 1917.³ Each used local offices and local registers, but those of National Registration were tied together by the Central Index, housed in the Central National Registration Office at Southport.⁴ The Central Index was composed primarily of the transcripts of the enumeration schedules, and recorded, among other particulars, the citizen's name, National Registration number, and address at the time of the enumeration. It did not record subsequent changes of address; only changes of National Registration area. The last 'posting' was automatically that of the area of the last known address; the address itself was recorded in the appropriate local National Registration Office. The

¹ A description of this period by the senior official in charge of rationing.

² See p. 505 below.

³ See p. 433 *seq.* above.

⁴ This was for England and Wales. The Central Index for Scotland was in Edinburgh. There was a separate Registrar-General for Scotland and the practice there was slightly different, but he worked in close co-operation with the English Registrar-General. In Northern Ireland, National Registration functioned under the direction of the English Registrar-General, but the local Registrars were also the local National Registration Officers, and N.R. work was, from the beginning, carried out in Food Offices.

local register concerned with removals was the *Maintenance Register*. This did not set out to cover the whole local population;¹ it was built up by removal notices, new registrations and the like, and so took cognizance only of people who had had occasion to make contact with the National Registration Officer since the enumeration.² Removals were notified at the 'arrival end', sent to the Central Index, and relayed thence to the Office of the departure area.³ The formal sanction behind the National Registration removals registers was the statutory obligation to notify changes of *residence*.⁴

The Registrar-General had always recognised that the Food Office might be as important as the National Registration Office to the local part of this system. The enumeration had opened a running account; it was intended to keep track of a person's movements. But, though the Central Index might know where he had been on enumeration night, the local Food Office was, because of the tie to the retailer, more likely to know where he had gone since. Much, therefore, depended on the food registers and on the means for transmitting the rationing 'power' to the National Registration machine.

A Food Office had two main registers; that of the *buying population*, i.e., the people who bought certain rationed foods in the area, and that of the *resident population*, i.e., the people who lived there. The first register was the one directly connected with food supply. It consisted of the registration counterfoils lodged with retailers and forwarded by them to Food Offices, and it was easily kept up-to-date because people had to obtain new counterfoils when they changed retailers. 'Credits' came directly in the form of new counterfoils sent in by retailers, 'debits' indirectly in the form of notifications from the Food Office of the area to which a person had moved. The second register was made up originally of the National Registration enumeration schedules, against which the initial issue of ration books had been made, and so was a register of households—hence its filing order under addresses. After the second issue of ration books in July 1940,⁵ it was composed, instead, of the reference leaves sent in

¹ From 1943 it covered the whole local population over 16 years of age; from 1947, the whole local population.

² In 1942 the security scheme for the Kent coastal zone revealed that only half of the local population was in the Maintenance Registers. The percentage would probably be higher in urban areas.

³ A form N.R.29 was completed for the local office Maintenance Register, and a debit form, N.R.30, prepared from it and sent to the Clearing House, which relayed it to the office of the departure area.

⁴ Not of *address*. The difference between National Registration and rationing definitions of temporary and permanent removal was to lead to difficulties. National Registration never defined a temporary removal in terms of time; but rationing had to do so because of the need to cancel registrations with retailers. Its time limit for a temporary removal began as four weeks but was later extended to eight, after which, though temporary documents would still be issued, registrations would be cancelled.

⁵ The enumeration schedules were then returned to the local National Registration Officer—but not, admitted many Food Offices, in very good condition.

as renewal applications and so became a card-index of individuals. However, it was still, at first, filed in address order, and hence a person could not be found in it unless his address were known. Exits from and entrances into the civilian rationing world were recorded on this register¹ by adding or extracting reference leaves; so, too, were removals. These were 'credited' and 'debited' by direct communication between Food Offices. If a removal were external, that is, to another food area, it was notified at the 'arrival end'. The new Food Office sent a form (R.G. 12)² bearing a list of retailers copied from the ration book, to the Office of the departure area; thereupon the consumers' registrations with those retailers were cancelled and his reference leaf³ transferred to the new Food Office. If a removal were internal, that is, within the same food area, the reference leaf was simply corrected and re-filed under the new address.

As the reference-leaf register underwent change as a result of collaborating with National Registration, it must be examined in some detail. The system of transferring reference leaves when an external removal was notified gave it the appearance of a 'live', i.e., up-to-date, record of the local population; indeed, it had been defined in one pre-war document as a '. . . Register of Consumers *residing* in a particular district'. In practice it was not a complete record of the local population, and it could not be kept up-to-date. Immediately after the enumeration, it had been an accurate local population register, but after July 1940 it lost even the appearance of completeness; there were no reference leaves for people who lived in institutions and therefore held no ration books. Even as a mere register of *ration-book holders*, it daily became less accurate because a removal, even to another food area, did not have to be notified to a Food Office unless it meant a change of retailers. At each reissue of ration books, therefore, a new register had to be made up from the reference leaves sent in as applications.

The reference-leaf register could not, therefore, be regarded as a local *population* record, and indeed the Food (Defence Plans) Department had never really intended that it should. The Registrar-General's offer of reciprocal notification of removals from National Registration Offices, that is, of removals *without* a change of retailer, had been rejected.⁴ Food Offices, the Department had explained, would be interested only in removals *with* a change of retailer; and

¹ Births and deaths came via the Registrars (see Appendix C) and enlistments from the Service authorities who returned recruits' ration books to the Ministry's Headquarters at Colwyn Bay, whence they were relayed to the local Offices. This was the only time rationing used a centralised system of notification. The purpose was to save Service authorities having to identify and deal with 1,500 local Offices.

² Later revised to R.G. 12A (p. 501, n. 1).

³ Until July 1940, the enumeration schedule or an extract from it.

⁴ See p. 467 above.

these would come to them direct. This was logical; the distribution of food depended upon where a consumer shopped, not where he lived. Knowledge of his present address was important only at the reissue of ration books—so long as they were posted—and then it could be obtained from his reference-leaf application. At other times, an urgent matter was likely anyway to bring him to the Food Office *ventre à terre*.¹

If, however, the Department were not even aiming at an accurate population record, two points in its removals procedure need explanation. In the first place, why transfer reference-leaves at all? The answer is that a reference-leaf was a receipt for a ration book; a proof that one had been issued. The book might be lost, and so the leaf ought to be in the Food Office to which the holder was most likely to apply—that corresponding to his present address. Otherwise, the leaf could be located only if he recollected what his address had been at the time the book was issued. The transfer of reference-leaves is explicable, that is to say, if the register be regarded as one of ration books issued by a Food Office rather than of their holders; the reference-leaves as receipts for ration books rather than as components of a population register; and the system as part of the precautions against fraud and duplication.²

Secondly, the rejection of reciprocal notification does not seem to square with the instructions that were later issued to local Food Offices: should an external removal without a change of retailer happen to be notified, it was to be accepted *and the reference-leaf transferred*. Apparently, therefore, Food Offices would be interested in such removals if they came direct, but not if they came from a National Registration Office. These instructions, however, had not appeared in the draft removals procedure of 1938; their insertion was due to the *concordat*—to ensure that such removals came under the joint removals procedure and so reached National Registration Offices. Even so, it is not clear why reference-leaves had to be transferred in such cases, except that to have introduced a special category of 'half-removals' would have confused Food Offices. If such wind-falls, having been accepted for the sake of National Registration, were then found to be useful for rationing purposes—to get a few more reference-leaves in the right place—it would seem illogical to refuse the chance of more of them from the National Registration

¹ A Food Office might, on occasion, wish to get into touch with a consumer—for instance if a retailer went out of business (as often happened in bombed areas) and the counterfoils had to be returned for re-registration. The consumer's address, however, was on his counterfoils.

² The transfer had ancillary uses. It was an acknowledgment that the removal notice had been received and, presumably, acted upon—though some Food Offices sent on the reference-leaf before they had cancelled registrations with retailers. Later, the reference-leaves grew into dossiers recording special entitlements, with the necessary certificates attached to them.

Officer. The rejection of reciprocal notification is made to appear as a move from accepting the imperfect to aiming at it.

II

This contradiction was resolved twice in 1940—in opposite directions. As soon as the joint removals procedure was in operation, the Registrar-General drew attention to what, in his view, was a breach of the *concordat*. That had divided removals into two classes; those with a change of retailer—which were in the province of Food Offices—and those without a change of retailer—which had been left to the province of National Registration Offices. Rationing, having first disclaimed interest in the second class, now implied, by the offending instructions, that they should be notified to Food Offices after all; but, said the Registrar-General, the *concordat* had laid down that a removal need only be notified once. The Ministry of Food held that the instructions were purely permissive, were unlikely to be seen by the public, and had, moreover, been adopted for the sake of the National Register. In deference to the Registrar-General's wishes, however, Food Offices were instructed to deal only with removals that meant a change of retailer, and to direct others to the National Registration Office.

This self-denying ordinance was widely regarded by the Ministry's local officers as a retrograde step, destroying all hope of keeping an accurate local population record. The hope had in fact been destroyed when reciprocal notification was rejected; the new ruling merely made a necessarily imperfect record slightly more imperfect. Food Executive Officers were not, Headquarters pointed out, expected to maintain an accurate population register; rationing was not interested in removals without a change of retailer and, even if it had been, there was no way of enforcing notification of them. Food Executive Officers, however, instinctively regarded the register as a population record; when they were also National Registration Officers, they would learn of all removals notified and so be able to keep it reasonably up-to-date, while some who were not National Registration Officers had made private arrangements for reciprocal notification. Moreover, they perceived the remaining illogicality; if reference-leaves were not to be transferred when an external removal did not mean a change of retailers, why should they continue to be transferred when it did? As a record of ration books issued by a Food Office, the register was a *static* register; reciprocal notification would have enabled it to be a *fully maintained* register; but the Ministry was now adopting a policy of deliberately keeping a *partly maintained* register.

In May 1940 came a development that nearly destroyed the joint removals procedure altogether. As part of the tightening-up of security measures, identity cards had to be filled in with the holder's signature and address.¹ At the same time, the National Register modified its removals requirements; it was no longer necessary to notify a removal as long as the address registered was a 'usual residence, to which the person intended and expected to return and through which the authorities could make contact with him promptly'. It followed, first, that a change of registered address would call for a visit to the National Registration Officer for the official alteration of the identity card and, secondly, that the question of what constituted a permanent removal became almost metaphysical. Henceforward, a permanent address for rationing might legitimately differ from a registered address for National Registration.² In practice, a removal that meant a change of retailers was usually treated as a change of registered address, but this was not formally laid down in National Registration regulations until a year later.

Now that notifying a removal to a Food Office no longer absolved people from visiting the National Registration Officer, Food Executive Officers hoped that the joint removals procedure would cease. But the Registrar-General was reluctant to lose the food leverage; as the efficiency of the National Register would not be impaired if the up-to-date address was not on the identity card provided that it was in the local register, the procedure was continued. In addition, Food Executive Officers were instructed, in July, to *remind* persons notifying removals to take their identity cards to the National Registration Officer for alteration.

The next development was a surprising one; the adoption, in November, of reciprocal notification of removals from National Registration to Food Offices. The latter were, after all, to concern themselves with removals that did not mean a change of retailer and to 'pursue the ideal of a continuously accurate [population] record'. The reason for this change of front must be sought in the tribulations attending the second issue of ration books in July.

III

It is necessary, if one is to pick one's way through the labyrinthine

¹ These were to be placed on the part of the identity card that the Registrar-General had hoped rationing would use for the initial issue of ration books. It should be noted that, if a person had moved after he was enumerated without notifying a local Office, the address he placed on his identity card might differ from the one recorded for him in the Central Index.

² When, at the fourth issue of ration books in July 1941, it was decided to pass on removals to the National Registration Officer only if enquiry revealed that they were permanent, it proved extraordinarily difficult to devise an exact form of enquiry. The Registrar-General solved the difficulty with the phrase 'present permanent address'.

history of the reissue of ration books, to bear in mind not only the function, but also the appearance, of the reference-leaf. It acted first as an application form for a new ration book; then, during the six months' currency of the book,¹ as a 'master card' in the Food Office register. A reissue of ration books therefore evoked two sets of reference-leaves; the 'new' and the 'old'. The 'new' reference-leaves were those being sent in as applications for the new ration book and had been taken from the one that was being replaced; the 'old' were those that had served as application forms at the previous reissue. For instance, when the third ration book was being issued, it would be applied for on reference-leaves taken from the second, while the leaves already in the register would have been taken from the first. A reference-leaf stayed in the register of the Food Office that had issued a book against it until a removal to another food area was notified, when it was transferred to the register of the Office of the new address. The Food Office that held the reference-leaf was denoted by the stamp on the front cover of the ration book; this was put there when the book was issued and was altered when the reference-leaf was transferred to another Office.

¹ In 1918, the Ministry's precept had been that the reissue of ration books should be based on both sets of reference-leaves; the 'new', or application reference-leaf, must be confronted with the 'old' one in the register before a new book was supplied.² If, however, an unnotified removal had taken place, the 'new' reference-leaf might not be presented to the Food Office holding the 'old' one; even if it were, the 'old' leaf would still be filed under the former address. The reference-leaf therefore bore *two* spaces for the holder's address; on the top half, for that to which the ration book had been issued, on the lower half, for that from which the application for a ration book was being made. Before the new book was issued, Food Offices themselves filled in and stamped the top half; and when a removal was notified, both the address and the Food Office stamp were brought up-to-date. Thus when the reference-leaf came back six months later as an application for a new ration book, it bore all the information needed to lead Food Offices to the 'old' leaf; the office stamp would show which office held it, the address on the top half, where it was filed.

In 1940 conditions were different; nothing could be written on the reference-leaf before ration books were posted because they were sealed.³ The Food Office stamp and the address to which the book

¹ Twelve months after July 1941.

² This account refers to 'old' reference-leaves although, at the second issue of ration books in July 1940, the register was composed of National Registration enumeration schedules and, at the second issue in October 1918, of Household Application Forms. The principle was the same; to compare current with previous applications.

³ See p. 451 above.

was sent had to be placed on the front cover, i.e., on a part of the book that did not serve as a voucher for the new one. If, therefore, a check between 'old' and 'new' reference-leaves were to be attempted, the clues to the whereabouts of the former would have to be placed on the latter by the applicant himself. Whether or not the Food (Defence Plans) Department had intended that such a check should be made is not clear. On the one hand, it had not only consented to the books being sealed, but had rejected the opportunity to keep the register of 'old' reference-leaves up-to-date, and had thus precluded both means by which a check could be made. For either Food Offices must be sure of being able to trace old reference-leaves when the time came—in which case, it would not particularly matter where they spent the preceding six months; or they must seek to keep them continuously in the right place—in other words, the register must be kept up-to-date.

On the other hand, there are two indications that a check had, in fact, been intended. First, the reference-leaf bore the instruction that it should be sent to the Food Office named on the front cover of the ration book—in other words, to the Office that still held the 'old' reference-leaf. Secondly, the first instruction in the ration book was that the holder should write his name and address on the reference-leaf inside it. By implication, this was to be done when the book was received and so the address would be the one at the time of issue. Now if new ration books were to be written from unchecked reference-leaf applications alone, there was occasion, neither for these to go to the Food Office that held the 'old' leaves, nor for knowledge of the former address. Indeed, there was no need for two address spaces on the reference-leaf at all.

All these details would have been unimportant had the Ministry's first intentions been adhered to. In January 1940 Food Executive Officers had pointed out¹ that, unless the Food Office register were kept up-to-date, it could not serve as the basis for the second issue of ration books. They were told that there was no intention of 'writing' them from the register. Admittedly, if they were written from the reference-leaf applications alone, with no precautionary check, then possession of a ration book would automatically entitle the holder, through the reference-leaf in it, to a new one. Books stolen, books lost and then found, books allegedly lost, books not surrendered when the holder went into the Services—all these might be renewed; but the need to register with retailers would nullify some of these frauds, and others might be exposed when the 'new' reference-leaves were filed.²

¹ See p. 482 above.

² Provided that the duplicate application was made in the same food area.

In March, however, London Division put forward a plan that did include a check of the application reference-leaves: not against the register, but against the identity card. The plan was for personal application at sub-offices. Reference-leaves were to be extracted, the new ration books written on the spot, and the identity card stamped to show that a new book had been supplied. This method would, it was claimed, avoid the problems of books and reference-leaves 'lost in the post', of removals that were taking place while the reissue was going on, and of illegible or incomplete reference-leaves. It would, moreover, carry out a useful check of identity cards. The plan was timely, for it was possible that the summer of 1940 might see a renewal of the movement of population that had been so unfavourable to postal issue the previous autumn. But a majority of local officers was against it,¹ and on 29th April a departmental conference presided over by the Minister decided in favour of the postal method. Many local officers were, however, anxious to write the ration books from the Food Office register so that work could begin without waiting for the reference-leaf applications to come in. The concession was made that, where a Food Executive Officer was also National Registration Officer and had kept his register up-to-date, the ration books could be written from it—provided that none were posted until they had been checked against the reference-leaf applications when these came in. Thus some Food Offices would be issuing ration books on the reference-leaves alone; others would, in essence, be carrying out the procedure of 1918. The instructions went out on 2nd May. Within a short time, not very much was left of them, the main author of the damage being the Registrar-General.

He had long been concerned with the problem of preserving the link between the two services—the National Registration number on the ration book—when ration books were reissued. His first suggestion, that the number should be written on the reference-leaf before issue, had been 'defeated by a spot of gum'.² But the exchanges of December 1938 had left him with the impression that the second-issue ration books would be written from the original returns (the enumeration schedules) that would, of course, bear the National Registration number. The London plan would have suited him admirably; but the discussion went on so long that preparations for the alternative postal method had to go on simultaneously. As a result, the Registrar-General heard of the rejection of the London plan, and of the method to be used instead, at the same time—after the instructions had gone out.

¹ Their arguments were: that it would be wasteful of staff because there could be no even flow of work; that it would cause queues—Scottish officers held that it was essentially a London plan in that Londoners were, because of the conditions of their daily lives, trained and good-tempered queuers; that it would be unsuited to rural areas; that delays in replacing lost identity cards would lengthen the operation.

² See p. 451 above.

He held them to be potentially disastrous and a breach of pre-war commitments. The only provision for keeping the link between the two services was that people were to be instructed to write the National Registration number on their reference-leaf applications, whence it would be transferred to the new ration books.¹ Most local officers would, he considered, take the line of least resistance and write the ration books from the application reference-leaves alone. This offered an alarming prospect of error in National Registration numbers. There was, he admitted, already error, dating from the enumeration, but at least if the ration books were written from the register of schedules it would not be multiplied. He asked, therefore, that the option to local officers be withdrawn; that *all* Food Offices should write the ration books from the register; that the reference-leaf applications should be compared with the register in order to reveal errors in National Registration numbers and unnotified removals, and, finally, that all changes of address discovered should be passed on to National Registration Officers.

The Ministry held that no promise had been made to base the second issue of ration books on the register. But it could not deny the pre-war commitment to preserve the link at each successive re-issue; nor, in view of the importance in May 1940 of national security, and therefore of the National Register, could it ignore the Registrar-General's opinion that the provision for fulfilling this commitment was inadequate. On the other hand, all Food Offices could not write the ration books from the register. The pre-war rejection of reciprocal notification, the re-statement of this policy in January 1940, the removals that had taken place the previous autumn before consumers had registered with retailers, the unsatisfactory performance of the Service authorities in returning recruits' ration books—all meant that the register must be assumed to be out-of-date. A compromise was found at the last moment—'you will be receiving circulars', wrote a senior official to a Divisional Officer, 'which, I fear, may cause some consternation'—and five days before the operation was due to begin new instructions went out. The ration books were to be written from the reference-leaf applications, but *all* Food Offices had first to compare these with the original returns in the register and issue a new ration book only if two out of three items of identification—name, address, and National Registration number—fitted. All changes of address revealed were to be passed on to National Registration Officers.

So began the procedure to be known as 'marrying'. It was really the procedure of 1918 being used without the advance provision that

¹ At first it was intended that all reference-leaves not bearing the N.R. number were to be returned for completion. But Northern Division pointed out that, if 10 per cent. of the leaves had to be returned, it alone would need 300,000 envelopes, and the instruction was cancelled.

had then been made for it. Some Food Offices enjoyed an alternative provision—a fairly up-to-date register; the rest had to depend entirely on reference-leaf applications completed by the public to lead them to the 'old' leaves. Although people were told (a) to write the National Registration number on the application, (b) to copy it directly from the identity card, not the ration book, and (c) if they had moved without notifying a Food Office, to see that the address on the *top half* of the application was the one to which the ration book had been issued, many omitted the number, or transcribed it wrongly, or, if they had moved, wrote their present address on *both parts* of the application. A vast correspondence ensued between Food Offices and the public, to clear up discrepancies in National Registration numbers and to ask for former addresses so that 'old' reference-leaves could be traced. The Westminster Food Office (which had maintained its register)¹ reported that 38 per cent. (about 34,000) of the reference-leaf applications sent to it had given rise to enquiries.² About 17,000 were due to National Registration numbers and 13,000 to unnotified removals. Out of 88,000 applications received, 38,000 had been sent in late.³

This experience made it clear that, if 'marrying' were to continue, Food Offices must have more reliable information of the whereabouts of the 'old' reference-leaves. Undoubtedly, the Registrar-General would wish it to continue. Either, therefore, the essential part of the reference-leaf application must be filled in by Food Offices in advance (in which case, the ration books must be posted unsealed and under cover); or all Food Offices must keep their registers up-to-date. The Ministry moved in both directions. First, it asked for reciprocal notification of removals from National Registration Offices. Whatever the original purpose of the reference-leaf register, it was now to become a local population record maintained 'primarily to facilitate the next following general issue of ration books'. Secondly, the Division re-created, in part, the circumstances of 1918. At the next issue—the third—Food Offices were to prise up the back covers of

¹ The damage, however, had been done the previous autumn before consumers registered with retailers.

² An enquiry often meant as many as four letters to the applicant.

³ Westminster also received 4,000 reference-leaves intended for other Offices. This was due partly to leaves posted in business districts being delivered to the Food Offices of these districts. The Offices re-posted them and got them back again, the merry-go-round continuing indefinitely until they were re-posted under cover. But it was also due to confusion caused by the difference between the instruction printed on the reference-leaf and that given to the public at the time. The former said that the leaf was to be sent to the Office named on the front cover of the ration book. If an unnotified removal had taken place, this would be the Office of the old address. But the public were told to send the leaves to the Food Office of the *present* address. This was logical, in that it would be little use sending the leaf to the old Food Office unless the former address were given as well—the Office would probably conclude that a mistake had been made and re-post it. If the leaf were correctly filled in with the former address on the top part, the issuing Office could be traced by the 'new' Office.

ration books without unsealing them, and place the National Registration number and Food Office stamp on the part of the reference-leaf they could reach. As soon as possible an official 'box' for the National Registration number was to be provided at the foot of the reference-leaf, and the leaf itself moved to the front of the book.¹

V

By the end of 1940, therefore, the connection with National Registration had led to two changes. First, the reissue of ration books had been established as part of the joint removals machinery. The standing procedure covered notified removals; the reissue operation, unnotified removals.² Secondly, and as a result, the standing procedure had become a two-way traffic, and rationing had embarked upon the maintenance of local population records that, paradoxically, were more complete than the National Registration local registers; for these, as has been seen,³ did not set out to cover the whole local population. How far such registers, and the resulting pre-occupation with consumers' present addresses, properly lay within the province of Food Offices depended upon whether 'marrying' itself were held to be essential to rationing as well as to National Registration. In 1940, the rationing officials were inclined to think that it was:

'I am very doubtful', wrote one rationing official on 17th July, 'whether there is an adequate check on the issue of ration books in itself without a procedure similar to that recently carried out ...

'The stealing of Ration Books or reference-leaves', he added, 'easily results in duplication'.

The third issue of ration books (January 1941)⁴ therefore followed

¹ As the ration book took nearly a year to print, this could not be done until the fourth edition (July 1941). As it happened, full postal issue was abandoned the next year, making the provision no longer necessary.

In March 1940, the Registrar-General had suggested that a solution might be found on these lines by making the front cover of the ration book slightly shorter, thus exposing the foot of the reference-leaf. This was rejected for technical reasons. Another suggestion was that the reference-leaf might form the back cover of the ration book, but it was feared that it might become too defaced.

² These would include removals of people living in or entering catering establishments, those that took place between the posting of ration books and re-registration with retailers, and the like. The rationalisation of milk deliveries later brought in some of these removals.

³ See pp. 480-2 above.

⁴ The date when the new ration book came into force has been used as the date of the reissue operation. In fact, the latter was spread over many weeks. The third ration book, for instance, came into force in January 1941 but it was in the hands of the public by the end of December 1940.

the lines of the second;¹ so after some hesitation, did the fourth (July 1941).² Nevertheless, the Ministry was never sure that the results justified the effort, both at the time of issue and in maintaining the registers throughout the year. The check could never be carried to completion. Somewhere, among 1,500 Food Offices, was an 'old' reference-leaf to match each 'new' one (unless it had been lost in transit); but if it could not be found a new book had to be supplied, against a special declaration that no application had been made elsewhere. If no 'new' leaf was received to match an 'old' one, a new book was issued under the lost ration book procedure. There was neither the time nor the machinery to track down the residue of 'unmarried' reference-leaves: 'the backwash we are left with after each "write-up" almost keeps us going until the next . . . we lost completely masses of the population through bad filling in of details by individuals'.

Officials were uneasy, not only about 'marrying', but about the standing joint removals procedure. The former turned what was expected to be a simple operation into a very complicated one, and 'encumbered food control machinery with an elaborate system of records that, to a certain extent, duplicated the National Register'. The latter inflated the ration book into a duplicate of the identity

¹ The Westminster Food Office's report showed that, this time, it had had to deal with 6,000 errors in N.R. numbers and 16,000 unnotified removals. The percentage of reference-leaves giving rise to enquiries was 40, and 29,500 reference-leaves (out of 66,500) were sent in late. Over the whole country, 8,500,000 reference-leaves gave rise to enquiries.

Westminster pointed out that the cost in wages and overtime of routine issue was £11 11s. per 1,000 books; the cost of issuing books that had given rise to enquiries was £40 per 1,000 books.

² At the fourth issue, the percentage of reference-leaves giving rise to enquiries was reduced to 4; partly because the N.R. number had been placed on the reference-leaves at the previous issue, partly, perhaps, because of a publicity campaign of some violence, culminating in a newsreel of the Prime Minister filling in his reference-leaf.

The fourth issue was, however, the most harassing of all up to that time. First, it was difficult to make arrangements in good time because of the policy discussions still going on (value, group, and points rationing). Secondly, a supplementary book was being issued (R.B.9, see p. 764) which was being assembled hastily by local printers. The life of the old ration book (the third) was prolonged for three weeks by using the backs of the coupons (fortunately it was still single-printed although coupon-cutting had been given up), but the date of posting the new books and hence of re-registration could not be fixed until it was known when R.B.9 would be ready. (The Ministry had learned that it was not wise to leave too long a gap between posting and re-registration—'Directly we put the book into the hands of the public they start doing things with it and almost invariably the wrong things. . . . Even if they do the right things . . . they then move.') Finally, very few of the instructions printed in the book still held good. It had been designed to carry out the recommendations of the Committee for the Revision of Forms and Documents, and not all of these had been put into effect (see p. 565 *seq.*). There were no counterfoils for re-registration, but re-registration was to take place after all. The counterfoils were slipped into R.B.9, but the instructions in the main book said 'present' instead of 'new' retailer. People had to use three books for re-registering—the new main book, the old main book (for eggs) and R.B.9—and, in addition, be taught to ignore the counterfoils for cooking fats and preserves (because of the policy of combined registration—the former were paired with margarine and butter, the latter with sugar). The Ministry had already decided to give up pre-fabricated instructions in the ration book.

card that had (through the National Registration number on it) to lead into the National Register; it gave rise to a prodigious amount of 'paper-passing'; the preparation of removal notices was a considerable burden on Food Offices;¹ even so, these notices were incomplete—they did not bear the dates of birth of adults²—and might be inaccurately copied.

The logical solution was to make not the ration book but the identity card the link between the two services. If the card were used as a voucher for a new ration book, duplication should be reduced to people holding two identity cards; 'marrying' would no longer be needed as a rationing precaution; without 'marrying' there would be no need for Food Offices to maintain accurate population registers—and one half of the joint removals procedure could be dispensed with. So could the other half, if the identity card also took part in the Food Office removals procedure; people could be impelled to notify removals directly to the National Registration Officer by being refused new counterfoils for registration until they could produce an officially corrected identity card. Moreover, there would then be no further need for the National Registration number on the ration book, and another reason for 'marrying' would be gone. If the number were still required to help identification for rationing purposes, it could be taken directly from the identity card, both when ration books were reissued and when a removal was notified. One reason for 'marrying'—the detection of unnotified removals—would remain. If, however, the National Register were sure of receiving, directly and continuously, all notified removals, it might afford to slacken the chase after those that were not. Indeed it might have to do so. If the reissue of ration books were based on the identity card, people would have to collect them in person and so would not be forced to reveal a change of address.

¹ The Manchester Food Office had about 3,200 removal notifications a week, 95 per cent. of which had not been notified to the National Registration Officer. Three clerks were engaged upon preparing removal notices (N.R.29's) for him.

² A notification of a removal was an opportunity for a check with the Central Index, and the person was asked for the same information that had been given at the enumeration. But people were well aware that the date of birth of adults was not necessary for food rationing purposes and many women resented being asked for their ages in public by a girl clerk. Rationing Division steadily refused to allow Food Offices to ask for it. Ironically, after 'fusion', rationing incurred the odium nonetheless; the public regarded the joint office as the Food Office and assumed that it was the rationing side that was asking for the date of birth.

In 1944, the Parliamentary Secretary (Mr. Mabane) expressed concern lest rationing was being exposed to accusations of 'unnecessary bureaucratic inquisitiveness'; but by then the date of birth had become more important still because of Electoral Registration. However, Food Executive/National Registration Officers were warned that (1) they must not bring pressure to bear to obtain the information, (2) the removals procedure must not be made dependent on it, (3) all that could be done would be to warn the applicant that she might be omitted from the Electoral Register if she refused the information, (4) that women should be allowed to write down their ages, (5) that, when writing to members of the public, Food Executive/National Registration Officers must make it clear whether they were writing as Jekyll or Hyde.

In 1940, some Food Offices had already begun to use the identity card as part of the removals procedure,¹ and the Registrar-General was naturally anxious that local practice should become official policy. But, first, the Food Executive Officer had no legal right to require the production of the identity card,² and, secondly, the National Register asked the citizen, not to notify every removal, but to maintain an address through which the authorities could reach him. If Food Executive Officers were to demand that every change of address be notified to National Registration Officers, they might (until the amending regulations of 1941 that added a change of retailer to the National Registration definition of a notifiable removal) be going beyond what the law actually required. Neither of these obstacles was insuperable; but a third appeared to be. This was the problem of how far consumers could be disciplined beyond the point required for purely rationing purposes. The Beveridge Committee,³ when recommending collaboration between the two services, had added 'so far as the primary function of the two systems will permit'; the Food (Defence Plans) Department had insisted that the task of rationing administrators was to 'feed the people', not to provide a 'means to control civilian life in war'.⁴ In the same spirit, the Ministry concluded that the primary function of rationing would not permit Food Offices to refuse the change of retailer procedure until the administrative requirements of another service had been satisfied. 'We are out to help ourselves and help the N.R.O.,' wrote a senior official, 'but we must not run the risk of leaving a man unfed *nor must we cause him unnecessary inconvenience*'.⁵ The most that might be done was to tighten the screw very slightly. Food Executive Officers were already under instruction to remind applicants to visit the National Registration Officer *after* they had completed their business with the Food Office; they were now (February 1941) told that they could ask applicants to visit him *first*—if he were handy. But they must not insist or in any way make the Food Office removals procedure dependent upon the production of the identity card.

¹ The senior official in charge of rationing wrote, on 18th July 1940, that 'the Minister recently had a complaint from a man working very long hours that he was unable to obtain rationed food because the removal procedure was refused by the Food Office until he sent in his Identity Card. As he worked in a protected area he could not be without his Identity Card and he was unable to attend personally . . . it is important that we should steer quite clear of the difficulty . . . in cases of this kind . . . our procedure on the ration book issue seems to have had the effect of causing Food Executive Officers to introduce new procedures of this kind'.

² Unless, like many, he could transform himself at will into a National Registration Officer.

This difficulty could be overcome at the time of the reissue of ration books. He could not insist on seeing the identity card but he could legitimately refuse to issue a ration book until he was satisfied of identity.

³ See p. 445 above.

⁴ See p. 463 above.

⁵ Author's italics.

After November 1940, both Food and National Registration Offices should have learned of all removals notified, either directly or under the arrangements for exchange of information. In addition, the reissue of ration books brought unnotified removals to light, at first every six months, after July 1941 every year. But these arrangements affected only the registers, not the documents. The statements on the ration book and on the identity card might disagree not only with each other but with their respective registers. A removal passed on by a Food Office might mean that the present address would be in the Maintenance Register but not on the identity card;¹ similarly, a removal passed on by a National Registration Officer might lead to the refileing or transfer of an 'old' reference-leaf, yet leave the old address on the ration book and, more important, on the reference-leaf inside it. In June 1941, therefore, it was arranged that National Registration Officers should bring the address on the ration book and its reference-leaf up-to-date when a removal was notified to them—but only if the applicant happened to have his ration book with him.

This onerous and unsatisfactory relationship persisted for another year. It was ended by the fifth issue of ration books in July 1942; a landmark comparable to the *concordat* itself.

VI

In December 1941, the distribution of the separate points-rationing book (R.B.10) brought about a reconsideration of the whole question of the re-issue of the main ration book. With R.B.10 there had been no time for elaboration; it had been distributed from sub-offices on the strength of a main ration book, people were left to write their names and addresses on the cover themselves, and the only precaution against fraud had been the stamping of the main book. This procedure had dispensed with all three stages of a main reissue—'marrying', 'writing up', and posting—and it was inevitable that there should be pressure, from the Minister downwards, for it to be applied to the reissue of the main book. The chief argument was man-power, for a main reissue needed 10,000 extra clerks as well as what voluntary labour could be obtained.

Consultations with local officers lasted several months. The crux of the matter lay in the full 'writing up' of ration books with name, address, and National Registration number, before they were issued. A ration book could be issued only to the person whose name was on

¹ A Liverpool district reported that the National Registration Officer might have to send out as many as 1,800 letters a week to people whose removals had been passed on by Food Offices, asking them to attend for the alteration of their identity cards and the completion of their removal notices.

the cover (or his proxy); if, therefore, personal application at sub-offices were adopted, an applicant would have to go to the particular sub-office where his ration book was. No alternative would be satisfactory; if the distribution were centred in the main Food Office, queues might be overwhelming, and if, instead, ration books were written in sub-offices at the time of issue, there could be no preliminary identification of the applicant from Food Office records. What had been developed since 1940 was a device of tying the ration book to its holder—instead of merely to another book, its predecessor—and of tying the holder to his dossier in the Food Office. Thus he received at each re-issue not *a* ration book, but *his* ration book—prepared for him in advance—after he had been re-identified.

The conclusion was that full 'writing up' must continue. The issue of R.B.10 was not a valid argument against the policy, because it had been given against a main ration book that had been issued to a pre-identified person and was backed by Food Office records. These records were, it was held, important to rationing, to the National Register, and to other Government Departments:

'We just dare not invite the public to write their own names on their books . . . the writing in of these details correctly is a matter of great moment, not only to us but to the Registrar-General and to innumerable other Government Departments who rely on us for knowing all about everybody.'

On 'marrying', opinion was more divided, for its efficacy was open to question.¹ 'This "marrying" process', wrote one Food Executive Officer, 'was always far from popular in Food Offices and I never heard that it achieved any good result apart from providing a very great deal of work'. Headquarters concluded that 'marrying' would be better continued, but must be jettisoned for the sake of manpower. It could not, however, be abandoned without reference to the Registrar-General, who now had new problems on his hands—Electoral Registration and a re-issue of identity cards—that made the support of rationing more important than ever. The Ministry was caught between equally imperative needs; those of its own Food Offices and those of the National Register. From this situation came an important step: it offered to check the applications for ration books, not against Food Office records, but against the identity card.

The new procedure was a combination of the London plan of 1940 and the old postal method. People were to go to sub-offices with their old ration books and identity cards. If the reference-leaf in the ration book were filled in correctly and if the name, National Registration number, and address, on it agreed with those on the identity card,

¹ See p. 487 *seq.*, above.

all three documents—ration book, identity card, and reference-leaf—would be stamped with a special octagonal stamp, and the leaf extracted. If not, minor discrepancies could be put right, and removal notices taken, on the spot; others would mean a visit to the National Registration Officer before a reference-leaf would be accepted.¹ The new ration books would then be written in Food Offices from the reference-leaves collected at sub-offices, and posted as usual.

This procedure had many virtues. It would secure the benefits of a personal interview with consumers, which would be far more effective in settling difficulties than a protracted correspondence; it would ensure the accuracy of the reference-leaf applications; it would enable National Registration numbers to be checked against the originals; it would avoid the disadvantage of personal application, for ration books would still be posted, and so a change of address would still have to be revealed; above all, it would provide a quick and simple substitute for 'marrying'. Entitlement to a ration book would rest on the production of an identity card, instead of being established by the laborious sorting and checking of applications against a register. The procedure would also do useful work for the Registrar-General. Removals would be brought up-to-date as usual; lost and defaced identity cards would be dealt with and irregular ones presumably put out of circulation, as any card not bearing the octagonal stamp indicating that it had been paired with a ration book would automatically be suspect; and essential preparations for the task of re-issuing identity cards next year would have been made—the reference-leaves of those under sixteen (who were not to have new cards) would have been picked out, and everyone would have been asked to give his date of birth on his reference-leaf.² The procedure had, in fact, only one defect: 'it was not very inviting', wrote a senior official. 'Even with the thought of a ration book some day, the inducement to go to an office and deposit a reference-leaf and come away with nothing was not very strong'. The Ministry overcame this psychological flaw by reversing its policy of aloofness towards clothes rationing³ and distributing the clothing books from

¹ Publicity began with an 'official' leak designed to stampede people to the National Registration Officer before the operation began.

² The Ministry was reluctant to ask for this. Printed instructions had to be contradicted again—the reference-leaf asked for age if under 18—and rationing had no legal right to ask for it. (It had no legal right to ask for the identity card either, but the Ministry and the Registrar-General decided to lie low and rely on the public believing that getting a new ration book depended on it.) There was never any difficulty about getting the age if it were under 18, because it paid to be under 18, but the Ministry could not think of any convincing reason for wishing to distinguish higher age groups for rationing purposes. Since the reason for the request was that the re-issue was a combined operation with National Registration, and neither service particularly wanted this publicised, the reply made to political criticism was a vague statement that it was merely an extension of existing permitted administrative requirements.

³ See Appendix G.

the sub-offices. (It afterwards got a 'carrot' of its own in the shape of the Personal Points Book (R.B.11) for sweets rationing.)

The arrangements for the issue of ration books now had to be carried through with two other Departments. The Board of Trade was told that the issue of clothing books must be a routine issue of 'one per person with nothing written on them'. However, some elaboration did creep in. Children under 17 were to receive sheets of supplementary clothing coupons, but the distinguishing age for food rationing purposes was 18 and this was to be the age limit for the junior Personal Points Book (R.B.11A). The distinguishing age for National Registration, on the other hand, was 16. The matter was settled by all parties adopting 16.¹

The fifth issue of ration books was an example of the importance of the Ministry's local organisation, which appealed '. . . to Government Departments and other interested parties as a ready-made organisation for rendering service to them'. The reissue had become a considerable combined operation; the number of documents alone that had to converge on the sub-offices by the appointed day was formidable. The Ministry ruthlessly suppressed refinements desired by its collaborators² lest its sub-offices should be overwhelmed; even so, they carried out tasks that, treated separately, might have made impossible demands on man-power. They issued the clothing books, the supplementary clothing coupons, and the Personal Points books; they conducted a census of identity cards and brought the National Register up-to-date; they collected and checked the applications for the main ration book; they did a service for the Registrar-General of Shipping and Seamen, by referring holders of the Mercantile Marine Identity Card to National Registration Officers so that men no longer entitled to it could be weeded out; and, finally, the Ministry rounded off the operation by issuing clothing books to Gibraltar refugees on behalf of the Ministry of Health.

There was, therefore, a wide field in which something might go wrong, and the hitch came through the essential octagonal stamp. The Ministry was not responsible for the stamps and it had sought reassurance from the Stationery Office that they would be ready in time. They were, but something went wrong with the transport arrangements, and many of them were found to be making their way north by slow goods train while anxious Food Executive Officers were picketing carriers' agents. In England and Wales, they arrived in time, but too late to allow any extensive stamping of documents in advance; in Scotland, however, some areas—including Glasgow and

¹ In 1943, when a new Junior Ration Book (R.B.4) was introduced, the upper age limit for it was fixed at 16 so as to fit in with the reissue of identity cards. In 1944, however, the age was raised to 18.

² The Board of Trade, for example, would have liked more elaborate security and accounting arrangements for clothing books than were usual for food ration books.

Edinburgh—were unable to begin on the appointed day. The result was a good deal of Press comment that did not do justice to the scale of the operation and the preceding negotiations.¹

The post-mortem on the fifth issue revealed that, on the whole, Food Executive Officers were pleased with the new procedure. Naturally, they criticised its details. The main trouble had been queues. These had not been a problem in smaller areas that had adopted the Ministry of Labour device of alphabetical application. Ministry of Food Headquarters had not recommended this nationally as, in its opinion, instructions and publicity were complicated enough already, but had left it to local discretion. Some areas that did use it managed the whole operation without extra staff. Where, mainly in cities, there was 'queue trouble', this was often due to people bringing large numbers of books. Huddersfield reported that bundles of fifty were common, and one Londoner had appeared with a suitcase containing 300. (He had offered his services to his neighbourhood at 1s. a book.) Another cause of queues—a point that was to be nearly fatal next year—was the difficulty of, as it were, measuring out the publicity in exact doses. It had been somewhat too urgent, with the result that the public rushed the sub-offices in the first few days instead of spreading the work over the whole fortnight. A shortage of rubber stamps had also held up work. Food Executive Officers had been told to take the issue of the Points book (R.B.10) as a guide when estimating how many stamps they would want, but this had needed only two stampings, whereas the arrangements for the fifth issue had been so extended that an issue for a child under 16 came to require nine impressions.

Finally, Food Executive Officers complained of the volume of work that had descended on them before the operation started. Advance National Registration publicity had meant not only that Food Offices were flooded with removal notifications and enquiries about identity cards but that they sometimes had to go to the rescue of National Registration Offices as well. Manchester Food Office had had 45,000 removals notifications and 40,000 enquiries about identity cards during May. The National Registration Officer had had to

¹ It revealed, in some cases, interesting recrudescences of 1918 feeling; the Chairman of the Glasgow Food Control Committee told the Press that centralisation should cease so that local offices could get on with the job. A merry Glasgow editorial dissected the announcement about 'the inevitable delay in the arrival of materials', revealed this to mean that some rubber stamps were missing, and proceeded to the conclusion that 'It might be possible, one fancies, to mislay the Minister of Food or the chief permanent departmental Civil Servant and life goes on in its normal fashion. But a rubber stamp is something irreplaceable. Without that blessed mark of authority . . . the bureaucratic machine cannot function'.

One office was disconcerted by a prank of the Scottish Registrar-General's. He presented himself with his documents all in order but was told that he could not be dealt with as the office had no rubber stamp; whereupon he produced one from his pocket. The staff stuck to their refusal on the grounds that they had no instructions to cover such a contingency.

deal with 9,000 lost identity cards. Ilkley, with a National Registration population of nearly 18,000, had had 1,000 removals notified in three weeks, and nearly 100 applicants for new identity cards—some of whom had been without them for over a year. Neither Food nor National Registration Offices could deal with such a rush of work again, for it must be remembered that, for the former, the issue of ration books was only part of their duties, and that the month preceding the operation had to be devoted intensively to other work. That month, as well as the one occupied by the re-issue, had been disorganised.

The conclusion was similar to that about the second issue. On that occasion it had followed that, if the reference-leaf register were going to be used in the re-issue of ration books, it must be kept up-to-date throughout the year; on this occasion, it followed that, if ration books and identity cards were to be 'paired' at the time of reissue, then they must be maintained in conformity. In other words, if the identity card were to be used as a voucher for a ration book, it must also be integrated into the Food Office removals procedure. On 23rd July, therefore, Food Offices were told that the ration book must never be altered to disagree with the identity card; i.e., the rationing removals procedure was not to be operated until an identity card already corrected to the new address could be shown. National Registration Officers were told, at the same time, to refuse removal notices if the ration book were not available for correction.

The new arrangements were not perfect. Food Executive Officers still had no legal right to demand the identity card, let alone make the issue of new registration counterfoils dependent on it; National Registration Officers might be reluctant to carry out their side of the bargain lest an applicant, put off because he had not got his ration book with him, should not come back again; removal notices still had to pass from National Registration to Food Offices; above all, by compelling people who had to change retailers to notify the removal to the National Registration Officer *first*, the two services had completely reversed the *concordat*; most removals had now to be notified twice. The development of the relationship founded by the *concordat* had, in fact, led logically to its abrogation. The Ministry, however, had already decided that the *concordat* system could be carried no further and negotiations for a substitute had begun. Thus the new procedure that, any time before 1942, would have been a momentous step, was neither a climax nor a beginning; it was merely a stop-gap to preserve the newly-won conformity of records and documents while these negotiations were going on. Indeed, its imperfections were an asset to the Ministry in that they reinforced its case for a more logical and economical settlement—the complete 'fusion' of the local work of the two services.

CHAPTER XXX

The Establishment of Joint Offices and the Reissue of Identity Cards, 1942–3

I

EARLY IN 1942, rationing administrators had reached the conclusion that the difficulties into which the two services had fallen could be resolved only by sweeping away the régime that had been built up since 1940, and handing over National Registration work entirely to Food Offices; the existing system was faced with new strains that, in their opinion, it would not be able to bear.

In February, the Registrar-General approached the Ministry of Food about the first of these. He had been charged with preparing a new kind of Electoral Register, designed to meet the abnormal population movements of war-time; a continuous register, to be 'frozen' when required, instead of one created at fixed intervals. There would be two distinct problems, namely compilation and maintenance. The creation of special machinery, e.g., an initial canvass by enumerators, was at this stage in the war all but ruled out. Nor could the National Register itself provide a complete substitute, because the local Maintenance Registers did not cover the whole local adult population.¹ Once the Electoral Register was created, its maintenance would make calls upon the joint removals machinery, and Food Offices might have to ask not only the age of adults but their nationality.²

The second proposal—the re-issue of identity cards—would present similar problems. The new cards might be written from the old ones, from the extended Maintenance Registers, or from the food registers; but they would have to be issued through Food Offices. Food Offices, however, were already near breaking point, and the

¹ See p. 480 above. The Registrar-General hoped that the fifth issue of ration books (July 1942) could be used as an occasion to complete the Maintenance Registers. People not included in them would be recognised by the absence of official stamping on their identity cards, and removal notices (N.R.29's) could be written for them. The Ministry successfully pleaded for its sub-offices to be spared this complication.

The Registrar-General then suggested that the reference-leaf registers replaced at the 1942 re-issue might be handed over to National Registration Officers who could then complete the Maintenance Registers from them. But the reference-leaf registers were not complete either—they did not include people who lived in institutions. In 1943, these registers were made into complete local population records by using 'dummy' reference-leaves for people who did not hold ration books.

² Because aliens were excluded from the Electoral Register.

Ministry dared not allow the existing system of co-operation to be extended to new outside commitments—especially as the Registrar-General's approach was in itself a discouraging commentary upon what that system, with all its goodwill and hard work, had been able to do for the National Register.

'The only real solution I can see to the difficulty', ran a minute to the Permanent Secretary, on 9th March, 'is that the Food and N.R. Offices should be definitely and completely merged and that we should take on full responsibility for all the N.R.O.'s jobs. . . . So long as we are separate we cannot expect to secure any information we ask for which is not specifically necessary for food, nor can we afford the time or the food delay . . . to chase defaulters. . . . I have a sort of feeling', the minute concluded, 'that the idea of merging is coming from other quarters too'.

The 'other quarters' were the Treasury. As early as July 1941, its Organisation and Methods Division had concluded that manpower might be saved by abolishing the local National Registration Offices,¹ and relaying removals to the Central Index directly from Food Offices. In February 1942 this view was reinforced by a detailed investigation, carried out by one of its officers;² in July, his report was seized upon by the Treasury Committee that had newly been appointed to promote economy in Government staffs, and 'fusion' was urged upon the Registrar-General. Rationing officials needed no such urging; with the full support of the Treasury they had suggested, as a move in the right direction, the new removals procedure already described, by which identity card and ration book were to be collated on each occasion.

The Registrar-General, with his thirty years' experience of such questions, was scornful of the Organisation and Methods report; it

¹ Local National Registration staffs amounted to about 2,000—1.2 clerks per office. Local food staffs were about 30,000.

² His reasons were:

1. The National Registration Officer was almost completely dependent on the Food Office for removal notices.
2. Food Offices carried the most complete and up-to-date records of the local population, and the police, the Ministry of Labour, and the like found the Food Office register more useful.
3. The National Registration Officer himself often had to resort to the Food Office register.
4. The filing order of the Maintenance Register impaired its usefulness.
5. The Maintenance Register was a greater clerical burden than had been expected (20,000,000 removals had been notified to the National Register to date; St. Marylebone, with an original population of 53,000, had had 130,000 notified removals).
6. There was much unnecessary clerical work and inter-office communication.

In view of (1) the investigator was puzzled by the outcome, in practice, of the instruction that Food Offices should do no more than *ask* applicants to go to the N.R.O. first. He was aware that some offices were, in fact, insisting, but he regarded these as fulfilling the law and the others as departing from it. It was hardly to be expected that he should appreciate the *nuances* of a situation that had its roots so far back.

was, he wrote, 'of no real use to anyone concerned and included a number of more or less ill-founded suggestions'. Two proposals from that quarter, however, he welcomed—a common local office,¹ and a common counter for transactions in which both identity card and ration book had to be altered; a third he was willing cautiously to explore—a single local register for both services. In this last lay the Treasury hope of economy in manpower; and rationing officials had produced a number of eager but impractical suggestions for making the rationing records serve the purposes of National Registration. Less empirical than the out-and-out advocates of 'fusion', the Registrar-General was anxious to examine first principles thoroughly. 'The Treasury', he wrote to his opposite number in charge of rationing, 'is disposed to press the advantages from the point of view of staff and accommodation. The former economy may be small, the latter possibly greater. You and I, however, will be more concerned with the efficiency of our respective organisations'. He insisted, first, that the National Register must not become 'food-specialised' so that its usefulness for other purposes—for instance, his current pre-occupation, Electoral Registration—was impaired, and secondly, that National Registration duties were vested in him by statute and could not be delegated.

The discussion turned on the kind of machinery that the joint local offices should operate; that is, in essence on the kind of basic population record and the method of crediting and debiting it. The National Registration removals procedure was centralised:² the local Office of the area into which a person had moved prepared two forms; one (*N.R.29*) a notice of arrival, the other (*N.R.30*) a notice of departure. The second form was relayed by the Central Index to the Office of the departure area. The rationing removals procedure, on the other hand, provided for direct communication between local Food Offices on the R.G.12A,³ a detachable page in the ration book on which the names of the consumer's retailers were entered at the time of registration. The Food Office of the area into which the person had moved extracted this form from his ration book and sent it to the Office of the area he had left. The old Office then cancelled his registration with his former retailers, and sent to the new Office his reference-leaf from its population register. The question was how far the two sets of registers and the two removals procedures could be combined.

The Registrar-General could see his system serving rationing, but

¹ He had, of course, suggested one before the war (above, p. 467).

² See p. 479 above.

³ Removals procedure had been revised in December 1941. R.G.12A had originally been R.G.12, a *separate* form on to which Food Offices copied the retailer's names from the inside covers of the ration book. R.G.12A had been devised to eliminate this copying.

not rationing's less professional registration techniques serving him. Every year, as he said, the local rationing registers arose 'like the Phoenix from the ashes of their predecessors'. They might tell a new story—for example, about ages or the diminutives of first names; they could be checked only against the previous year's registers, and the annual renewal of ration books left many 'old' reference leaves unaccounted for—which meant that their holders had been 'reborn' in another food area. The Registrar-General could not envisage the Central Index being served effectively by such phantom registers, and he offered instead the Maintenance Registers—extended to cover the whole local population and converted, if rationing preferred, from National Registration to alphabetical order—as the population records for the joint Offices. This would make it possible to abolish not only the reference-leaf registers but the reference leaf itself. The identity card had taken its place as a voucher for a ration book; all that would be needed would be a counterfoil to act as a receipt. (The identity card could be stamped to show that a book had been issued, but the card might be lost; therefore a permanent record was necessary.) As for the removals system, the Registrar-General had always considered the rationing method to be contrary to all good registration principles, in that 'master cards' from the registers had constantly to be transferred between Food Offices.

As the Registrar-General remarked, the proposal did indeed want 'a lot of thought', and was 'not one to be rushed'. Each service had its own peculiar requirement to be satisfied. National Registration had to notify the Central Index, as well as the Office of the departure area; rationing had to cancel registrations with retailers, and the Office of the departure area had therefore to receive a list of retailers as well as an exit notice. Several possibilities were discussed. R.G.12A, the rationing removals form, might be routed through Southport,¹ so performing the National Registration duty on its way to the old Food Office with its list of retailers. This method had three disadvantages. First, documents took, at that time, three weeks to get through Southport; but the process could be speeded up, and in any case retailers' permits to obtain supplies were only revised every eight weeks. Secondly, R.G.12A would not cover removals without a change of retailers. Thirdly, R.G.12A was inside the ration book, and therefore would not be available when a ration book was not collected on death or enlistment.

Another possibility was that the National Registration debit form, N.R.30, might be adapted to carry a list of retailers; but this would mean a return to transcribing retailers' names, the very process that R.G.12A had been designed to eliminate. There seemed to be no escape from either copying the list of retailers or actually sending it.

¹ This was done after the war (see p. 534).

The Registrar-General, however, supplied one. Food Offices might, he suggested, keep a consumer-retailer register.¹ Such a register could be constructed easily enough at the mid-1943 reissue of ration books, when, assuming that there would be no general re-registration, the lists of retailers (R.G.12A's) could be extracted from the ration books that were being replaced, and attached to the reference-leaves in the population register. Thus a simple notice of removal received through Southport would enable the consumer's registrations to be cancelled.

The rationers had often contemplated this idea wistfully. A weakness in the Food Office machinery was that, although the consumer could be found under his surname in the reference-leaf register, and under his retailers in the counterfoil register, there was no link between the two. Thus he could be deleted from the former on the strength of a removal notice, but could not be found in the latter save by the list of his retailers in his ration book. The list was not always available;² inflation from non-cancellations that resulted could only be got rid of at the annual general re-registration. Though the Registrar-General's suggestion would work in the case of exits from the civilian population, difficulties would arise with removals. The old Food Office would be able to cancel the old registrations, but the new Food Office might find it difficult to construct a list of the new ones. It might ask the consumer to come back with the information when he had re-registered; it might ask retailers to return lists of new customers; or it might copy the information from the new counterfoils when they were sent in by retailers. The rationers, however, felt that the first two methods would be impracticable and the third too troublesome.

By September it was clear that discussions could (indeed must) go on for a long time on these fundamentals; and the Ministry suggested to the Registrar-General that they concentrate for the moment on the amalgamation of Offices. This limited the range of discussion, and progress became much faster. But it meant, too, that the degree of 'fusion' actually achieved fell short of that originally hoped for.

Even in the limited field, two last-moment difficulties arose; the position of Divisional Food Officers and the application of 'fusion' to Scotland. National Registration had nothing corresponding to rationing's Divisional organisation, and the Registrar-General was, in fact, beginning to build up a local inspectorate. He recognised that the Divisional Food Officers would be very useful to him, but he was also anxious that his Instructions should not be filtered through

¹ This register—of retailers filed under consumers—would be the exact opposite of the counterfoil register which consisted of consumers filed under retailers. (See p. 479 above.)

² See p. 525 below.

them and that the direct contacts between the local National Registration Officer, the Central National Registration Office at Southport, and Somerset House, should not be broken. As a result, Divisional Food Officers would be placed in an equivocal position. They would be responsible for the efficient performance of National Registration work in the joint local Offices, but—in contrast to rationing, where direct communication from Food Executive Officers to Headquarters was not permitted—they would be by-passed when policy and the interpretation of instructions were concerned.

The position of Scottish Divisional Food Officers caused even more difficulty. A separate treaty had, of course, to be made with the Registrar-General for Scotland, and he viewed the interpolation of Divisional Food Officers into National Registration machinery with great apprehension. He ultimately agreed to 'fusion' on condition that the references to Divisional Food Officers were modified for Scotland so as to make it clear that he did not require their assistance in supervising National Registration work.

Higher authority within the Ministry of Food had also to be satisfied, and for it there was drawn up an impressive list of expected advantages. First, people would be able to transact both rationing and National Registration business at one counter. Secondly, though both sets of records were to be retained, they would be under the same roof; clerks would be familiar with both, and the passing of documents between separate addresses would be completely cut out. Thirdly, the release of information, for instance to the police and the Ministry of Labour, could be handled locally from one Office and the entire responsibility for this and for population statistics could be taken over by the Registrar-General. Fourthly, there need be only one set of establishment rules and records, of imprests and accounts. Fifthly, there would be saving in manpower—'Fusion cannot fail to release staff'—and premises. Finally, the rationers hoped in future to avoid the annual general re-registration with retailers. The inflation in registrations throughout the year should, they argued, be reduced, because an exit notified to either service could be used by the other. For instance if, as often happened, an identity card were collected on death or enlistment, but not a ration book, the exit would still be known to rationing and steps could be taken to cancel the registrations. It should follow, also, that the reference-leaf registers would be as up-to-date as possible. The remaining inflation, due to exits that were not notified, could therefore be dealt with once a year by writing the new ration books from the registers without waiting for the applications to come in. The residue of unclaimed documents would represent the registrations to be cancelled. This theory will be discussed later in connection with the 1944 reissue of ration books.

'Fusion' was signalled by the 'Heads of Agreement' of 22nd December 1942, between the Registrar-General and the Ministry. The latter undertook, as agent for the former,¹ to provide accommodation, equipment, and staff, to enable the local National Registration Officer to discharge his duties to the satisfaction of the Registrar-General; the person appointed as Food Executive Officer was also to be appointed simultaneously by the Registrar-General as National Registration Officer; the Ministry undertook to bear his National Registration duties in mind when selecting a Food Executive Officer; National Registration staff were to be absorbed at their existing rates of pay if they wished; the Ministry afforded the Registrar-General the services of its Divisional Food Officers, and a liaison committee was established to supervise the fusion of establishments.² The amalgamation of offices went smoothly (the committee only met twice), and had been completed in most areas by 31st March 1943. nine hundred National Registration Officers had already been Food Executive Officers as well; the remainder resigned, save in a few cases where it was desired to keep the goodwill of a Town Clerk and he was retained as a nominal National Registration Officer; the National Registration Staff were absorbed and all new staff were henceforward recruited by the Ministry.

The 'fusion' of offices was announced to local officers as a first, not a final stage:

'The full plans cannot be put into operation until a single local office has been established . . . and to prepare the way for the adoption of simplified forms of procedure it has been decided that the staffs should be brought together in common premises as rapidly as possible . . . where this has not already been done'.

But there was a more immediate problem. Side by side with the 'fusion' negotiations had gone the discussions on the procedure for issuing ration books and identity cards in 1943. It was to be many months before either the two Departments or the new joint Offices could turn to more spacious matters.

II

The sixth issue of ration books landed Food Offices in what one Food Executive Officer described as the 'biggest maelstrom of their

¹ The agency principle was not new. The Ministry was already doing work on this basis for the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, and the Board of Trade, and was prepared to do so for the Ministry of Fuel and Power.

² The establishment and finance officers of the two Departments had been hard at work since October on the intricate details; but as the outcome of the negotiations was by no means decided, the Ministry had to go cautiously.

not uneventful careers'. It had to break new administrative ground, for it was as much a reissue of identity cards as of ration books. This at once precluded any repetition of the successful 1942 method because the new identity cards might not be sent *en masse* through the mails;¹ people would have to collect their new documents in person.

It may be as well to repeat that the National Register was a continuous record, the individual being linked to the Central Index by his identity code-number. The new cards would not be new documents (save in the purely physical sense) and great care would have to be taken not to break the chain of history behind them. It would not suffice to make verbatim copies of the old cards; an effort must be made to eliminate defacement and clerical error—which broke the link with the Central Index—and to uncover frauds. The Registrar-General therefore intended that the new cards should be written in advance from independent records and afterwards compared with the old cards, so that discrepancies would automatically be revealed. He naturally wished to use National Registration records—the local Maintenance Registers—for this purpose, but these did not cover the whole local population and the rationers had rejected his various proposals for extending them.² They offered instead a sweeping alternative of their own.

The reference-leaf registers in the joint Offices ought, as a result of 'fusion', to be receiving all removals that were notified; they ought, as a result of the pairing of ration book and identity card at the mid-1942 re-issue, the subsequent decision to call for the identity card when removals were notified in Food Offices, and, latterly, the establishment of the joint removals counters, to conform with National Registration records. Therefore (it was argued) they ought to be good enough to enable, first, the new ration books to be written from them in advance of reference-leaf applications, secondly, the new identity cards to be written from them also; that is to say, the new cards might be written at the same time as the new ration books, by the same people, from the same records. This plan would use the unique opportunity of the reissue of identity cards to establish a 'marriage' of ration book and identity card from the beginning; it would eliminate the sorting and checking that would be necessary if documents to be distributed together were written separately; it would apply the *terminus ad quem* of 25th July 1943 (the beginning of

¹ Neither might the clothing ration book which was, in 1943, incorporated in the food ration book. Even registered post would not suffice because a registered packet is not necessarily delivered to the actual person to whom it is addressed. In any case, the Post Office could not allow the use of a registered post on such a scale, nor could it provide a special service. It should be remembered that Food Offices, when using registered post, had to list the packets for the Post Office.

² See p. 480-1, 499 above.

the new rationing year) to the identity card operation; above all, from the rationing point of view, it would remove the need for a general re-registration with retailers, for the residue of unclaimed documents would stand for exits unnotified and registrations to be cancelled.

The Registrar-General accepted the plan; but agreement on the subsequent stages—checking and distribution—was more difficult. If the new identity cards were to be written from the food registers it was more important than ever that they should be checked against a National Registration record; as the Maintenance Registers were unsuitable, the check must be against the old cards. The Registrar-General was anxious that this, too, should be done in advance, and not under the eyes of 'glum and protesting queues'. 'I find it very difficult', he wrote on 14th October 1942, 'to contemplate the preparation of new Identity Cards wholly from Food records without a sight of the old Identity Card until the actual moment for issue arises'. Moreover, he still regarded the reissue of ration books as an occasion for 'combing out' unnotified removals. There should, therefore, be a second check—of the new documents against the reference-leaf applications.

The Registrar-General felt that these essentials could only be met by requiring people to make two visits to the issuing offices. On the first visit, they would leave a 'new' reference-leaf and half an identity card. The new documents already written, having been compared with these, would be issued at a second visit, in return for the remaining half of the identity card. The Ministry, however, would not hear of a plan involving two visits because it was convinced that people would not make the first one—the previous year's 'carrots' (the clothing and sweets ration books) being now embodied in the main book. A compromise was reached: the documents would be written in advance from the reference-leaf registers; people would take or send their reference-leaf applications to a sub-office and note the one chosen on their ration books; the reference-leaf applications, *kept throughout in sub-office bundles*, would be compared with the new documents and, at the same time, used to sort them by sub-offices for distribution; finally, people would collect their new documents from the sub-office at which they had left their reference-leaf applications, using the identity card as proof of entitlement. The compromise in this plan lay, first, in that the check of the new documents against the reference-leaf applications would be made in advance, but that against the identity card would be left to the time of issue; secondly, in that people were not actually being called upon to make two visits—the sub-office for the first visit need not be staffed and could consist only of a 'well-labelled letter-box'—though they were being called upon for a double action.

The next four months were spent filling in the very complicated details of this plan. First, some classes of identity cards were not to be replaced,¹ and Southport had to identify these for Food Offices by sending slips to be attached to the reference-leaves so that new cards were not written for them. Secondly, the writing of the new documents had to be preceded by a marking of reference-leaves, so as to identify those who were to receive the new Junior Ration Book (R.B.4). Thirdly, there was much discussion of the actual time-table. The Registrar-General, fearful that identity-card writing might be unduly rushed, wished it to be spread over four months; as Rationing Division was adamant that the two sets of documents must not be separated at any stage, he pressed for the whole operation to begin earlier. But the Division could not allow it to begin before May 1943: first, because Food Offices would need March and April for intensive work upon other duties² in preparation for their partial suspension while the reissue was going on—which period would already be encroached on by the preliminary marking of reference-leaves; secondly, because the printing of the new ration books would not be completed until the beginning of May. Indeed, on 9th March the Ministry learned with some dismay that, because of manpower difficulties, delivery of the books might not be completed until 19th May. It dared not face the Registrar-General with this news, which would have reinforced his case for the separate writing of identity cards. The Stationery Office had a trying two months; in the end, most of the books were ready by the end of April, but some Food Offices were to be held up for as much as a fortnight by the late delivery of books from ration-book stores.³

The draft scheme finally went out to local officers in the first week of March 1943. That it had not gone earlier was due partly to the

¹ The special photo-bearing ones, for example. Civil Defence workers were to have special cards issued through local authorities, and 'passenger immigrants' (mainly Eire labourers) were to have temporary cards that were current for a limited period only.

² This argument also reinforced the Ministry's case for the re-issue of identity cards to be exactly contemporaneous with that of the new ration books. Towards the end of the reissue period, construction camps, seamen, institutions, and so forth had to be dealt with. Then came the 'mopping up' operations; in 1943 these would be the following up of discrepancies and of lapsed registrations and the adjustment of children's registrations. Then came the ordinary routine duties: special entitlements such as agricultural cheese, the issue of supplementary clothing coupons, poultry-keepers' ration books, and the like. 'Before very long', wrote an official in June 1943, when the crisis was at its height, 'we shall have . . . poultry keepers round our necks again'. In 1944 the poultry book was made to run for twelve instead of six months, so that it no longer coincided with a main reissue.

³ The association with the clothing book had brought a tightening-up of security measures both in stores and in transit. Part deliveries, so as to keep an even flow into all stores at once, would mean duplication at least of elaborate transport arrangements, and the Division was anxious to avoid this. The late deliveries—usually to remote areas—were due to the often inconvenient siting of the stores. In 1939, more attention had naturally been given to security from air-attack than to geographical relation to Food Offices. Stores were being reorganised in 1943.

difficulties of collaboration; the Board of Trade did not want publicity for the clothing ration book until it was able to announce the amount of the ration; the Registrar-General had discussions to complete with the Home Office and with the Scottish Registrar-General, and in any case wished to spring the new identity cards upon the fraudulent at the last possible moment. The delay proved unfortunate, for by 18th March the two Departments were back where they had been the previous October, with the whole question once more wide open.

Criticism from local officers had begun as a trickle in January when news of the proposed method began to filter through; in February, there was a strong protest from Glasgow and a stir of mis-giving from the Scottish Registrar-General; by March, the storm was overwhelming. Food Executive Officers pointed out that the scheme embodied a return to 'marrying', in that the new documents, written from the 'old' reference-leaves in the registers, were to be checked against the 'new' reference-leaves acting as applications. Furthermore, these applications were, once again, to be filled in by the public without supervision. Some local officers averred that, in the days of postal issue, as many as 50 per cent. of the 'new' reference-leaves were wrongly filled in and that many were left blank. Unless the sub-offices were staffed for the first visit and, as in 1942, the reference-leaf applications 'vetted' before they were accepted, the revival of 'marrying' would, they held, give rise to the usual immense correspondence between Food Offices and with the public.

Just as serious were the new problems that the scheme would create. First, with the writing of ration books spread over two months, removals that took place while the operation was going on—especially those that took place between the two visits—would cause difficulties; in addition, the use of the reference-leaf registers for 'writing up' would disorganise the routine removals procedure. Glasgow stated that as many as 2,000 references a day might be made to this register and that, as 28th May was the Scottish removal term, the West of Scotland expected to receive some 200,000 removal notices in May, June, and July. Secondly, Food Offices were to be expected to take on, in addition to the normal re-issue of ration books—a very great strain on them—a task for which 65,000 enumerators had been used in 1939. Thirdly, the sorting processes demanded by the scheme evoked universal denunciation. The written documents would be in *alphabetical* order of surnames, for that was now the order of the registers from which they were to be written; they were to be issued *geographically* through sub-offices; within those offices, they would probably be claimed by households and should, therefore, be in *address* order. Glasgow alone had 750 John Smiths, 719 John Wilsons, and 666 John Browns. Unless these 'families'

were first re-filed into address or National Registration number order, they would all have to be gone over in Food Offices many times with each sub-office bundle of reference-leaves. Similarly, once in the sub-offices, they could not be kept in ordinary alphabetical order if they were to be picked out speedily when they were called for. It was gradually borne in upon Headquarters that there simply was not space in Food Offices to spread out many thousands of ration books and identity cards and re-deploy them from alphabetical to sub-office order. Finally, local officers doubted whether the new identity cards should be written from the reference-leaf registers at all. Westminster pointed out that the conformity of food and National Registration records over a whole year had not yet been tested; Glasgow reported that, in a sample check of 1,000 reference-leaves, it had found 70 on which names differed from those in the Maintenance Register (mainly because of the use of diminutives) and 29 on which the National Registration number was wrong. In theory, this should not have been possible after the check carried out in 1942, but Food Offices did not necessarily use the more rigorous National Registration rules about names, and both 'writing-up' and sub-office staffs had been fallible. Glasgow revealed that, after any reissue, people had come to the Food Office to have errors on the ration book put right; these might represent only a small part of the total error. The general trend of the criticism was that the job would be too big for one operation, and that the new identity cards should be dealt with separately.

III

By the time these views began to reach Colwyn Bay, however, the plan was already dead at the hands of one of its begetters, the Registrar-General. About 10th March, two National Registration Officers reported to him a degree of error of over 6 per cent. between the reference-leaf and Maintenance Registers. Having spent 3½ years eliminating the errors in the original identity cards, he was faced with the prospect of introducing a fresh mass of error into the new ones. He therefore returned to his original demand for two visits by the public and the depositing of the half identity card, so that a trained and careful examination of identity card numbers could take place before the public had to be faced at all. In fact, the first session might be used to issue ration books; the second, identity cards.

A horrified Ministry of Food saw prospects of the job extending not

only over the whole summer but well into the next year. A harrowing week was spent in re-casting the whole scheme:

'This crucial subject', wrote the Registrar-General to his Scottish counterpart on 23rd March, 'has undergone kaleidoscopic changes day-by-day under conditions of emergency which are of a most nerve-racking kind. . . . Dealing with the Food Ministry under these urgent conditions in correspondence . . . is no easy job; and while they seem unable to avoid working always on the crest of their crises, I shall be heartily glad to have got through this Identity Card reissue business and to revert to a more civilised tempo of administration under our own steam'.

But it was to be many months before the rationers were able to revert to a more civilised tempo; at the moment, they were contemplating what seemed to be an impasse. The new documents had, for the sake of the identity card, to be written carefully in advance. This had to be done from the 'old' reference-leaves in the registers because there were only two ways of getting in the 'new' ones: by post, but 'we have learnt from bitter experience year after year that people never fill in things correctly'; or by collecting and inspecting them at sub-offices, which would mean two visits by the public. Once written, the documents would be in alphabetical order of surnames; they could not be posted, and they could not be distributed from sub-offices in alphabetical order. Nor could they, as Food Executive Officers had now made very clear, be sorted for distribution into an order different from that in which they had been written.

Meanwhile, Food Executive Officers, unaware of the crisis at Headquarters, were pouring in criticisms of the dead plan and suggestions of their own. The Ministry had (someone remarked) as many plans as Food Offices. It was the plan put forward by Westminster that was selected, revised, offered to the Registrar-General, and accepted by him on 23rd March 1943.

The essence of the new plan was that the documents should be distributed in the alphabetical order in which they were written. This could only be done centrally, and so it meant, first, that people must be called to the central point in batches; secondly, that writing and distribution must go on simultaneously.¹ The final arrangements therefore were that, as soon as an alphabetical batch of ration documents had been written, people whose surnames began with the letter in question would be called either to the main Office where

¹ Once 'written up', the documents were attractive to thieves, and would need more rigorous storage precautions.

The new arrangements were a blow to the Stationery Office. If the ration books were all written in advance before distribution began, the different classes of ration book could be printed in any order. With writing and distribution going on at the same time, quantities of all classes of ration books would be needed at once.

the documents were being written, or to a distribution point near it. The Registrar-General's main worry was to be met by leaving the National Registration number to be written on the new identity card at the time of issue, after the old card had been examined. The protests of Food Executive Officers were to be met by eliminating all advance checking; the new documents would be compared with the old identity card and the 'new' reference-leaf at the time of issue. This would still be 'marrying'—for the new documents would represent the 'old' reference-leaves from which they had been written—but without the arduous sorting processes that it had once entailed.¹

The operation was already complicated, but two more refinements had still to be added. First, the occasion was to be used as an opportunity to overhaul milk registrations; people were asked to write the names of their milk retailers on their reference-leaves, thus turning them into milk counterfoils. Secondly, as there was to be no general re-registration with retailers, other means had to be found of adjusting the registrations of children who had grown out of, or into, special age categories. People were asked to write the names of retailers for meat and eggs on the reference-leaves of children's ration books.

The adoption of Westminster's plan of central distribution was, however, the beginning rather than the end of rationing officials' troubles. They had to defend the plan against their own local officers and against 'higher authority'. They were well aware of the dangers; congestion in towns, the need to travel long distances in rural areas, and the hardship to households containing more than one surname. But they took their stand, first on the magnitude of the undertaking, secondly on the saving of manpower, and thirdly on security, both in the wider sense of the importance of this major overhaul of the National Register and the narrower sense that the value of the documents being issued² meant that they must be cleared as soon as written. The operation would give people new identity cards—the first for over three years and a non-recurring item—and clothes- and food-ration books for a year. Behind the scenes, food and national registration records would be brought completely up-to-date and a general re-registration with retailers avoided. As for manpower, considerable emphasis was laid on the 65,000 enumerators of 1939, and the advantage in the national interest of handling the issue of three personal documents at one go. This economy accounted for the hardships of the procedure; but methods less inconvenient to

¹ The original intention had been not to use the new reference-leaf at all. The Registrar-General, however, pointed out that a check on unnotified removals was still needed. The new reference-leaf would also be necessary for children under 16. To these motives was added that of the overhaul of milk registrations (see above, p. 243 *seq.*).

² The ration book was said to have a black market value of £5 (mainly because of the clothing book, but also because of the points coupons).

the public—the first plan, for example—would make impossible demands on manpower. ‘The burden is, in fact, for security and manpower reasons, transferred from officials to the public’.

The scheme from the first included measures to mitigate its inconveniences. There were to be special ‘block issues’ to factories and large business houses; documents might be collected by proxy; sub-offices were to be opened in rural areas when central distribution was finished and the unclaimed documents circulated round them; at the very end, documents might be sent by registered post; above all, so long as the main principles of the operation were observed—central distribution of as many documents as possible, and no separation of ration-book and identity-card at any stage¹—local discretion was to be allowed in the actual issuing arrangements. In towns, central distribution need not mean distribution from one building only; several centres could be used successively for the same initials—thus giving people more than once chance of application—or, of course, for different initials over the one period. In rural areas, it would be for the local officer to decide when and where central distribution should give way to sub-offices.

In view of what happened later it is as well to be clear about how much discretion local officers really had. The original instructions of 20th April 1943 said that rural sub-offices could be opened ‘later’. This was amplified on 8th May as the result of criticism from rural officers. Divisional Food Officers were then told that ‘. . . where a Food Executive Officer is satisfied that in a rural area few people can attend distribution centres, he may take steps to advertise without delay where and when sub-offices will be set up later’. Food Executive Officers were told at the same time that they had ‘. . . full discretion within the framework of the main scheme . . . to make . . . their own local arrangements including the setting up of sub-offices’, and that though it was ‘. . . essential that as many documents as possible should be distributed centrally . . . the degree to which central issue can be carried must, of course, vary widely with local conditions’. The trouble was that this elasticity could not be announced in advance; if people did not believe at first that they were obliged to apply at one centre, there was no point in attempting central issue at all.² The Ministry was aware of the dangers of this situation; on 7th May a rationing official pointed out the risk that, when the second part of the plan was put into operation, it would

¹ This fiat was difficult to obey because school-children were used for ‘writing up’ ration books but the Registrar-General could not allow the new Identity Cards to be written by them. Many local officers therefore wished to write the cards separately and in advance, using their own office staff.

² ‘We should be fools indeed if we said nationally “Do not pay the slightest attention to all our best efforts, wait long enough and we will . . . deliver the book.” On the other hand . . . we shall have to be very wary with publicity so as not to give the impression that we actually insist on people travelling long distances’.

appear not fore-ordained, but the result of public pressure. This is exactly what happened, and the Ministry fell into much tribulation as a result.

The new plan, though more welcomed than the old, was still being sniped at by local officers right up to the time when the operation began. Scotland was particularly strong against it. Her geography, and the peculiar problem of her county areas, often meant that what was minority dissent over the whole country was majority dissent there. Scottish opposition was led by Glasgow and the Scottish Registrar-General: the former because of the problem of 700,000 adults attending centrally, the latter because of the unreliability of the reference-leaf register as a basis for identity cards; the new scheme did not, he pointed out, meet the discrepancies in names that were even more serious than those in National Registration numbers (7 per cent. as against 3 per cent.), and he still pressed strongly for two visits by the public and the splitting of the operation. The English Registrar-General thought that the name discrepancy was more in the region of 3 per cent., a figure confirmed by an extensive check between reference-leaf and Maintenance Registers in London Division.¹ In England, the opposition was led by Birmingham which, with 960,000 ration books and 750,000 cards,² did not see how it was going to get either the staff or the premises for writing-up and issuing at one and the same time. Its efforts to secure premises brought in the City Corporation which protested to its M.P.s and to the Minister, and succeeded in having the matter raised in the House of Commons just before issue began. Where Manchester and Glasgow, for example, proposed to use 6 or 7 centres, Birmingham had to use the Civic Centre only, with 80 queues at once. This provided an easy contrast with the 40 or more sub-offices used the previous year, but as Headquarters pointed out the two operations were entirely different; in any case, the 1942 method had only become popular in retrospect. Other large cities were equally worried about staff, premises, and the dangers of congestion, but their protests were dwarfed by the consternation in rural areas. In Cornwall, to take an extreme case, journeys of 20 miles each way might be necessary, and many other rural areas emphasised the inadequacy of war-time cross-country transport services, and the particular inconvenience to farms employing workers with many different surnames.

These misgivings were shared by the Ministry's Public Relations Division which, when it saw the scheme, was 'really disturbed' about rural areas, and, foreseeing Parliamentary Questions and protests from farming organisations, asked if special provision could not be made for them. Rationing officials replied that 'We can only do this

¹ Scotland is, perhaps, rather more given to diminutives of first names than England.

² Children under 16 were not being given new Identity Cards.

job if we are systematic about it and that means writing and dispersing alphabetically'. In the middle of April, Divisional Food Officers gathered for conference, 'worried at the immensity of the job, but full of zest',¹ and zero hour approached with 'Birmingham resigned', but its Corporation 'still very angry'; Manchester 'enthusiastic'; London 'fairly so'; Southern Division 'rampaging' (about rural areas); and Scotland uneasy, with Glasgow fiercely gloomy. At the last moment, however, a few days before the operation began, officials at Headquarters, having achieved an uneasy quiescence below, had to placate anxious enquirers from above. Once the procedure was announced, protests from individuals, and from local authorities of all sizes, began to reach the Minister, and on 13th May, the Birmingham arrangements came up in the House of Commons. Officials marshalled their arguments and gained the support of 'higher authority'—for a few days.

IV

The operation began on 17th May, and by the 22nd trouble had begun. Bristol reported four-hour queues and the danger of a breakdown; Liverpool was in difficulties; queues were forming at 6.30 in the morning (unnecessarily) in Glasgow; later, Cardiff was overwhelmed and was saved only by a three-day Royal visit that enabled distribution to cease temporarily. Not all towns and cities were in trouble. Leicester, according to the Parliamentary Secretary, who had gone out on a tour of inspection, was a 'perfect dream'; Leeds was later described as 'marvellous'; Edinburgh was doing well; Plymouth excellently; complaints in London were mainly from outlying and scattered boroughs;² Birmingham had queues but was comforting them with tea from W.V.S. canteens. The Press, however, naturally concentrated upon those that were in trouble and in so doing stampeded people into yet more queueing. Congestion was due partly to the public itself and partly to defects in local organisation. Where people had come on the wrong day or, as happened very often, with their reference-leaves not properly completed, work was slowed up and applicants accumulated. Similarly, queues forming hours before opening-time might disorganise issuing centres for the whole morning. But failure to achieve an even flow was often due to local mistakes in assessing 'call-up' and trying to deal with

¹ And, mindful of the 1942 rubber stamp, carefully enquiring about the special ink for identity card writing.

² But London, with 7 times the population of Birmingham, had 95 times as many issuing offices.

too large a slice of the alphabet at once. Too few centres, too few issuing points within the centres, and lack of suitable premises were other weaknesses. The last was a particularly difficult problem. It was not easy in 1943, especially in bombed cities, to find premises that could house documents, staff, and queues.¹

On the 22nd May, Headquarters made suggestions to Divisional Food Officers to meet these problems; trouble would be saved if extensive use were made of 'outliers' to examine documents in queues before applicants reached the receptionist; more issuing points and centres might be used; the amount of work attempted in one day should be restricted, and Food Executive Officers should be encouraged to split up blocks of surnames beginning with the same letter between successive days, so as to secure an even flow. These suggestions applied mainly to towns; the only reference to rural areas was '. . . we must still leave to you and your Food Executive Officers discretion about going on tour. . . . I suggest that you and they are not too definite too soon'. The situation in towns improved as local officers learned from experience and adapted their tactics—'My personal feeling', wrote one Divisional Food Officer, 'is that if they would leave the public alone we would get on very well'—but that in rural areas grew steadily worse.

The Ministry found itself faced with a suddenly hostile Press, Parliament, and public, and on the 26th May the 'loosening' process began. Rural Food Executive Officers were told to hurry up central distribution as much as possible, to mitigate it by extensive use of 'agents' like the W.V.S. and Women's Institutes, to bring in documents for exchange from outlying villages, and to make known at once where sub-offices would be opened later. The Minister himself insisted that they should realise that they had full discretion to adjust procedure to local conditions, and that the instructions should go to them direct instead of through the usual channels, the Divisional Food Officers. This was hammered home by a Press announcement on the 27th, to the effect that the Minister had made it clear that they did possess such discretion; but many sections of the Press made it appear as if he had just given it to them. On the 28th, the process was completed by a broadcast from the Minister, assuring the public that the Ministry would see they got their new documents, making a concession to mixed households ('Mrs. Smith could collect Mrs. Brown's documents') and admitting that the scheme had been over-centralised.²

The loosening arrangements were summed up by the Division for its local officers. In towns, initials should be split up where necessary

¹ Liverpool had to operate from a group of shops and (at first) keep business hours.

² This broadcast was suggested to the Minister by the very officials it appeared to be casting overboard, and he was reluctant to make it for that reason.

and the number attempted each day restricted; people in queues must be given seats and the means of completing their reference-leaves ('Recognition that leaves will not be properly completed is more important than regret about it'), and Divisional Food Officers were to use the full weight of their authority to secure adequate accommodation.¹ These detailed suggestions incorporated the personal observations made on a tour on the 25th by the Parliamentary Secretary. In rural areas, every use was to be made of 'agents'; sub-offices must be advertised at once; mixed households could collect under the last letter of the household, and persons who called at the wrong time were to be obliged. The aim was to be 'no queue and no fruitless visit'. These measures were a change of tactics rather than of strategy. Headquarters emphasised that there was to be no departure from principles or loosening of the fundamental checking process, and it hoped to confine the 'back-letter' concession to rural areas or, at least, to households. But '. . . public convenience has become a greater factor than we probably anticipated on 17th May', and, 'henceforward Government "service" as distinct from Government "control" is the keynote'.

In the Press this retreat was given the appearance of a rout, and it placed many Food Executive Officers in a difficult position. 'Neither we', warned Headquarters, 'nor the Food Executive Officers must do anything to suggest that we are not carrying out the Minister's broadcast'. It was not very easy to carry out immediately. Sub-offices could not be opened until central distribution was finished, because until the alphabet had been gone through once, all the books would not be 'written-up'; the number of offices that could be opened would be limited by the skilled staff available to act as supervisors. The concession to mixed households was equally difficult to put into practice; where several centres were in use, the documents might not be in the right one, and many Food Offices had no space in which to keep unclaimed documents so that they were readily available. In these cases, local officers were told that the documents asked for must be sent on by registered post. The most damaging result of the broadcast was to swing the pendulum back too far; the responsibility for getting the documents out had been firmly put back on the Ministry, and the public took the concessions as a general permission to make late application. 'The number of people calling for ration books', wrote one Divisional Officer on 1st June, 'has greatly diminished as they now feel that any time will do'.

The waters began to subside. The Minister's broadcast had

¹ There were a few cases in which local authorities had refused to let Food Executive Officers have the use of the most suitable premises, e.g., public baths, and had then complained to their M.P.s when queues accumulated.

reassured the public; the House of Commons became more friendly; the Press began to discover that block issue to factories and the opening of sub-offices had been intended from the beginning—by the end of June it was castigating the public for its dilatoriness and publishing letters from surprised citizens who had found, on calling for their ration books, none of the hardships they had expected; and administrators re-emerged and wondered if it were safe to begin back-peddalling. By then, the Minister was emphasising that the 'back-letter' concession should be used only by households, and was urging people to call centrally on their right day as far as possible. In July, the main worry, apart from the situation in Cardiff where books had to be issued through the Civil Defence service, was that the congestion caused by late-comers at the end might be as bad as that at the beginning.

For Food Offices, the ration book issue did not end on 25th July. They were still engaged in 'mopping up' operations in the middle of September. People who could not be traced in the local registers made do with temporary documents while a search was made between Food Offices for their history. The main cause of such difficulties was, of course, removals. Removals and the issue of ration books, it was explained to the Parliamentary Secretary, 'do not go together very well . . . [they] always are our chief headache in every aspect of food control. . . . The number . . . is just inconceivable to anyone not immersed in food control'. To prevent duplication, a Food Office would not issue new documents until the 'old' reference-leaf or documents already written from it had arrived from the old Food Office.

'Mr. X moves from A to B . . . he is bound to call at B . . . to let us know about his removal, but his documents cannot possibly be there then. . . . We therefore tell him that we shall collect his books from A to B and they will be ready for him as soon as we have had time to do so. . . . It is just another of those things which do sound silly to the public . . . but . . . we have not got his basic history at B, it is all sitting at A, and the whole security value of the operation would go west if we adopted any other procedure'.

Unfortunately, Food Offices were overwhelmed and the documents often took a long time to arrive at B; in many cases, they never did arrive. Removals had, during the operation, been routed through Divisional Offices and these were sometimes swamped; documents were lost from badly packed parcels; 'old' Food Offices did not always indicate for which one the documents were intended; there were losses from burglary, a fire at the Mount Pleasant sorting office, and one in a mail train. The possible victims of these mischances could not be denied new documents indefinitely, and the last class—those

who could not be traced in either Food or Maintenance Registers—were being dealt with from 13th September. New documents had to be prepared from documents presented by the applicant, including, of course, the old identity card.

V

The experience had been an unhappy one for the Ministry; few Food Executive or Divisional Officers went through a time worse than the last fortnight of May 1943. Undoubtedly, some of the difficulties had been aggravated by the attitude of Parliament and Press. Undoubtedly, too, some of the trouble was not due to the plan itself but to lack of local initiative in carrying it out; at the extremes, imaginative administrative arrangements brought little-noticed success and 'woodenness' much-publicised failure. Some Divisions drew upon the discretion granted on 8th May¹ very liberally indeed—the East of Scotland, for instance, confessed that it had reduced the period of central distribution in Perthshire to nil and had gone out on tour from the beginning—while others were backward in taking local conditions, such as country 'bus time-tables, into account.

The Minister's admission that there had been over-centralisation in the name of security was, in fact, an overstatement; except for the back-letter concession and the use of remote proxies, such as the Women's Voluntary Services, in rural areas, every 'loosening' expedient that was employed had been expressly specified in the Food/National Registration joint instructions. On the other hand, though rural Food Executive Officers did have discretion about sub-offices from the beginning, they were not encouraged to use it. On 26th May, Ministry Headquarters admitted that '... we have ... until the last few hours, given the impression of lying low about later sub-offices'. The 'loosening' was a change of emphasis rather than a change of plan, but it was a very important change—from prolonging the period of central distribution as long as possible, to hastening through it. The breakdown came in rural areas because, as local officers had emphasised, central alphabetical distribution was radically unsuited to them and because unpublicised reserve facilities were not much use when people really believed that they had to travel twenty miles or spend 6s. on a 'bus fare.

It was not often that Headquarters obstinately repulsed local advice, and Divisional and Food Executive Officers, who were prone to see the Registrar-General as an *eminence grise*, were united in

¹ See p. 513, above.

attributing their trials to National Registration. Certainly, the habit of combining the ration book reissue with other objectives reached a climax in 1943, and there had been many Press comments to the effect that the Ministry had tried to do too much. Certainly also the identity card was, as an official said when the agitation was mounting, 'the nigger in the woodpile' that was responsible for the tightness of the scheme. But the decision to link the issue of identity cards with the ration books had been the Ministry's own; both Registrars-General, and many local officers, would have preferred identity cards to have been dealt with separately. To rationing officials, the choice had been clear; between overloading Food Offices for a short period and risking a breakdown, and having them occupied indefinitely with identity card reissue. The overwhelming argument in favour of joint issue was that, if the new identity cards were not issued along with the ration books, there seemed little likelihood of getting them out at all. People, as each ration book reissue after 1942 proved, were quite happy without identity cards and were not likely to take the trouble to call at Food Offices or sub-offices unless something more enticing were being offered. The only other possibility was a house-to-house distribution as in 1939 but this was held to mean the employment of 65,000 enumerators.¹ Once this argument is accepted, it is difficult to see how a looser method of distribution could have been combined with the rigid precautions required to prevent duplicate issue of new identity cards.

What the critics within the Ministry were really saying, therefore, was that Food Offices should not have been concerned with identity cards at all. The operation of 1943 had exposed the illogical relationship between rationing and the National Register. On 13th May, the Parliamentary Secretary had defended the method of issue on the grounds that:

'We are very concerned that this time, and through this machinery, we may be able to get a proper check. Basically, there is nothing which enables us to know so much about the movement of people in this country as the ration books.'²

As long ago as 1936 the Beveridge Committee had pointed this out. But the Food (Defence Plans) Department had refused to associate rationing openly with the enforcing of national security requirements: 'we obviously could not let a person starve because he or she had lost an identity card'. There had in fact been no suggestion that the Department should go to such lengths, but the remark expressed its attitude to lesser ways of manipulating food rationing for the sake of National Registration. The *concordat* of 1939 was not a departure from

¹ It was assumed that it must take place simultaneously.

² *Official Report*, 13th May 1943, Col. 900.

this attitude; by it rationing undertook no more than to provide National Registration incidentally with information acquired for its own purposes. In 1940, the Ministry of Food's watchword was still proclaimed as '*. . . we must not run the risk of leaving a man unfed nor must we cause him unnecessary inconvenience*'.¹ In 1943, Ministry of Food officials had said '*We know perfectly well that we shall cause the public some inconvenience*'² and we could only do otherwise by a vast expenditure of manpower which we cannot afford'. It might be argued that there is a good deal of difference between 'unnecessary' and 'some'. But it might also be argued that the 'some' inconvenience that the Ministry was defending in 1943 was rather more acute than the inconvenience it rejected in 1940. On both occasions, the risk of inconvenience arose from the needs of the National Register, and the choice between 'some' inconvenience and a 'vast expenditure of manpower' in 1943 was one for which ration book issue was not responsible.

The Ministry had, in fact, come round to the position suggested in 1936; 'it is no good', the critics were told, 'putting our heads in the sand and saying "let National Registration look after itself"'. The trouble was that neither public nor Parliament had been aware of what was going on. On grounds of administrative economy and national security, the Ministry's willingness to serve other Departments was right and its local isolationists wrong,³ but these, who bore the day-to-day brunt of the anomalous position, were right in detecting the root cause of the 1943 trouble—responsibility without power.

Since the second issue of ration books in 1940, the Ministry had exercised a delicate and concealed compulsion on behalf of the National Register. It had gone cautiously—it had refused, for instance, to ask adults for the date of birth or for the identity card when removals were notified—and it had succeeded because the strain was taken by its own local staffs. When the public failed to notify removals to National Registration Offices, Food Offices passed on the ones they received; at each re-issue of ration books, Food Offices 'duly grovelled through frightful checking processes' in order to bring the National Register up-to-date; when people failed to put the National Registration number on their reference-leaves, Food Offices did it themselves before the books were posted. Even then there was a certain amount of bluffing, for instance in 1942 over adults' ages; but it was not until 1943 that rationing tried to push administrative certainty too far. Even so, the first plan had still placed the burden on Food Office staffs.⁴ The contention that a

¹ Author's italics.

² Author's italics.

³ It must be remembered that some Food Offices had also had a trying time at the introduction of clothes rationing.

⁴ See p. 508 *seq.* above.

method less hard on the public would require an army of officials who did not exist, or would be beyond the strength of those who did; that, at that stage of the war and in view of the importance of the operation, people must be prepared to stand some inconvenience, was reasonable; but it was out of character. The very success until then of combining Government 'control' with Government 'service' caused an outcry when, for the moment, the former was allowed to be seen stark. At a Press conference on 25th May, the Parliamentary Secretary, stifling his personal uneasiness, had tried to still objections by pointing to national security and the importance of the identity card. The attempt failed; the Minister's 'loosening' instructions were, in fact, the velvet glove being hastily slipped on again, and rationing returning to its proper functions as the public understood them.

It would be false to suggest that such fundamentals played any part in the crisis of 1943; the public and Parliament rebelled against the obviously inconvenient details of the scheme. Indeed, a slight shift of emphasis at the outset, from the importance of the administrative check to be carried out to that of providing every possible amelioration for the public, might have enabled the Ministry to remain safely on its tight-rope.

CHAPTER XXXI

'Fusion' in Operation, 1943-45

I

IN 1944, rationing administrators were free to apply the full benefits of 'fusion' to the re-issue of ration books. The method they evolved looked very like that straightforward exchange of an old for a new book from which it had been deflected in 1940;¹ but the procedure was built upon the identity card and was a result of, not a retreat from, the developments of the preceding four years.

The most important result of 'fusion' was that the identity card could be called for when food business was transacted in a joint Office; there was no need, therefore, for the ration book to carry on its cover the full evidence of the holder's identity. Similarly, now that the identity card was used as a voucher for a new ration book, there was no need to establish a person's right to a ration book by comparing his application with Food Office records. It followed that nothing need be written on the ration book in advance and, therefore, that people were no longer tied to any particular issuing point. In 1944 the consumer took his old ration book—with the reference-leaf filled in—and identity card to any sub-office in his home food area;² the particulars on the identity card were compared with those on the reference-leaf; the leaf was extracted, to be assembled later into the food register for the area; a new ration book was written for him (with his name only)³ there and then, and the old ration book was rubber-stamped to show that a new book had been issued.

This method at last solved the problem of removals occurring during the re-issue period. A consumer's proof of entitlement to a new ration book was now the identity card in his possession instead of a reference-leaf in his old Food Office; he could therefore receive

¹ See p. 486 above.

² Books might be issued in sub-offices in 'foreign' areas at the discretion of the supervisor. It had been intended at first that application might be made in any area, but Food Executive Officers feared that confusion would be caused by the wholesale transfer of reference-leaf receipts for ration books to home Offices.

³ In 1945 the National Registration Number was restored to the cover of the ration book because Offices found it useful in distinguishing between common surnames.

The National Registration Number was still written on the reference-leaf, but people might now be left to enter it themselves, for sub-offices could see that it was entered correctly before accepting the leaf. The number was a link between the alphabetical reference-leaf register and the Maintenance Register filed in N.R. number order. If a person lost both his identity card and ration book, he could first be found under his surname in the reference-leaf register; the N.R. number on his reference-leaf would then lead into the Maintenance Register.

a new book at the same time as he notified his removal to his new Office. The 'general post' of 'old' reference-leaves or new documents between Food Offices, which had weakened the massive check attempted in 1943,¹ and had given rise to the delays that had so puzzled the public, ceased. One weakness remained; the guard against duplication was the stamping of the old ration book and the extraction of its reference-leaf when a new book was issued. It will be seen that a person with one identity card but two ration books might get both renewed by paying two visits. Admittedly, though it could not lock the stable door, rationing could still pursue the horse, for the fraud might come to light when the reference-leaves were filed. The obvious way of preventing it, however, was to stamp the identity card. It is ironical to find both Registrar-General and Ministry of Food regretting that the new developments had not come in time to enable the card to be designed with a space for endorsements showing successive issues of ration books. In 1939, there had been a part of the identity card that could have been used for this purpose; on the new cards of 1943, there was not.²

Simplicity had emerged, however, only from extensive discussions with local officers. In July 1943, when the Ministry began to make plans for the 1944 re-issue, personal application was under a cloud. Headquarters proposed, therefore, to return to the postal method of 1940 and 1941, and, moreover, to 'marrying'. The main object of 'marrying' would be to clear dead matter out of the local population records. These records were now provided by the National Registration Maintenance Registers which, after the mid-1943 operation, had been extended to cover the whole local adult population.³ (The reference-leaf registers lost their character of moving population records; the transfer of reference-leaves was given up in 1944, and they became static registers of receipts for ration books used for purely food and clothing purposes.) In 1944, therefore, the applications for new ration books would be 'married' to the Maintenance Registers. 'Marrying' had, however, assumed a new rôle. The residue of 'unmarried' cards in the Maintenance Registers would, like the residue of unclaimed documents in 1943,⁴ provide material for a hunt after registrations that should have been cancelled. It should be possible, argued Headquarters, to avoid yet again a general re-registration with retailers.

¹ See pp. 518-9 above.

² The Division pressed for the cards to be stamped none the less. But the Registrar-General's refusal was justified by events as the cards would have been well-nigh obliterated. The identity cards issued in 1943 were double-fold, but the extra space was designed for recording successive changes of address. (From 1949, however, identity cards were stamped to indicate the issue of a ration book.)

³ By means of the old identity cards. See p. 534 below.

⁴ See pp. 518-9 above.

This plan did not survive local officers' first sight of it. They preferred personal application to postal (except for country areas) and they strongly disapproved of the return to 'marrying'. They would once again have to rely for one half of their check upon reference-leaves filled in and posted by the public; they would have to sort the leaves before comparing them with a register filed in National Registration number order;¹ above all, 'marrying' as a substitute for a general re-registration was in their opinion both more arduous and less effective.

The debate on re-registration was intricate. At the end of every rationing year, the number of registrations with retailers was inflated, partly because of failure to cancel 'dead' registrations and partly because of error in dealing with 'live' ones. Failure to cancel 'dead' registrations arose from there being no link in Food Offices between the reference-leaf register (filed under consumers' surnames) and the counterfoil register (filed under the names of retailers); that is, between the register of the resident population and the register of the buying population.² The link was in the ration book, in the form of the detachable page (R.G. 12A) on which the holder was bidden to enter the names of the retailers with whom he had lodged his counterfoils. It was this page that should furnish the list of registrations to be cancelled when a removal or an exit was notified. Not only, however, did gaps in the record arise from the non-return of books upon death or enlistment; the pages that did reach Food Offices might not have been filled in accurately or at all. (Lodgers, for instance, often had not the slightest idea with whom they had been registered—and the freezing of milk registrations under rationalisation schemes created a special problem.)³ In these cases, registrations could be cancelled only through patient investigation by the Food Office. The second cause of inflation—error in dealing with 'live' registrations—arose from the fact that the counterfoil register was no longer kept 'live'.⁴ Instead, Food Offices kept a running account of the number of registrations in retailers' ledgers,⁵ and, inevitably, some inaccuracy crept into this book-keeping.

In 1943 this inflation had not been cleared by a general re-registration with retailers; Food Offices had had instead to apply

¹ The new reference-leaves were to arrive in household bundles (people were to be asked to sew the reference-leaves from one address together so that the new ration books could be posted by households). Local officers pointed out that they would first have to unpick the bundles and sort the leaves into order of National Registration numbers and then reassemble them (or the books written from them) into households.

² See pp. 479–480 above.

³ The Ministry shrank from imposing upon retailers the obligation of seeing that the holder of a ration book had filled in R.G. 12A. Many retailers did, however, stamp their names and addresses on it. For the problem of milk, see pp. 242–4 above.

⁴ It could not be abolished because the counterfoil was a legal document affording proof of registration.

⁵ See p. 637 *seq.*

their detective work to the 'residue' of unclaimed documents.¹ Whatever the value of this 'residue' to the local population records, it had (argued local officers) been of very little use to food supply, for it had merely indicated which registrations should be cancelled without providing any means of doing so.² Headquarters now proposed to carry the inflation into a third year, and held that, by the end of 1944-45, it should not be much more than 2 per cent. (This was, of course, a total, and took no account of the distribution of the inflation.) In any case, it did not matter if a retailer received too large a permit, since he had to make a return of stock.³

Local officers were unconvinced and moved on to all but unassailable ground. First, the annual general re-registration, in their opinion, meant not only more accuracy in the future, but less work in the present. After the 1943 re-issue of ration books, Food Offices had had to adjust the registrations of children who had grown out of the child's ration book—which meant sorting their reference-leaves, noting the names of the meat and eggs retailers written on them (often inaccurately) by the public, notifying the retailers and adjusting the ledgers; to investigate the 'residues' and, as people were allowed to change retailers during a specified period, cope with a minor general re-registration at the same time. Secondly, even if a general re-registration were not possible, local officers could still see no need for 'marrying'. If the Division were content to allow the inflation caused by errors in dealing with 'live' registrations to continue into a third year, then it might well dispense with the few cancellations of 'dead' ones that resulted from the investigation of the 'residues'. 'The information we have gained from the existence of these "residues"', wrote a Divisional Food Officer, 'is of very little use and does not seem to justify the enormous labour involved'.

By November 1943, Headquarters had accepted these arguments, and it was decided that a general re-registration should take place in 1944. The Registrar-General then agreed that unnotified exits and removals need be cleared from the Maintenance Registers only every other year. Thus in 1944 the 'dead matter' was to remain not in the food registers but in the population registers where it could do

¹ See pp. 518-9 above.

² Birmingham's 'residue' in 1943 had been about 6,000 (.62 per cent.). (The reference-leaf register had become very accurate.) One Food Executive Officer summarised the results of enquiries about the residue as follows:

1. No reply.
2. Gone away.
3. Enlisted, took ration book with him.
4. Dead, Registrar had ration book.
5. Removed, left no address.
6. Details of registrations of lodger, etc., as remembered by householder.

After all these hurdles had been surmounted, there remained the retailers, who might claim that the cancellations were covered by those already notified to them by the Food Office.

³ See p. 640 *seq.* for a discussion of this stock return.

little harm.¹ Both reasons for 'marrying' had been removed, and the way was clear for the adoption of the simple procedure already described.

II

The mid-1944 operation was placid compared with all its predecessors. The procedure was simple; there were no last-minute complications;² and the detailed instructions showed a prudent incorporation of the lessons of 1943. Food Executive Officers were given full powers to make their own distribution arrangements;³ they were to advertise their full programme of sub-offices a week before the operation began, and in country areas they were to make full use of voluntary agents. At the end of April, the Minister's Standing Committee made anxious enquiries about the plans and was reassured that local officers had full discretion, that they knew that they had it, and that they would, after 1943, know how to use it. But one point was hammered home as a result. A circular of 10th May warned local officers that it was the Minister's express wish that 'under no circumstances whatsoever' was anyone to be turned away from an issuing point because he had come at the wrong time. Persons from a 'foreign' food area could be given their new books at the discretion of the supervisor, and special classes, such as expectant mothers, who had to be dealt with at a main Food Office, could leave their old documents at a sub-office and receive their new ones by post.

The operation went smoothly, but no ration book issue was ever entirely without incident. This time, two delicate matters were given an airing. The first was the perennial problem of asking adults for the date of birth. The Ministry refused, this year, to make it a general requirement. On the other hand, it promised the Registrar-General to do nothing to discourage people from giving it. Therefore, people were asked to complete the reference-leaf in full (though it still, of course, asked only for the age 'if under 18'), in the hope that adults would enter their ages as usual, while local officers were told that if the age were omitted they were not to insist on its being given.

¹ See p. 529, below.

² 'It was agreed', wrote one Food Executive Officer, when reporting the views of himself and four colleagues on the method to be used, '... that final instructions should be issued in good time (i.e., earlier than is usual)'.

³ Which one of them used to repeat his successful 1943 arrangements for central distribution and open no sub-offices at all. They worked well, but Headquarters felt that the F.E.O. might have warned it, as there were enquiries from 'higher authority' when distribution in his area began.

A newspaper drew attention to the discrepancy between the instructions given at the time and the instructions on the reference-leaf; whereupon the Parliamentary Secretary revealed at a Press Conference the secret instructions to local officers. This did not accord with the pledge to the Registrar-General, but he was forgiving.

The second point was more serious. To make the identity card a voucher for the ration book was, strictly speaking, incompatible with allowing collection by proxy; therefore, people who lived in regulated areas,¹ and had to be able to produce an identity card on demand, were either being denied the use of proxy, or, worse still, being encouraged to break the law and incur fines. At the time of the seventh issue, the military authorities and the police were making a special check in those areas, and the point was brought to the Division's attention just before the operation began. It consulted both the Home Office and the Scottish Home Department and was reassured that no trouble was likely to arise. Unfortunately, one police official gave a warning to the Press that regulations would be strictly enforced. This touched off a local newspaper campaign on 22nd May and caused alarmed enquiries from 'higher authority'. The Scottish Home Department asked its Chief Constables to take a reasonable attitude, and Food Executive Officers were told to open on Sundays and late in the evenings for persons who could not let their identity cards out of their possession. Though 'higher authority' was reassured that the matter had not been overlooked—or kept from it—Public Relations Division remained more astringent, pointing out that, had it been warned of the existence of the snag, it might have been in a position to reassure the Press and prevent the development of any agitation.

III

The eighth issue of ration books, in 1945, was to have been a straightforward repetition of the successful operation of the preceding year. Rationing administrators themselves had 'no mind to be inventive' and they successfully fended off threats of complication from other quarters: a threatened milk census of children's ration books and two suggestions from Somerset House. The first suggestion concerned the special identity cards that had not been replaced in 1943.² The holders of these cards had been identified for Food Offices by slips sent from the Central National Registration Office at Southport, and, as the Electoral Register was to be constructed later

¹ Areas of military importance into which entry without a permit was forbidden.

² See p. 508 above.

from the old identity cards, 'dummy' cards were prepared for these special classes. The slip procedure had broken down in some Offices, and the persons affected had been left out of the Electoral Register. So it was proposed to mark the application reference-leaves of the holders of special identity cards during the re-issue of ration books, for comparison later with the Electoral Register; but the scheme did not come to fruition. Secondly, the Division was reminded that it was half-committed to a 'marriage' to clear 'dead matter' from the Maintenance Registers every other year; but this was kept clear of the reissue operation, and the registers were brought up-to-date by a 'backstage' operation later in the year. One other awkward problem also ceased to exist. The Parliamentary Secretary, enquiring in advance what policy was to be pursued on the question of asking for adults' ages, was informed that Colwyn Bay had burnt its boats; now that everyone under 18 had special ration books,¹ all provision for a statement of age had been omitted from the reference-leaf in the adult book.

It was all the harder, therefore, that at the last moment the eighth issue should have been encumbered with a matter far more delicate than either the association with the identity card or the question of adults' ages.

The Royal Commission on Population (appointed in March 1944) felt that it could do no useful work without a Family Census—there had not been one since 1911—and, having failed to reach agreement with the Registrar-General, it turned, through the Treasury, to the Ministry of Food for assistance. The Commission proposed to use the issue of ration books to identify married women by asking all women to put 'Mrs.' or 'Miss' on their reference-leaves. Later, Food Offices would send a somewhat personal catechism to one in five of the married women. The safeguards for the Ministry would be, first, that no woman would be obliged to comply; secondly, that the forms would not in any way be associated with Food Offices once they had been sent out; thirdly, that the aim of the Royal Commission would be widely publicised.

Rationing officials, while heartily agreeing with the first two points, rejected the third; they felt that there would be a better chance of securing the information if the reason for the new requirement were not publicised. In this they were in step with the Minister² who, mindful of the odium incurred in 1943, had no desire to see the ration book issue openly associated with the project. The requirement was announced, therefore, as being for 'general statistical purposes'. The Ministry promised to make every effort to get the information

¹ R.B.4 (for those between 5 and 16) had been introduced in 1943. The upper age limit had been raised to 18 in 1944.

² Colonel (later Lord) Llewellyn.

and the request was given prominence in the customary publicity; but Food Offices were warned that they must assume any omission to be deliberate and on no account press applicants, especially proxies, to remedy it.

The response was very poor. The old expedient of hoping that people would assume that the request had something to do with food supply failed—this time the method was being applied to one section of the population only—and by 6th June it was known that not more than two-thirds of the reference-leaves so far filled in gave the information. This, it was said, would be an unreliable statistical basis since no one could tell how representative the two-thirds were.¹ The Ministry found itself in a difficult position. On the one hand, with 70 per cent. of the ration books still to be issued, the Royal Commission was likely to press for intensified publicity in the hope of retrieving the situation; on the other hand, there was an admirable opening for a Press campaign on 'bureaucratic inquisitiveness'. So far, direct protests had been few—though cogent—but the situation was still combustible. There had been little fuss, simply because women had been permitted not to do as they were asked; increased pressure might endanger this safety valve.²

The Ministry took a cautious step forward. 'I must confess', wrote a high official on 8th June, 'that I am disappointed. . . . The Royal Commission have been charged with an important duty. They have appealed to us for help and we have failed them'. He suggested that all Food Offices should follow the example of one London borough (that had achieved a 90 per cent. response by exceeding instructions) and allow queue marshals to give a 'friendly reminder'. The Minister agreed, adding 'but we won't do more than that'—and the instruction went out on 9th June, with the usual warning that tact and not pressure must be used. But a sample test taken on 18th June showed that, though the national average of reference-leaves giving 'Mrs.' or 'Miss' was 82 per cent., distribution was very uneven and less than half the areas tested showed a response of 90 per cent. or more.

In the end, therefore, the Royal Commission decided to use field investigators. The part of Food Offices was, first, to estimate the

¹ A suggestion that defaulters might consist mainly of uneducated women was torpedoed by the Parliamentary Secretary (Miss Horsbrugh)'s revelation that she had not realised she should have put 'Miss' on her reference-leaf.

² Women in difficult personal situations, especially in small places, were naturally worried by the implications of the request. Most complainants were reassured when told that the information would not go on the ration books. But others pointed out that, if there were not compulsion, the resulting statistics would be unreliable; if there were, it was an impertinent interference with the lives of one section of the population. Towards the end of June, it was felt desirable for the Director of Public Relations to write to *The Times* explaining in general terms the need for population statistics. But the correspondents who had provoked this pointed out that they were concerned, not with what the Minister of Food wanted the information for, but with what right he had to ask for it.

number of women in their areas holding ration books so that the distribution of investigators could be planned; secondly, to appoint supervisors from candidates presented by the Ministry of Labour, to advise, assist, and if possible house them, and to pay them and their enumerators; thirdly, to select the sample cases that the enumerators would visit, to list them, sort them into districts, and address and post the catechisms to them.¹ The operation, which was a considerable one, was carried out in January 1946.

IV

The distribution of ration books was a prolonged guerrilla warfare between administrators and the public, which the latter usually won. It was at this point that food control made contact with the whole civilian population—a contact more direct, more frequent, and more extensive, than that of any other Department; a fact fully appreciated by those with odd jobs to be done. Moreover, the Ministry's task was unique in that it had to work to a time limit—the beginning of the new rationing year; to temper administrative perfection with concession; to abandon checks and counter-checks before they could be carried to their logical end. In fact, the Ministry lacked the sanction enjoyed by other Departments; it could not enforce its requirements by withholding what was being controlled. It functioned in a strait-jacket prescribed by the nature of the society that it served; in a democratic state, food rationing is not used as a disciplinary weapon. The individual therefore in the last resort had the whip-hand; sins of commission could be dealt with by ordinary legal processes, but sins of omission could not be met by leaving people without documents on which their rations depended. It must be admitted that many appeared to take full advantage of this.

The Ministry's difficulties were, however, inherent in most schemes of control, which are inevitably devised by those who are nimble with pen and paper, for those who are not. This was very well understood by Food Executive Officers, especially those in the poorer districts of cities. When, in 1942, the Board of Trade asked that people should be required to write their names and addresses on their

¹ The sample was prepared by taking 1 in 10 of the reference-leaves, discarding those of men, those marked 'Miss', and those shown by the Maintenance Register to belong to people who had left the area. (The Royal Commission was alarmed when it realised that the reference-leaf register was no longer kept 'live'.) Unspecified reference-leaves were included in the samples but a cross was put against them in the lists and on their envelopes. In Scotland the arrangements were different; Food Offices provided the samples but the affair was handled by the Registrars. It was hoped, at one time, to extend this arrangement to England and Wales, but there were too many difficulties, one of them being that salaried Registrars had to hand over fees to their local authorities and so could not be paid for the job. (But neither could Food Executive Officers.)

clothing books before leaving the sub-offices, the Ministry refused on the grounds that this would cause congestion; for many people, even the writing of their names was not a business to be dashed off lightly. Moreover, for every person who can write but is not accustomed to do so very often, there are many who panic at the simplest official form. When ration books were applied for in person, local officers found that many people deliberately came with their reference-leaves not filled in because they preferred to do it at the issuing centre with official help. Such points may seem trivial; but rationing administrators soon learned, first, what effect the 'old lady with woollen gloves, whose spectacles are at the bottom of a very large shopping bag' could have at an issuing counter during an operation like the 1943 issue of ration books and, secondly, that it is best not to hinge elaborate checking processes on documents that have been filled in and posted by the public. These problems were inherent in the simplest procedure; they were exacerbated when the reissue of ration books was complicated by subsidiary objectives and by the increasing refinements of rationing itself.

The first subsidiary objective came in July 1940—the detection of removals for the National Register. In effect, the re-issue of ration books was henceforth focused upon the minority—the unnotified removals and the crooked. In 1943, instructions to supervisors ran to twelve pages of foolscap, most of them, as Food Executive Officers pointed out, concerned with a minority of cases. But rationing, as well as National Registration, contributed both subsidiary objectives—for instance, the 'census' of milk registrations in 1943—and minorities. Expectant mothers, welfare schemes, vegetarians, invalids, the child's and the junior ration books, agricultural cheese, self-suppliers, special arrangements for construction camps and factories, the complication of the issue to institutions caused by the clothing book and sweets rationing;¹ all these meant that the re-issue of ration books could not but be far removed from the automatic exchange of an old for a new book envisaged early in 1940.

In 1944, some Food Executive Officers urged that the reissue of ration books had in itself become so complicated that all other matters should be kept clear of it. But such a wide and regular contact with consumers was too good an opportunity for performing 'odd jobs', not only for rationing, but for other Departments. 'I do not think', a senior official wrote in 1944, 'that we have ever been found wanting when some rearrangement of our machinery will enable a worth-while job to be done readily'. The two permanent collaborators were, of course, the Registrar-General and the Board of Trade. The latter did not affect the method of issuing ration books, but it did

¹ Inmates of institutions did not need ration books, but they often held their clothing and sweets rationing coupons individually.

complicate the stock, security, and accounting measures. The adventures with the Royal Commission on Population are perhaps the best example of the non-recurring 'odd jobs'. The Ministry always made certain rules for these. The job must be done in the way the Ministry thought fit; it must not demand any alteration of method or principle; it must not be too obviously unconnected with food supply;¹ it must not savour of unpopular pressure on the public. For instance, in 1944 the Ministry agreed, very reluctantly, that the issue of ration books to full-time Civil Defence and National Fire Service workers should be done through local authorities and that these classes should be refused at sub-offices. (The Board of Trade wanted to impound their clothing coupon debts for uniform issued to them.) But when the Home Office wanted the books to be collected in bulk without identity cards, the Ministry refused to modify its machinery to this extent. To its relief, for it did not feel happy about its part, the scheme was dropped.

In 1944 the Ministry was able, by using the identity card, to regain the simplicity from which it had had to depart in 1940. It might appear that this was a belated acceptance of the recommendations of the Beveridge Committee.² But the ultimate relationship between rationing and National Registration that had been worked out between 1940 and 1942 was not based on the platform that rationing might be used as a 'means to control civilian life in war'. Rationing administrators, though recognising that rationing was the main support of the National Register, had yet sought to give that support as unobtrusively as possible and had, by a different route, arrived at a relationship far closer than that envisaged by the Committee. It was based on ingenuity rather than logic. When, in 1946, a Food Control Committee asked by what right identity cards were asked for when ration books were reissued, it was told that the issue of ration books was not really based on the identity card at all; the reissue of ration books by the Food Executive Officer was merely made the occasion for an inspection of identity cards by his *alter ego*, the National Registration Officer.

V

The later history of 'fusion' was, compared with what had gone

¹ The Ministry was chary of allowing propaganda leaflets to be inserted in the new ration books. Its excuse (which was true enough) was that to slip a leaflet into each book would slow up the reissue operation; its reason was that it did not wish food rationing to be associated with too much official pressure unconnected with food.

² See p. 462 above. The Committee, however, had suggested that the identity card might be used only for the initial issue, not for subsequent reissues.

before, an anti-climax. The amalgamation of the local offices had been announced as the first stage only, to be followed by integration of procedures and records. This second stage was never carried as far as some had hoped. There were some immediate results. The Maintenance Registers (extended after the 1943 issue of ration books to cover the whole local adult population) became the population registers for the joint local offices; they continued, of course, to be maintained by National Registration's centralised removals system.¹ The reference-leaf registers were not abolished because they were, with the alphabetical filing order, a useful complement to the Maintenance Registers, but they reverted to a purely food (and clothing) role, and in 1944 ceased to be kept up-to-date.² Reference-leaves were no longer transferred between Food Offices as part of the removals procedure; a Food Office created a new reference-leaf for its register when a 'removal in' was notified, and 'dead' leaves remained in the register until, after the annual re-issue of ration books, it started afresh with new ones. The re-issue of ration books was also, as has been seen, made infinitely simpler. But the two procedures (one to notify change of retailer, the other, change of address) continued to run side by side, with the added duty of notification to the Electoral Registration Officer, and it was not until after the war that the rationing (R.G.12A) notices were routed through Southport and then only to save Food Offices sorting and addressing. The Service authorities continued to send lapsed identity cards to Southport, and ration books to Colwyn Bay. (The former did not wish to assume responsibility for the clothing books.) 'Fusion' remained, in fact, personal rather than operational; officials at all levels worked together in an increasingly close relationship and the result was a co-ordination, rather than an integration, of procedures; a valuable result, but not the one that had been aimed at.

The advocates of more complete fusion continued to press their case for some while longer; and towards the end of 1943 another Organisation and Methods enquiry, this time from within the Ministry, was launched. The investigator examined the effects of 'fusion' on the local Offices and found a disquieting situation.³ 'Fusion', instead of easing their burden, had in some ways increased it. The Ministry had not expected an immediate saving in manpower—there was the 1943 operation to be carried through, followed by

¹ They could not rely, however, on obtaining notice of removals unaccompanied by change of retailer, except at the annual issue of ration books (see p. 540, below.).

² It would not have been easy to amalgamate the registers. There was no uniform space on the cards (N.R.29's) of the Maintenance Register that could have been used for rationing information, e.g., the serial numbers of ration books, or for clothing.

³ His report was not shown to the Registrar-General.

work on the Electoral Registers¹—but it had hoped for an ultimate saving through the more economical use of manpower and the integration of procedures. 'Fusion', however, by bringing the complexities of National Registration work to Food Offices, had if anything increased their staff problems. Many offices lacked National Registration specialists, for in spite of the Ministry's anxiety to protect their interests, many senior National Registration staff had, owing to the different tempo and conditions in Food Offices, preferred to remain with the local authority when 'fusion' took place, or had subsequently drifted away. Just as serious was the shortage of staff capable of handling the combined jobs, and the investigator felt that some small Offices had fallen into a defeatist attitude to the staff problem. Because of this, and of the shortage of suitable premises, the degree of 'fusion' in practice varied a good deal. At one extreme were the large city Offices in which it had often been a fact before it was regularised. These had food and National Registration specialists at the same counter, or at least in the same room, though even here there were few Offices where the counter staff were completely interchangeable. At the other extreme were Offices that had contrived only a common counter for removals; other National Registration work had to be carried on in a separate room or even in a separate building altogether. Behind the counter there was, as has been seen, little amalgamation; the two local registers, for instance, not only still existed but often had separate staffs to tend them.

The staff problem was not new, for Food Offices had often been raided by the manpower authorities; what was new was that the Ministry of Food no longer had complete control over it. The rationers had brought to a fine art the handling of complicated procedures with the minimum of skilled staff. They had adopted mass production methods and a major operation, such as that of 1943, was broken down into stages, the procedure for each stage being embodied in instructions that were 'tabular and imperative'. As a result, the minimum of skilled staff, capable of dealing with tricky points and with all stages, was needed. Even then, the 1943 reissue of ration books had taxed local Offices to the utmost and rural areas had been seriously handicapped by a shortage of good supervisors.² Standard

¹ This was a difficult task. The Electoral Registers were constructed from the old identity cards—one half being used for this purpose, and the other for completing the Maintenance Registers to cover whole adult population. Since removals were taking place while the construction of the Electoral Registers was going on, corrective files of removals had to be maintained and worked in. These records were handed over to the newly appointed Electoral Registration Officers in January and February 1944.

² There were five stages in issuing a new ration book. The aim of the first three—queue marshal, receptionist, and examiner—was to inspect and code the applicant's documents so that the last stages—writing and issuing—were automatic. The applicant, in fact, passed along an assembly line (or rather, his documents did—they were not given back to him at any stage in case he disappeared in transit). Presiding over all was the mystical 'S'—and the most familiar instruction was 'If in doubt, refer to Supervisor'. In 1942 'S' was known familiarly as the 'snagmaster' but in 1943, one Food

[continued overleaf

counter procedure (such as that for removals) was dealt with in the same way, and the F.O.P.'s (Food Office Procedures) were most ingenious.¹ Great care was taken to adapt instructions to Food Office use and, by 1942, a system of manuals had been developed. Instructions were divided into three classes; the 'lowbrow' or D.L.O.3 ones being the material that should be known to all Food Office staff coming into contact with the public on routine work; the 'middlebrow' or D.L.O.2 type were those that concerned mainly Food Executive Officers, chief clerks, and Food Control Committees; the 'highbrow' D.L.O.1's were confined to background material for the Divisional Food Officer and matters in which he had discretion. Every month, these instructions were edited; the ephemeral and the out-of-date scrapped, and the rest incorporated into the permanent manuals.

This art National Registration had never had to acquire. Its circulars were drafted for specialists rather than unskilled staff, and there was no permanent manual of procedures corresponding to the D.L.O. volumes, only . . . 'a collection of past circulars, frequently ill-kept, often incomplete, always containing much that is obsolete'. The Ministry was not able to apply its own finesse in these matters to the more recondite National Registration methods. Immediately after 'fusion' it had tried without success to get a National Registration manual for the joint offices; any attempt by local officers to precis or 'pre-digest' National Registration instructions had to be severely frowned upon. In November 1944 the Registrar-General was said to be ' . . . very conscious of the need of a manual to service Food Offices' but his electoral commitments were then too heavy to allow for much progress.²

The limits of 'fusion' had, in fact, been set not by its advocates in the Treasury and the Ministry, but by the Registrar-General. 'The agency doctrine', he wrote in February 1943, 'is not an arrangement whereby the Ministry of Food is entrusted with the responsibility for putting my requirements into operation, but an arrangement whereby my local officers are provided with the staff to enable them to carry out my instructions'. The Ministry had to submit the joint Offices to any National Registration work required of them; it was responsible for the way in which they carried out that work and for the best use of their scanty manpower; but it had no control over the way in which this complicated part of their duties was presented to them or over the forms and procedures it involved.

The anomalies of the situation were seen clearly in the position of

Executive Officer remarked that surely 'S' stood for 'superman'. In 1946, the instructions for 'S' were kept apart lest they should daunt those for whom they were not intended.

¹ A specimen will be found on pp. 788-91.

² The manual was issued in 1945; revised and reissued 1951.

the Divisional Food Officers. Their Food Office Visitors included the National Registration side of the joint Offices in their periodic inspection and reports. But they were not National Registration inspectors, and matters arising from their reports would be dealt with directly between National Registration headquarters and the Office concerned. Similarly, any complaint raised by Southport could be remedied without reference to the Divisional Officer—though he would be informed as a matter of courtesy—and the Registrar-General could carry out an independent inspection of any office through a peripatetic headquarters official. The Ministry always hoped that the Registrar-General would come to make more use of Divisional Officers; in fact, this had been one of the reasons for the Organisation and Methods inquiry. The loss of National Registration experts and the lack of a manual meant that the volume of enquiries to Southport was considerable, and this, in turn, meant a delay in receiving rulings that impaired local efficiency still further. The Registrar-General had always been concerned to avoid delegating, or appearing to delegate, any of the National Registration functions vested in him; if Divisional Food Officers even appeared to assume the mantle of interpreters of his instructions, it might seem that he had done so. Although the Ministry assured him that the Divisional Food Officers in no way broke the control of headquarters over local officers in rationing matters, but merely acted as the 'captains of the team', this point always prevented any further integration of Divisional Officers into National Registration organisation.

'It is difficult for anyone concerned with management principles', wrote the Organisation and Methods investigator, 'to write with restraint about a situation in which responsibility for staff and seeing that a job is done is divorced from any official connection with the nature of the job itself, or any position in the administrative hierarchy. It is a situation full of inherent dangers and Divisional Officers could not be blamed if their attitude towards such responsibility as they have been given were entirely negative. Yet, in general, such does not appear to be the case. Some Divisions are even appointing . . . persons to take a responsible interest in N.R. matters. . . . This development could only have arisen through the persistence of the local offices in recognising the paternal relationship of the Divisional Office on this side as well as the Food side of their duties. So far as I know it has not been explicitly put to the N.R.O.s that the Divisional Office has no standing except a disciplinary one in the N.R. field. They must tend to derive the opposite impression from the fact that Food Office Visitors devote part of their visits to an examination of N.R. work.

'From the Registrar-General's point of view this setting up of Divisional experts is quite wrong unless it is restricted to establishment matters. He discourages the local offices from referring queries

via the Divisional Office, and even the Visitors are expected to go no further than making certain routine checks (although here again the local offices inevitably seek their guidance, and they must tend to lose face if they cannot give it)'.¹

By the time, however, that this report had been thoroughly considered in the Ministry (September 1944) it was out-of-date. The end of the war seemed to be in sight and there was no point in undertaking a difficult and delicate campaign to influence National Registration methods. As for the many suggestions in the report for amalgamation of procedures and records, they now seemed positively dangerous.

'... we feel' (wrote the senior official responsible for rationing) 'that we ought now to take a limited view of fusion. We know that rationing will come to an end some time and we suspect that the closure will be applied to national registration. It is unlikely, however, that the two events will coincide and we must be careful to see (a) that we can work in disregard of national registration and (b) that the National Registration Office can revert to the control of the Registrar-General should it outlive rationing'.

The next year, indeed, saw a reversion to the mood and situation of 1938.¹ The identity card was the obvious target for those who wished to make an immediate bonfire of war-time controls, and once again (National Service being kept in the background) rationing administrators sought to make it clear that the National Register could be described as valuable to rationing but not as essential to it. One reference in the House of Lords went far beyond the agreed brief when, on 8th March 1945, the Lord Chancellor (Viscount Simon) told Lord Reading: 'You could not have administration of the food code . . . unless you had identity cards. . . . It is absolutely essential for the purposes of administration of anything like a food code that there should be identity cards'.² In December, the Minister of Health (Mr. Bevan) defended National Registration more temperately from the rationing point of view ('The National Register also renders valuable services to the Ministry of Food')³, and rationing's place in the front line was, henceforth, taken by electoral registration.

VI

The Ministry's local officers had never become thoroughly reconciled to the connection with the National Register, and in April 1947

¹ When the Ministry of Labour ceased to register 16-year olds, Rationing Division refused to allow the ration book reissue to be used as the means of compelling them to exchange their identity cards for adult ones.

² *Official Report*, House of Lords, Cols. 433-4.

³ *Official Report*, House of Commons (5th December 1945), Col. 2511.

it was suggested, at a conference of Divisional Food Officers, that Food Offices might now rid themselves of National Registration work. But Headquarters felt that the National Register might collapse without rationing support, and, at that time, the Electoral Register depended on it. The most economical way of giving the necessary support was through 'fusion'; a return to the situation that had existed before 1942 was unthinkable, for any saving in staff, that might result from Food Offices being relieved of National Registration work, would be offset by the staff needed to run National Registration Offices and to maintain day-to-day contact with them. The Ministry concluded, therefore, that as long as both rationing and National Registration existed, so should 'fusion'.

This decision, it will be noted, was taken on grounds of the national interest; as with the *concordat* of 1939, there was no admission that rationing itself might need the National Register. Events after 1942 were no more than a return to the attitude of the Food (Defence Plans) Department in February 1937: that if a central index happened to exist, rationing would use it. Rationing officials were as far away as ever from feeling that they would have had to create an index, had it not existed. They did, of course, feel the need for 'fusion'; but this was the only practical outcome of the shifts to which the two services had resorted from 1940 to 1942, and these (they would have argued) were because rationing machinery was inadequate, not to rationing needs, but to those of the National Register.

Those who, in 1918, had declared a central index of consumers to be unnecessary to rationing, had done so on the ground that the tie to the retailer, already existing for sugar, was a sufficient guarantee against fraud. The argument for and against such an index in these circumstances turns into one of degree. The National Register, in theory the best way of ensuring that only one ration book was issued to each person, was not, until 1949, used to the full, for the identity card was not stamped when a ration book was issued against it. Nor was it completely flawless; for it had been based, in the last resort, on the statements of those enumerated, unaccompanied by any 'proof of personality'. People might evade the enumeration, or be enumerated more than once under different names; or fictitious persons might be enumerated, as when one household, with rationing in mind, created an extra child at the enumeration and maintained the fraud until 'he' was called up for military service, ten years later. Nevertheless, the National Register was an incomparably more thorough piece of machinery than anything the rationers, ingenious but inveterate improvisers that they were, ever contrived. And it is this that makes one doubt whether the degree of fusion of the two systems that some contemplated in 1942 could ever have been accomplished.

To admit the virtues of the National Register as a safeguard against

fraud and duplication does not, however, take the student of rationing technique very far. The cost of the disease has still to be balanced against the cost of the remedy. Had the war turned out to be the kind of war the pre-war planners professed to expect, the incentive to fraud and the need to prevent it would have been increased; but the resources of time, paper, and manpower, available to deal with it must have been diminished. In such a war, the elaborate clerical manipulations of 1940 and 1941 appear almost inconceivable; but so too, perhaps, does the tie to the retailer and its corollary, a special operation upon the ration documents of each and every consumer who changes his address and his retailer.

In any event, the tie to the retailer is certainly not an indispensable feature of rationing, so far as the mechanism of distribution is concerned; it was touch and go, in 1917, whether it would be retained, and had it not been, it might never have emerged again. Yet without the tie to the retailer, the sanction that secured the continual amendment of the National Register is gone, and it must rely solely, so far as food is concerned, on the periodic sanction afforded by the reissue of ration books. Into the consequences that this would have had for the National Register it is not the business of this history to enter; but it may be remarked that if rationing administrators inclined to regard the Register as a lame dog in the charge of a formidable master, they were only enabled to do so by the weakness of its political position. In that respect, the fears of the Food (Defence Plans) Department were not altogether groundless.

C:
Rationing as an
Administrative Problem

Part III: Expansion and Reform
in Controlled Distribution, 1940-45

CHAPTER XXXII

The First Year of Rationing January 1940—January 1941

I

THE YEAR 1940 marks the last chapter in the history of the 1918 rationing system. The second Ministry of Food started off with the rationing system of its predecessor, and ended the war having a system of its own. The turning point came in July 1941, when it was decided to rely on the counterfoil as the main basis for a retailer's supplies. 'We recognised', wrote the responsible official later, '. . . that for assessing the retailer's needs one system of measurement was enough; if we knew the number of his registered customers we could do without his coupons'. The Beveridge Committee had thought that rationing might begin without the coupon, and take to it when scarcity set in. At first sight, development in the second World War seemed exactly the opposite. The full rigour of the rationing machinery was deployed in times of comparative plenty, and, when they grew harder, loosening began. Nonetheless, rationing did resort to the coupon when times grew hard. The main rationing system for the staple foods was loosened, but at the same time supplemented by new and independent coupon-replacement schemes for lesser foods.

Rationing of sugar, butter, and bacon began on 8th January 1940; meat was added in March,¹ tea,² margarine, and cooking fats, in July. As far as consumers were concerned, it ran smoothly and acceptably from the beginning. Behind the scenes, however, inevitable running-in troubles merged into a questioning of the whole system that led, after six months, to the appointment of a committee to overhaul it.

The first stage in the introduction of rationing, the issue of ration books to consumers, has already been described.³ The second stage, the re-direction of supplies according to consumers' registrations, began with retailers sending Food Offices forms of Application for Supplies (the 'I' forms), giving their registered customers, the requirements of the establishments that had registered with them, and the

¹ Meat rationing is dealt with in Chapters XXXVII–XL.

² Tea rationing is dealt with in Chapters XLI–XLIII.

³ pp. 468–73.

names of their suppliers. (The first two items were already known to Food Offices because they held the registration counterfoils and one part of establishments' Preliminary Demand Notes. The third, however, was not.¹) From this information Food Offices prepared the initial permits to obtain supplies (the '2' forms). They added various weighing-up and rounding-off allowances, but, contrary to the practice of 1918, no margin for sales to unregistered customers; the retailer had to meet these from stock and then, if necessary, seek extra supplies. Applications were to be made and permits issued every four weeks. Finally, retailers had to render four-weekly² statements (on the '3' forms) of their stocks at the beginning and end of the period, and their purchases and sales during it. With these forms they sent in all collected coupons and the Order Forms they had received from establishments.

The most important of all these forms was the *buying permit*. It ran for four weeks but specified a weekly quantity that the retailer must not exceed. The calculation of the permit started from the number of registered customers. Food Offices filed the registration counterfoils to form a register of the local buying population, and kept a running record of each retailer's gains and losses in registrations on a 'vast sheet' called R.G.M.3.³ The number of registrations had also to be filled in by the retailer on his '1' forms and '3' forms.

What complicated the system was the effort to adjust the permits to actual sales. The primary source of evidence for these, the coupon, played as lowly a part as it had in 1918. Food Offices relied instead on a secondary source, the retailer's returns of performance. By adjusting main permits, or by refusing supplementary permits, in the light of stock figures on these returns, the retailer could be forced to use any surplus, resulting from under-consumption, to meet the demands of new or occasional customers or even of his regular customers. Thus the mainspring of the system was, in spite of appearances, the counterfoil, and the coupon was used remotely—to check, or merely encourage accuracy in, the retailer's return. It was therefore a luxury and, when the time came, was the first part of the apparatus to be shed.

This system of overlapping checks was often defended on the ground that the retailer must be made to feel answerable for the rationed foods entrusted to him. It could also be defended on grounds of utility. Even in 1918 when, for a time, there had been a coupon-checking centre, not more than 5 per cent. of the coupons had been

¹ They had also to be told in what proportion retailers wished their quantities split among their various suppliers.

² Fortnightly for bacon and ham.

³ A separate one for each commodity. (See pp. 637-9, below, for the subsequent history of this form.)

sent there. For practical purposes, what the retailer said had to be evidence; an attempt was made to conceal this by making him provide Food Offices with the data from which they could, given time, verify what he had said. By 1941, however, rationing officials were freely admitting what would have been heresy in 1940: that coupon-cutting without using the coupons as a basis of distribution was a 'troublesome bluff'.

The bluff began to be called very soon. Rationing had hardly begun before retailers were suggesting that coupons might be cancelled instead. Food Executive Officers, for their part, had been asking since November 1939 what they were to do with the coupons. Were they all to be counted? Or weighed? If not, what size sample was to be taken? As the answer to these questions affected the organisation and staffing of local offices, a ruling was urgently required. In January, Headquarters decided that most coupon packages must remain unopened, but that Food Offices should carry out sample checks and keep coupons for six weeks in case some retailer's return gave grounds for suspicion. The question had still not been satisfactorily resolved when coupon-cutting was abolished a year later.

The problem was how to check the coupons just enough to convince retailers that their statements were being verified. Retailers were making it very difficult for Food Offices to do this. A report from Leeds in February 1940 revealed that many retailers put all their coupons into the official envelopes¹ provided for, say, bacon coupons only (or into paper bags), and enclosed forms and general correspondence with them as well. Retailers who were asked for a form already sent in, or who received no acknowledgment of a letter that also lay in a sack of unopened coupon envelopes, naturally began to draw embarrassing conclusions. If the bluff were to be maintained (Leeds argued) then coupon envelopes must be opened and checked, and this, in turn, would demand more staff, room, and equipment; this would not be worth while, for coupons were not an effective means of controlling retailers' sales. The practice of depositing whole coupon-pages enabled retailers to cut out and present coupons

¹ Retailers were given official envelopes in which to return the coupons for each food. These envelopes were severely criticised, and in March were re-designed. They were copies of the 1918 ones, and were quite unsuited for sending through the post because they were covered with printed instructions. As the only indication of their destination was one line for the name of the Food Office, while two lines were provided for the retailer's own name and address, he often got them delivered back again. They also contained spaces on which he could state either the weight of the package or the number of coupons it contained. The first was inappropriate, because the Ministry had decided against weighing coupons—it had been discovered in 1918 that their weight could be increased by damping or greasing them—and large firms soon realised that they did not have to count the coupons. As the Ministry could not compel them to do so, these spaces were left off the re-designed envelopes. (An attempt was, however, made in 1946 to compel retailers to count bread units.)

whether or not the rations they represented had been bought. Coupons should, it was urged, be abolished.

The depositing of pages had been allowed partly to save time in the shops and partly to enable postal and telephone trade to survive. The Ministry regarded it as a concession, because deposited coupons could be cut out at the end of the week instead of at the time of sale.¹ It is difficult to see how the 'concession' could have been avoided, given the existence of large department stores doing as much as 60 per cent. of their trade (as one of them claimed) with postal and telephone customers, and, at the other extreme, country shops serving isolated houses and villages through van roundsmen. The depositing of pages was popular with retailers² and with consumers; it was unpopular with Headquarters because it constituted a loophole in the system;³ it was very unpopular indeed with Food Executive Officers because many people did not reclaim their deposited pages when they moved, and appeared at their new Food Offices with ration books that were little more than a pair of covers.⁴ In June 1940 the Ministry threatened to withdraw the 'concession' when the new ration book came into force, but, after pleas from traders' organisations, allowed it to continue 'for the time being' on condition that unused coupons were returned to Food Offices instead of being destroyed and that retailers kept registers of sales against deposited pages.⁵ In June 1941 local officers in reception areas made a fresh effort to get the practice abolished but the Ministry finally decided that it would have to be tolerated. Indeed, at the end of that year, a good deal of thought was given to making physically possible the depositing of pages from the points-rationing book.

In March 1940, Headquarters was inclined to think that Leeds

¹ Unused coupons were supposed to be destroyed.

² Except pork butchers (p. 671, below).

³ In August 1940, the Director of Bacon and Ham Distribution remarked that he had six ration books in his household, the bacon pages of which were deposited. He was the only one who ate bacon, and, as Area Bacon and Ham Officers were reporting a 100 per cent. 'take-up', he could not help wondering what was happening to the supplies on his other five ration books.

⁴ To many consumers, remarked Food Executive Officers in despair, a ration book was a ration book whether it contained any coupons or not. The problem was particularly troublesome during the waves of evacuation in the autumn of 1940 and the summer of 1941. The Divisional Food Officer of the South-Eastern Region reported that 85 per cent. of the refugees arriving in his area had ration books with no coupons in them; in 1941, the rural areas around Plymouth told the same story; Hull had to replace some 4,000 pages lost when shops were destroyed. Food Offices had to issue temporary cards and try to reclaim the deposited pages from the old areas. They pointed out that, during bombing, far more pages were lost if one shop were hit than if they had remained distributed among households inside ration books.

⁵ The idea was that, if any retailer consistently failed to return any unused coupons, his sales register should be inspected. He was not to be required by Order to keep such a register; enforcement officers were to encourage him to do so. There is no evidence that the Ministry had much success with this device; the East of Scotland butchers, for instance, threatened to go out of business rather than keep sales registers.

was making too heavy weather of the coupon problem: 'Regimentation of retailers will always be a quest and never an accomplishment'. The quest must go on. A little ingenuity should enable Food Offices to convince retailers that 'their trade in rationed foods is under strict surveillance'; for instance, they should keep a register of coupon packets received and be very prompt to enquire of any retailer who was late in sending his in.

II

While Food Offices were struggling in the first few months with what were, to them, the 'unbusinesslike' habits of retailers, they were themselves being criticised by Commodity Divisions for exactly the same faults. Food Offices, the complaint ran, were not giving enough thought to what happened to permits once they had left the retailer's hands.

The arrangements for distribution beyond the retailer varied for each commodity. Take sugar, a standard, non-perishable, and therefore comparatively simple, food as an example. The retailer sent his permit to his wholesaler; the wholesaler summarised the permits he received (by local Food Divisions) and sent a statement of his requirements, together with the supporting permits, to his dealer; the dealer (a direct buyer from factory or refiner) checked the wholesaler's summary, prepared his own indent (he might also receive permits direct from large retail firms) and submitted it to the Area Sugar Officer; the Area Officer gave him a voucher to buy, nominated the refiner from whom he must buy, and sent the chosen refiner a copy of the voucher. Oils and Fats Division took retailers' permits higher up, to their Area Distribution Officers, who gave the wholesaler a master permit on them. Butter and Cheese Division allowed supplies to come down to meet the permits by allowing the wholesaler to keep them and releasing supplies to him on a declaration that he held permits for the amount he had asked for. Bacon wholesalers also indented on their Area Bacon Distribution Officers on the strength of a summary of permits.

In every case a fresh set of permits set off a reaction that began when the permit left the Food Office and ended when the food entered the shop. The cycle could only function efficiently if Food Offices prepared the permits in a 'businesslike' manner (e.g., did not leave the name of the Food Division off the sugar permits) and got them out to time, and if retailers forwarded them promptly. (It may as well be said at once that Rationing Division could and did do something about the first two requirements but that the last was

only met by changing the system.) Any failing on the part of Food Offices was, therefore, likely to be followed by a reaction of a different kind; from aggrieved wholesalers to an Area Distribution Officer, from him to his Commodity Division, from the Commodity Division to Rationing Division, and thence, if the case were proved, to the offending Food Office via its Divisional Food Officer. This process could also work the other way, as in November 1940, when Food Offices received a revised bacon scheme just after new bacon permits had been written, but before they had been posted.

The duties of the rationing officials at Headquarters (hereafter referred to as Rationing Division)¹ were delicate and not easy to define. For the main foods, they were directly responsible for all the procedures and documents in a field bounded by the issue of documents to consumers and that of permits to retailers. The duties of Commodity Divisions were 'merely to see that supplies reach the distributors in sufficient quantities to meet the amounts vouched for by the [Food Offices]'. (This was a definition by a rationing official. It was on one occasion, under stress of shortage, translated by Meat Division into 'honouring a blank cheque'.) Commodity Divisions tended to contemplate the machinery for the control of the retailer with mixed feelings. The utmost economy of food could only be achieved by frequently adjusting supplies to the changing pattern of demand, i.e., by short permit periods. On the other hand, wholesalers undoubtedly preferred a more static situation, i.e., long permit periods. The attitude of Commodity Divisions² was, therefore, liable to vary with the state of their stocks. When times were good, they did not want the retailer squeezed too hard; when times were bad, they called for a tightening of rationing machinery.

Rationing Headquarters (who naturally took a less opportunist view of the rationing machinery) occupied a pivotal position. Too loose a control might bring the system into disrepute, or lead to a waste of supplies that might threaten ration levels, inefficient Food Offices could disorganise distribution, badly-designed forms could

¹ This is not strictly accurate until May 1941. In November 1939, Rationing Policy on the one hand, and Divisional and Local Organisation on the other, were Branches within different Headquarters Divisions. (Though the same official was responsible for both.) In May 1940 they became different Branches within the same Division; in May 1941, each became a Division in its own right within the newly-created Department of Divisional and Local Services. The two Divisions were housed in the same building at Colwyn Bay and the senior official responsible at first for Rationing, then for them both, took a keen interest in the detailed organisation of Food Offices.

The use of the word 'Division' to denote both an administrative group at Headquarters and a local geographical area is confusing and needs to be borne in mind. The latter will usually be referred to as a 'local food Division' unless it is mentioned by name, e.g., Midland Division, when the geographical prefix should serve to distinguish it from Rationing or a Supply Division.

² Except, perhaps, that of Sugar Division, which feared that subsidised sugar for domestic consumption might find its way into manufacturing channels. (See p. 634 *seq.* below.)

harass retailers without affording Commodity Divisions any information of value. On the other hand, Commodity Divisions might demand new procedures or an *ad hoc* set of statistics¹ at an inconvenient moment in the Food Office cycle of work. Rationing Headquarters had to adapt their local machinery to the needs of both consumers and the Supply Divisions, and *vice versa*; as time went on they became experts in 'the art of the possible', and expected to be consulted on what was practicable or acceptable before policy was determined. Thus they were able to kill a bacon/cheese option for agricultural workers, a half bacon ration for children, coupon-cutting for oranges, and to scotch registration for onions. On the other hand, it was their duty to be prepared with documents and machinery—hence the care in providing 'insurances' in the ration book—suitable for any policy that might be decided on.

As one would expect, a good deal of tuning was needed in the first few months. Commodity Divisions complained, for instance, that Food Offices were giving permits for ridiculously small amounts that obviously represented only the registrations of the retailer, his family, and a few friends. After considerable discussion it was decided that, because of the difficulty in distinguishing between these and the genuine struggling retailer, the Ministry could not advise Food Control Committees to transfer such registrations. The remedy, felt Rationing Division, must lie with wholesalers, who need not accept such small orders.² It was not until 1941 that the 'minimum registration rule' was adopted.³ *Supplementary* permits given for 'paltry quantities' were another matter. Bacon Division instanced a wholesaler who received 15 supplementaries from one retailer in one day for such quantities as $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. This was a sin against the rationing system as well as against wholesalers, for it meant that Food Offices were giving supplementaries automatically without reference to stocks.

The need for supplementary permits arose from the inevitable inaccuracy of the main permit. It was out-of-date before it even left

¹ e.g., amounts authorised to caterers, catering consumption, retail stocks, amounts authorised on permits, 'off-take', etc. These figures had to be extracted from permits and '3' forms, and it was not until 1941 that the collection of statistics was put on a routine basis, and forms re-designed so that information could be readily extracted from them.

² Commodity Divisions also asked that Food Offices should demand evidence from catering establishments of previous purchases at wholesale. The trouble was that some caterers had fled from their retailers lest they should, under rationing, be charged full retail prices. There was no need for them to do so because prescribed prices were maximum prices only. Large retailers who had lost such trade were asking to be registered as secondary wholesalers. This, however, would have created a very paradoxical situation because wholesalers' sales to catering establishments counted as retail sales and they had to receive retail licences for this trade. (Food Control Committees [Local Distribution] Order, S.R. & O. (1940) No. 1312.) The purpose of this definition was, first, to bring this trade within the sphere of Food Offices, secondly, to enable wholesalers to continue to do business at prices some way between wholesale and retail.

³ See pp. 643-6 below.

the Food Office because (when permits were made eight-weekly) it had to be posted twenty-three days before the date on which it came into operation. This was to allow time for it to clamber up the ladder of distribution; in addition, the records on which it was based had to be 'frozen' when the task of writing began and this, in a large Food Office, might take three weeks.¹ At one time of a year—when ration books were reissued and consumers were allowed to change retailers—the main permit was even more out of touch. 'It takes 58 days from the word "go",' explained an official in 1941, 'till registration takes effect through the resultant permit'.² By 1942 it had been decided that there was not much point in Food Offices writing a set of permits that would bear hardly any relation at all to current demand, and a whole permit period was dropped, the current permits being extended for eight weeks. If, as a result of all this inaccuracy, the retailer's main permit proved too high, any surplus should be revealed in his stock return; if it proved too low, he could apply at any time for a supplementary.

There were two kinds of supplementary; the recurring, given to meet new registrations, and the non-recurring, given to replace occasional sales. Both kinds were regarded by Commodity Divisions as a nuisance, because they compelled constant re-adjustment of supplies, and a danger, because they meant inflation; the increased demand for which they stood made itself felt more zealously than any decrease. Retailers were prompt to send on new counterfoils, and present coupons from temporary documents; a decrease, on the other hand, could not be dealt with until the main permit was revised and, moreover, might never be discerned at all. If a customer went on holiday, the only evidence of this temporary decrease in demand lay in a much more fallible instrument than the cut coupon—the retailer's stock return. A permanent decrease might also go unnoticed; if, for

¹ In December 1940 the Glasgow F.E.O. stated that his 'books were closed' at least two weeks before permits were issued. In November 1941 Birmingham claimed that permit writing took twenty working days.

² In July 1940, when the second ration book was issued, consumers were changing retailers from about 24th June to 6th July. New permits came into force during this period and so, for most of their run, were quite unreal. Normal inaccuracy was not regained until the next set on 25th August. In January 1941 there was no general re-registration but an optional re-registration was allowed between 20th January and 3rd February. New permits were issued 3 days before this began and went into force a week after it had ended. New permits reflecting the new pattern of registrations could not take effect until April (to the inconvenience of Meat Division, see p. 676 *seq.*) Bacon Division, which was also in a perilous stock position, also suffered from this re-registration. Its Distribution Officer for the Northern Area said that there had been 25,000 changes of registration in Newcastle alone, and that hundreds of supplementary permits reflecting increases were coming in; the retailers who had lost customers were safely in possession of inflated permits for the rest of the period. In June 1941, with the fourth ration book, Rationing Officials tried a short-cut. They offered Commodity Divisions unpunctual accurate permits instead of punctual inaccurate ones. The old permits were extended for two weeks beyond the new period (28th July) while Food Offices hastily wrote six-week permits based on the new registration. This was a failure; the permits were so late that distribution was out of gear for the rest of the period.

instance, the Service Authorities failed to impound and return a recruit's ration book, his registration might continue to attract supplies, not merely for the rest of a permit period, but for the rest of the life of the book.

Rationing Division sought to meet the Commodity Divisions' objections to supplementary permits by urging Food Offices to apply the rationing system properly and to use their common sense. Supplementaries must not be issued without reference to registrations lost and to the stock position, and they should, if possible, be delayed until they could be combined into a reasonable amount or even until they could be added to the next main permit. However, although it helped to bring about a radical change in the permit system, the problem was never entirely solved.

III

The commodities that gave special trouble in 1940 were bacon and margarine. The first is noteworthy because, like meat, it soon began to 'contract out' of the main rationing system; but the initial difficulties with it arose because, until Denmark fell, there was too much.¹ The ration was 4 ounces uncooked, 3½ ounces cooked. Certain parts of the pig—*chaps, knuckles, and picnics*—were unrationed; so were bacon and ham sold by catering establishments for consumption *on* the premises, and ham sandwiches for consumption *off* the premises.² On 17th January 1940 *cooked* ham and gammon, and *uncooked* fore and gammon hocks were freed; on 25th January the ration was doubled; on 8th March, *cooked* shoulder meat was taken off the ration.³ Even so, bacon stocks were described as 'dangerously high'⁴; the ration did not return to 4 ounces until June, and some unrationed bacon persisted until October.

Food Offices found it hard to keep up with these continual modifications. They had to send out a stream of supplementary permits to caterers, and to retailers registered as caterers (for the sale of cooked ham), because original estimates of requirements had been made on the assumption that cooked ham would be rationed. The ration had been doubled three days after new permits had gone out. These

¹ This would not have been such a problem in 1918 when most bacon was still 'hard-cured', i.e., with salt and borax. But salt bacon had gone out of favour, and the use of borax was forbidden. In April 1940 the Ministry obtained permission for a partial return to the use of borax (S.R. & O. (1940) No. 547; Bacon [Addition of Borax] Order).

² This led to some retailers complaining that their rivals were selling a few inches of wafer-thin bread on top of ¼ lb. ham and calling it a ham sandwich.

³ S.R. & O.s (1939) No. 1856; (1940) Nos. 13, 14, 69, 110, 324, 903, 1848.

⁴ Vol. I, p. 121.

could be treated as worth twice their face value; however the lot made out four weeks later were found by Area Bacon Distribution Officers to be based variously on a 4-ounce ration, an 8-ounce ration, or on some compromise that none but the Food Office could understand. These were as nothing, however, to the general confusion arising from the effort to apply the rationing machinery in a glut.

At the best of times Food Offices could not relate a retailer's bacon purchases to his sales, for bacon went into a shop with bone and was sold without it. In addition, it shrank while it was in the shop. The figure for purchases on the retailer's fortnightly return (B.H.3) was, therefore, a gross figure, his sales figure a net figure, and there was not much point in Food Offices trying to compare them.¹ The purchases figure would not correspond to permit quantities either, partly because the latter were for boneless ration weight, partly because wholesalers sent out long sides of bacon whenever possible and evened-out deliveries over several weeks. As for stocks, these would have gone bad or been disposed of by the time the returns reached Food Offices.

It was therefore inevitable that the rationing machinery should fit bacon somewhat loosely; it did not fit at all when, as the Director of Bacon Distribution put it, only an expert could tell which part of the pig was rationed and which was not. In March 1940, a layman's view of the pig was, roughly, that the middle (the back on top and the streaky underneath) was always rationed whether cooked or uncooked; the shoulder meat at one end, and the gammon at the other, were unrationed when cooked, but rationed when sliced and uncooked (fore-hock + collar = shoulder meat; gammon hock + corner gammon = whole gammon; whole gammon, when trimmed = a ham); hocks when sold as hocks (i.e., with bone) were always unrationed.²

The retailer had therefore two categories of bacon to handle; the uncooked rationed bacon that he needed to meet the requirements of his registered customers, and the cooked ham and uncooked hocks that he could sell off coupon. What confused Food Offices and for that matter, Bacon Division, was that bacon could pass from one category to the other by being cooked. A retailer obtained his cooked

¹ Rationing Division would have liked the percentage allowance for boning and shrinkage to have been added to permits by Food Offices. But the bone content of the various cuts varied so much that this was a task for experts. The allowances were made by the Distribution Officers when they allocated to wholesalers, and were passed on by the latter to retailers.

² An intricate debate arose that summer on whether or not hocks were unrationed when boned and sliced. Bacon Division held that they were only unrationed when sold with bone; Legal Department that a hock was still a hock when boned and sliced, and, therefore, unrationed uncooked. For the purpose of the Order freeing hocks (S.R. & O. (1940) No. 69) sliced hock was still hock, i.e., ration free. For the purpose of the price-fixing Orders (*ibid.*, Nos. 12, 457, 896) which did not distinguish between sliced collar and sliced hock, it was sliced shoulder meat and therefore rationed uncooked. Bacon Division, which did not want boneless uncooked unrationed bacon in circulation, said that the law had better be changed. In October, however, hocks had to be put back on the ration.

ham in three ways: he bought shoulders and hams already cooked, or raw for cooking (75 per cent. of retailers were said to do their own cooking), or, and most important, he could cook surplus ham and gammon that had been allocated to him for his ration requirements. It was thus a waste of time for Food Offices to scan the retailer's return for a surplus that could legitimately be cooked and sold off-ration. For Bacon Division the situation was equally confusing. It had no idea what its *ration* commitments were because the retailer's permit, on which distribution was based, did not distinguish between ration bacon and bacon being bought cooked or for cooking. At the end of February it suggested that bacon rationing must be revised, or, preferably, suspended. The second was rejected lest the machinery should rust, and, at the end of May, a revised bacon scheme was presented to Food Offices.

The essence of this scheme was that rationed and unrationed bacon should be treated separately. Retailers would be given three permits: for Category A—rationed bacon, Category B—unrationed uncooked bacon, i.e., hocks, and Category C—unrationed cooked. Category A supplies alone would be guaranteed. By these arrangements Bacon Division hoped to learn something of its ration commitments; Rationing Division, to regain some control of the retailer and restore the authority of the permit. The reason for Category A is obvious; Category C was intended to keep control of caterers; Category B was to regularise the purchase of hocks. A retailer who got long sides was bound to get hocks, and, as these corresponded to about 25 per cent. of the rationed bacon in a side, Food Officers were told that they must automatically give a Category B permit for 25 per cent. of the Category A quantity.

One category had not been provided for; bacon that a retailer cooked himself. Unfortunately, the joints that a 'retailer-boiler' might buy for cooking comprised all three Categories. They consisted, when raw, of Category A shoulder or gammon, and Category B hocks; they were sold when cooked as Category C. Thus, Category A collar (rationed when raw) + Category B forehock (unrationed when raw) = Category C unrationed cooked shoulder meat. Bacon Division did not want bacon, destined to be sold off the ration, to cloud the statistics of its Category A commitments; Rationing Division did not want uncooked Category A bacon on Category C permits, because a permit 'should say what it means and mean what it says'; and a Category C permit said 'cooked'. For a desperate moment, a fourth class—AA—was considered for bacon that would be rationed if the retailer did not cook it and unrationed if he did; but the thought of trying to explain this to Food Offices was too much. Instead, Category C was re-defined to include 'bacon intended for cooking'. A retailer might receive a Category C permit for half his average sales of cooked

ham during May. At the same time, Food Offices were reminded that he could still cook 'any part' of his Category A allotment not taken up on the ration; so that they must not be surprised if Category C sales exceeded the quantities authorised on a Category C permit.

On 10th June, however, the ration had to be reduced to 4 ounces; the problem was no longer to find an orthodox method of not enforcing the rationing system, but to protect Bacon Division's stocks. Unfortunately, many Food Offices had by now captured the liberal spirit so recently enjoined on them. They were being lavish with supplementary permits to reception areas (including areas that only *expected* refugees), and some were including bacon in the week's emergency stocks that retailers were being encouraged to hold as part of the anti-invasion preparations. In addition, summer trade in cooked ham was in full swing; there was a heavy legitimate demand for supplementary permits because a general re-registration was taking place, and it would be some weeks before main permits could be adjusted to the new pattern of demand.

In these circumstances, Food Offices (according to Area Bacon Distribution Officers) had made a 'dreadful muddle' of the new permits. Some had simply issued old-style unclassified permits; some had issued no Category B permits, thus failing to legalise the receipt of hocks; others had gone to the other extreme and regarded Category B as a sort of general 25 per cent. bonus to retailers. The cooked ham trade, even allowing for the seasonal demand, appeared very flourishing, seeing that Bacon Division was issuing very few shoulders and gammons for cooking. This, it was discovered, was because the instruction that the retailer could cook 'any part' of his Category A allotment not taken up was being interpreted to mean 'any part' of the pig. He should, of course, have cooked shoulder and gammon only; any other part that was cooked should be sold as the 3½ ounce cooked ration.¹ Even when this was put right, there remained the impression that Category B entitled the retailer to 25 per cent. extra bacon.

Bacon Division therefore decided that Category B must go. From 26th August, bacon was to consist of two categories only: A—rationed, C—cooked unrationed. This was announced in a circular that consolidated all previous instructions, that dealt with every misconception that had arisen since February, and was accompanied by a disarming letter to Divisional Food Officers:

'we fully appreciate here', they were told, 'how tiresome the difficulties . . . must have been . . . in the last month or two. Unfortunately even now it seems impossible to find any simple solution. The pig is an obstinate beast and . . . will not fit into any simple rationing

¹ The 'cooked' ration was abolished in January 1941 (S.R. & O. (1941) No. 15).

system. . . . If anyone can suggest a simpler solution which will effectively control supplies and at the same time avoid dislocating customary trade practices . . . we shall be very glad to hear of it'.

August saw the beginning of the end of this novel interlude. By October, bacon rationing was easier to handle simply because all bacon was back on the ration. Hocks must be boned, sliced, and sold on coupons; shoulder meat could no longer be cooked for off-ration sale; no more issues under Category C were made.¹ The retailer could still cook and sell off ration any surplus ham or gammon from his Category A allotment, but bacon was so scarce that few retailers were likely to have any surplus.

Bacon supply prospects were worsened in September, when the Treasury declined to sanction the full programme of imports from Canada. Among the economy measures that were put before the Food Policy Committee as being necessary in consequence, was a halving of the child's bacon ration. It seemed unreasonable to some that children should have a half-ration of meat, which was (for the moment) plentiful, and a full ration of bacon, which was not; and though Bacon Division pointed out that the saving would be small, the proposal was accepted by the Food Policy Committee. It was not one that could be adopted immediately, or even when the next permits came to be written; Food Offices would each have had either to go through thousands of counterfoils to pick out those from children's ration books, or ask retailers how many child customers they had, or assume that an arbitrary proportion of their registrations were those of children. Ministers appear to have been told, however, that the change could be made when the new ration book came into force on 8th January 1941; and its supporters within the Ministry had to be told by Rationing Division, as late as 11th December 1940, that this was not possible. The earliest date on which amended permits could be issued, having regard to Food Office commitments, was April 1941. By then it was meat, not bacon, supply prospects that were the worse;² the meat crisis broke on Christmas Eve, and the proposal was dropped as not 'tactful'.

Meanwhile, in November, there had been another revision of bacon rationing. The A and C Categories of the August scheme corresponded roughly to rationed uncooked and unrationed cooked. As no more bacon was being issued specifically for cooking, this was felt to be inappropriate. The categories were therefore redefined. All reference to the kind of bacon they represented was dropped. Category A permits were now to be described as those which would normally be honoured in full, and Category C as those that would be

¹ S.R. & O. (1940) No. 1848.

² The Canadian difficulty had been overcome as the result of a visit of Canadian Ministers.

honoured only when supplies were available. Mild though this revision was, it made Food Offices very angry because it was announced in the interval between the writing and the posting of new permits.

At the beginning of rationing in 1940, bacon had been looked upon in the same light as, say, sugar. 'I do not think it would be wise', wrote an official in January, 'to deduct from the second [bacon] Buying Permits any stocks shown to be in hand on the first of the "3" series. This, I think, should be adjusted on the second of the "3" series returns by retailers'. By the end of the year retailers were receiving a margin for uncovenanted sales and, provided it were ham or gammon, could cook and sell off-ration any surplus. It had, in fact, been recognised that the full rigour of the orthodox rationing machinery could not be applied to such a perishable commodity as bacon.

IV

The rationing of *margarine* and *cooking fats*, which began on 22nd July 1940, introduced the new complications of a combined ration and options. The total fats ration was 8 ounces. Of this, 6 ounces was a combined butter-margarine ration that could be taken all in butter, all in margarine, or in any proportion of each. The remaining 2 ounces could be taken in cooking fats or margarine. The purpose of the combined ration was to guarantee, to people who could not afford butter, the same amount of fats as those who could. The purpose of the cooking fats/margarine option was to allow Oils and Fats Division a wider field of manoeuvre. They might be able to release more margarine than the combined ration required, but not enough to raise it to 8 ounces. In any case, the size of the combined ration could not be determined with reference only to margarine. Some consumers might want to take it all in butter, and if, at any time, Oils and Fats Division could supply more margarine, there was no guarantee that Butter Division would be able to find more butter. If, however, cooking fats were to be rationed, and a margarine option allowed, more margarine could be disposed of without endangering butter.

This was the most complicated rationing scheme yet introduced to the public;¹ the complications behind the scenes were much worse.

¹ See Vol. I, pp. 121-123 for the events leading to the rationing of margarine and cooking fats.

Rationing officials met in the middle of June to make what preparations they could for the rationing of margarine and cooking fats at short notice, but, apart from warning consumers to make sure they were registered for butter, there was little that could be done until the actual decision to ration was taken. The public was not inclined to

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Exact allocation to retailers in advance was impossible; no one could tell in what proportions any particular trader's registered customers would want to buy butter and margarine, or margarine and cooking fats. The permit system could not be applied to the last two until retailers had been able to gauge the demand for each;¹ in addition, the distribution of butter would be upset. The Ministry proposed, therefore, to ask retailers to submit applications for supplies (i.e., forms Butter 1, Margarine 1, and Cooking Fats 1) *after* the first fortnight of rationing, and to issue permits based on this information at the end of August. Meanwhile, the trade would see that retailers were well-stocked with margarine; the current butter permits, which were written for a 4-ounce ration and were due to expire on 25th August, were extended, and their value regarded as being increased by one-half. This was the only instance in 'orthodox' rationing of the consumer being rationed before the retailer.

At first, all went according to plan—if one excepts a pre-rationing run on margarine that cost Oils and Fats Division some 2 or 3 weeks' reserves, and a rapid disappearance of the extra butter. Retailers duly sent in their applications for supplies; the first permits for margarine and cooking fats, together with new butter permits, were to be issued on 31st August and come into operation on 23rd September. On 12th August, however, Butter Division announced that, because of the heavy demand for butter, they must immediately reduce allocations to the old level of 4 ounces per head, and hope that the trade had amassed enough reserves to 'carry' the combined ration for the time being. On the 24th it was decided that a 4-ounce 'ceiling' must be placed from 2nd September on the amount of butter that could be taken in the combined ration. This destroyed the basis on which Food Offices had been preparing the new permits for all three commodities. In itself that was no great loss, for many retailers, led astray by the generous treatment they had received in order that rationing might have a good start, had put in applications for

respond to requests to register until rationing was actually in sight (cf. cheese, see pp. 595-7 below), and, even if it did respond, the information would be of little value because of the removals that would have taken place in the meantime. The scheme was announced to Food Offices on 8th July and consumers asked on 16th July to register.

The Treasury was told that £8,000 worth of publicity would be needed to explain (a) that the combined ration must be bought from the butter retailer, (b) that a separate registration was necessary for cooking fats, (c) that this need not be with the butter retailer, (d) that, in spite of what the cooking fats coupon said, dripping was not being rationed. The combined ration and the option had to be explained and there was also a mention of tea (which was rationed on 9th July).

¹ It had been suggested that retailers should be able to estimate future demand by reference to their current trade. But, it was argued, butter showed a larger profit (per unit of weight) than margarine; therefore retailers might over-estimate the demand for butter and the poor would not get their margarine. Another suggestion was that wholesalers and retailers should be asked to keep records of sales in a preliminary period, but this was dismissed because it would have given too much warning that rationing was imminent.

supplies that added up to far more than 8 ounces of fats per head. The imposition of the 4-ounce butter 'ceiling' put Food Offices back where they had been before rationing began. There was just time to revise butter permits; with margarine and cooking fats they had to begin again. The first permits for these were postponed until the period beginning 21st October, and retailers were asked to send in a fresh set of applications.

The permits for 21st October were to be issued on 28th September. On the 24th September it was decided that, a week later, the butter 'ceiling' must be lowered again, this time to 2 ounces. The new butter permits could be treated as worth half their face value; the basis on which the margarine permits had been written had again been destroyed. They had to be sent out accompanied by 'supplementary special' permits for half the amounts on the butter permits. The same device was used for the next two permit periods (16th December 1940—9th February 1941; 10th February 1941—6th April 1941). Butter permits continued to be written for a 4-ounce ration and there were *two* margarine permits: the supplementary special for half the quantity on the butter permit, and the ordinary, written for the amount left after the quantities on the butter and cooking fats permits had been deducted from the total fats allowance. Rationing Division, anxious to shed the cumbrous machinery of the supplementary special permit, did suggest that butter permits might be written for the actual 2-ounce ration, but was assured by Butter Division that there was a possibility of a return to 4 ounces. This came on 10th March 1941—again during the currency of a permit. The butter permits were unaffected; and the consequent adjustment of margarine supplies was eased by Oils and Fats Division's desire to disperse stocks among retailers. It was decided not to withdraw the supplementary special permits, but to encourage retailers to use them to build up two weeks' stocks of margarine. They were, of course, dispensed with for the new permit period that began on 7th April. On 30th June 1941, also in the middle of an eight-week period, the butter ration returned to 2 ounces. This time, the current butter permits were halved, and, again in order to encourage retail stocks, margarine permits were doubled.

Permits, once issued, could not be considered immutable, in case the consumer should suffer if his retailer guessed wrong. If, therefore, retailers asked at any time for the proportions of their supplies to be altered, Food Offices had to issue supplementary permits and notify suppliers of any corresponding decrease. This difficulty was most likely to arise from the cooking fats option. The demand for cooking fats was very irregular. Consumers seemed to change their requirements from week to week, and neither retailers nor wholesalers could achieve a steady flow of distribution. The former, if they miscalculated

the amount of cooking fats that would be taken up, might find themselves short of margarine for the combined ration; the latter, having indented upon their Area Oils and Fats Distribution Officers, might then find themselves confronted with either supplementary permits or reductions in main permit quantities. In November 1940, therefore, Oils and Fats Division suggested that the option be withdrawn. The cooking fats ration should be reduced to 1 ounce (which seemed to be enough for all save Yorkshire housewives), and the combined ration raised to 7 ounces, the problem of odd weights being overcome by allowing two weeks' coupons to be used at a time. An additional argument was that it might be as well to simplify the administrative situation in case the butter ration was extinguished in December and had to be replaced by lard. The proposal was turned down on the grounds that a 1-ounce ration would be too small, and that the difficulties arose primarily from the narrow margin of fats on which traders were operating. As for two weeks' purchase, this had already been suggested in August as a solution to the problem of selling 2 ounces of cooking fats when the price was 5d. to 7d. a lb. Rationing Division had objected that, as long as it was assumed that a serious check of retailers' coupons and returns was made, it could not add two weeks' purchase to the existing complications caused by the options. The cooking fats option was to remain for another year.

This option was also responsible for a minor but vexatious problem of licensing. A consumer's fats registrations might be split between two retailers—one for butter/margarine and one for cooking fats—and the latter might be a butcher. Butchers naturally asked that they be licensed to sell margarine, so that consumers who registered with them for lard might have the benefit of the option.¹ The Ministry steadily refused this request on the grounds that it might disturb the pattern of retail distribution, but exception had to be made for an odd minority of butchers who sold butter.² Farmers were another difficult class. In October 1939, Food Offices had been told that it was essential that retailers (including farmers) should be licensed to sell margarine if they sold only butter, and vice-versa; on 9th November, this instruction had been cancelled, because margarine was not to be rationed. In June 1940, it appeared that farmers were to have margarine; in July, the instruction was cancelled again, although creameries and dairies normally selling only butter could

¹ Lard that butchers rendered themselves constituted a slight leak in the rationing system. Officials refused to attempt to control it; the administrative difficulties would be formidable and the chances of success slight.

² Conversely, 'health food stores' selling only margarine were to be licensed to sell butter. In July, the Doncaster F.E.O. said that 45 farmers sold butter in Doncaster market and had about 2,000 registered customers, some of whom were asking for margarine. (He also had 5 butchers in his area who sold butter.)

have it.¹ Rationing officials feared that, if consumers removed their registrations from farmers, there might be difficulty in disposing of farm butter, which they were reluctant to de-ration lest the news of even a few getting ration-free butter should undermine the authority of the rationing system. Oils and Fats Division, however, was adamant in its refusal to allow margarine to farmers, until the imposition of the 4-ounce butter ceiling in September destroyed its argument that people who registered for farm butter were not likely to want margarine. There was then no option but to allow farmers to be licensed to sell it.

These were not the only quirks of margarine rationing that took up a good deal of officials' time during the summer of 1940; there was, for instance, the question of indemnifying retailers who broke the Food-and-Drugs and Weights-and-Measures regulations every time they sliced a half-pound packet of margarine into four and sold a 2-ounce end-piece. However, no better illustration can be found of the span of control, and the detail into which rationing had to go, than the case of the butchers who sold butter.

V

A distribution scheme for home and imported *cheese*² was introduced on 1st October 1940. Retailers had been asked in June for a return (Cheese 1) of their sales of cheese during each calendar month during 1939. Subsequently, they were to apply every month (on form Cheese 3) for an amount not exceeding their sales in the corresponding month in 1939 and would receive a monthly permit. Allocations would be for a proportion of permit quantities according to the supply position. There were two modifications of the datum. First, permit quantities might be adjusted to meet any increase or decrease of more than 10 per cent. in the local population; secondly, retailers who had not completed the Cheese 1 return because they had no steady sales of cheese might have permits based on the last complete month for which figures were available.

This scheme did not work very well. Retailers who had not made a return might be at an advantage, if they were to receive a monthly permit for the quantity sold, say, in August 1940, when their seasonal sales were at a height; or their permits might be based on a considerable quantity bought for maturing. On the other hand, those who had not done so because they had been accustomed to sell only

¹ They were to have margarine for the combined ration only; not, that is, for their cooking fats registrations.

² Excluding packet and processed cheese, and home-produced special cheeses like Caerphilly, Stilton, and Wensleydale.

packeted or processed cheese, wanted bulk cheese when their usual supplies began to dry up. The main difficulties, however, were those inseparable from the datum principle. By the middle of November, Butter and Cheese Division was speaking the same language as Tea Division:¹

'no case has been brought to our notice where a reduction in the permit quantity on account of evacuation has been applied, so that the Cheese Division is placed in the position of having to provide for the "overs" without getting the benefit of the "shorts" '.

There were obvious reasons for this: loss of civilian population was often balanced by an influx of billeted Servicemen, and demand for cheese was rising as other staple foods grew more scarce. The main trouble was that, as with tea, it was very difficult to adjust supplies for a given food control area. First, the resident population did not correspond to the consumer population; some people shopped outside the area in which they lived. Secondly, the closing of shops by bombing brought greater demand to those that remained. Thirdly, there was a good deal of class distinction in cheese buying. The cheese trade of high-class shops remained fairly steady whether refugees from bombing were going in or coming out, and a general increase or decrease in the permits of all the shops in the district would be quite arbitrary.² The only equitable and economical way of adjusting cheese supplies would therefore be to adjust them to demand in each shop, and this—contrary to orders—was what many Food Executive Officers were doing. The Commodity Division was itself dissatisfied not only because of increasing demand, but because Food Offices, which were affected, of course, by air-raids,³ were not getting permits out punctually. In December, therefore, the cheese scheme was modified. New formulae were introduced for retailers who had not completed a return with sales for every month of 1939, the chief one being that the total shown should be divided by twelve in order to arrive at the permit quantity. The monthly application was abolished; and Food Offices were to work to the original returns. Permits were to be made two-monthly. Finally, increases might be given to retailers in a particular locality, but no increases at all were to be made without reference to the Divisional Food Officer.

The pressure on unrationed foods, including cheese, grew stronger, and retailers naturally reserved cheese for their registered customers. The Ministry felt that this was justified; but was aware, though it

¹ Below, p. 708 *seq.*

² Two examples given were Tunbridge Wells where, according to the Divisional Food Officer, a general increase in permits to cover the influx of people from the coast towns would unduly benefit the high-class shops, and King's Lynn where, according to the Food Executive Officer, most of the newcomers registered with Co-operatives.

³ Bristol, for example, lost all its Food Office records.

hoped that the consumers who complained were not, that a Divisional Court in 1918 had ruled that to refuse to sell to an unregistered customer was imposing a condition of sale, contrary to a Ministry Order that had been re-enacted (in substance) in September 1939. Amendment of the Order had been under consideration since August 1940, and in November it was replaced by one allowing retailers to refuse scarce foods to unregistered customers.¹ Retailers promptly sought to get more registrations by linking cheese to the commodity for which they had least; consumers retaliated by splitting the family registrations so as to get a footing in as many shops as possible. Consequently, the number of people who availed themselves of the optional re-registration allowed in January and February 1941 was considerable,² to the discomfort of Meat Division which, caught in a supply crisis, needed as static a consuming population as possible, and of Bacon Division which, with no bacon to spare, was dismayed by the number of supplementary permits flooding in.

By the middle of December it was clear that datum distribution of cheese would have to be superseded. The supply situation had taken a turn for the worse; releases for January were for only 50 per cent. of permit quantities. It was suggested that distribution might be linked to, say, sugar registrations, but rationing officials disliked this because it would mean giving cheese to shops who had not previously sold it, and *vice versa*. The alternative seemed to be rationing; but there was a tradition in British food control that, because consumption varied widely between different classes and occupations, cheese was unrationable. Unless, therefore, miners and agricultural workers were to be deprived of what was believed to be one of their staple foods, cheese rationing had to be differential rationing, to which everyone, including the T.U.C. Advisory Committee, was opposed. There seemed a faint hope, however, that 'flat rationing' of cheese might be possible. Analysis of the datum returns made for the cheese distribution scheme had not supported 'previous conceptions that cheese was largely consumed by agricultural and heavy workers'. Consumption figures for the South of England were more than twice those for the North. When, therefore, the supply side proposed at the end of December that cheese rationing should begin in March, the scheme was one of 'flat rationing'.

The proposal was rejected by the Minister. Instead, a 'leave cheese to those who need it' campaign was launched. This, it was hoped, together with a redirection of supplies to mining areas and the

¹ *Welch v. Russell* (1918) (87 L.J., K.B., 1038). The judgment in this case was, thought the Legal Adviser, open to question; but unless upset it held the field. The amended Order was S.R. & O. (1940) No. 2012 (revoking No. 1103 of 1939).

² On 17th February Edinburgh reported that there had been 55,000 applications for change of registration in the previous few weeks, and ascribed this to dissatisfaction with the cheese supply.

designation of cheese as a main dish in catering establishments, might hold the situation. The campaign was a failure. It served only to remind consumers that they were short of cheese, and they redoubled their efforts to find it.

VI

Meanwhile, all these stresses had been having their effect on the rationing machinery itself. The load-shedding process began very early. In April 1940 the fortnightly returns for meat, and bacon and ham, were made four-weekly. In May the '1' forms, the Applications for Supplies, were made six-monthly instead of four-weekly; they were to be used, that is, only after a re-issue of ration books and a general re-registration of consumers. No one, when the use of these forms came to be questioned, could really explain what they were for. Their initial use, when Food Offices had had only ten days in which to prepare permits and, in any case, needed to be told the names of retailers' suppliers, was easily understood; their continued use every four weeks was not. Retailers were now tied to their suppliers and gave the names again on their returns; Food Offices knew the number of registrations and retailers gave this, also, on their returns. It was suggested that retailers should be using the forms to state their real requirements as ascertained from their trading; but this was a *post hoc* justification and had certainly never been put to Food Offices.¹ Another argument was that the forms afforded retailers the chance of furnishing Food Offices with their own version of their entitlement; but retailers soon made it clear that they would willingly exchange this opportunity for one less form to fill in.

This bewilderment is not surprising, for the '1' forms can be demonstrated to have been nothing more than a mistake. The Food (Defence Plans) Department had failed to perceive that periodical applications for supplies had not been required under the rationing scheme of July 1918. (It was specifically stated, when the standard returns were introduced in that month, that they were to 'save retailers from the necessity of making separate and special application for the various permits they require'.) Hence the *ad hoc*, once-and-for-all application forms used before July 1918 had been incorporated in the Department's scheme as a periodic feature.²

¹ It was later revealed that some Food Offices were using the forms in this way, taking the retailer's estimate as the permit quantity if it were lower than their own.

² The meat application form, M.7, used in April 1918, was used again a month later. It bore on both occasions the date by which it should be returned to Food Offices—a sure sign of a 'once-only' form. The sales return for meat was M.11. In July 1918, the M.11 and the M.7 were superseded by the standard return, M.60. The M.1 and

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It was also decided in May 1940 to extend permit periods from four to eight weeks. Butter, and Oils and Fats, Divisions had been asking for three-month permits; opinion in Bacon Division varied between two and six months; Sugar, whose stock position was precarious, was prepared to accept two-month permits—but not at the moment. As proposals to extend permit periods were to be fairly frequent in the next two years, the arguments may as well be summarised at the outset. Permit-writing by Food Offices and permit-summarising by wholesalers consumed time, labour, and paper; new permits interrupted the flow of distribution; this was aggravated by retailers' incurable dilatoriness in sending on their permits to their suppliers. Longer permit periods would, therefore, be convenient both to the food trades and the Ministry. On the other hand, they would be a disadvantage in unsettled conditions when the population was on the move, or, as the ups and downs of the butter ration showed, sudden changes in ration levels became necessary. Furthermore, less frequent adjustment of retailers' supplies would entail a loss of accuracy that Commodity Divisions might not always be able to afford. Rationing Division, therefore, accepted only eight-week permits, and the principle of an eight-weekly review of retailers' supplies was maintained throughout the war.

This alteration took effect in August (October for sugar). By then, however, the extensions of rationing had brought to a head a clamour for simplification that could not be stilled by minor adjustments. There were now seven foods rationed: bacon, butter, sugar, meat, tea, margarine, and cooking fats. For each (except margarine) a coupon had to be cut out; for each (except tea) a permit had to be written, and for each a four-weekly return of stocks, sales, and purchases, had to be made. From retailers came denunciation of coupon-cutting and of the number and unintelligibility of forms; from Food Offices, complaints of the 'interminable fiddling' with their 'vast collections of little bits of paper' (counterfoils) and warnings that retailers, correctly inferring that little notice was taken of their coupons and that they were bound to receive supplies whether they rendered their returns

M.3 of 1940, therefore, represented both the discarded M.7 and the M.60 that had superseded it.

For sugar, there could have been no regular four-weekly application because the retailers' 'Authorities' ran first for sixteen, then for twenty-four weeks. When sugar rationing began, retailers had, in December 1917, to make application for supplies on form S.8. The subsequent Authorities ran until 20th April 1918. No fresh applications were required for the next four-week period; for the period after that there is no evidence except that no fresh applications were required for manufacturing sugar. When national rationing began in July 1918, the twenty-four-week Authorities given then were for the quantities authorised for the previous four-week period. Fresh applications had to be made in November 1919 (on form R.9).

For butter the first permits under national rationing ran from September to December 1918.

In 1940, the introduction of margarine rationing afforded an excellent example of the logical use of the forms (p. 557 *seq.* above).

or not, were becoming increasingly restive. By August, Rationing Division had recognised that unless steps were taken to relieve the 'intolerable clerical burden of rationing', the system might collapse under its own weight.

To some extent, the reasons for this agitation were transient. Food in the summer of 1940 was not yet scarce, and the complexities of a system devised for the stringency of early 1918 were hard to justify. It was easy, for instance, to point to the enviable looseness of tea, not yet discredited, and ask if it were really necessary to 'check the movement of each rationed food from the cradle to the grave'. A rigorous system, however, might be equally hard to justify under severe conditions; not because it seemed unnecessary but because, with more foods rationed, and labour and paper as scarce as food, it could not be worked. In August, therefore, the Ministry set up a small committee composed of headquarters and local officials, to 'consider the simplification and reduction in number, of documents, forms and returns relating to rationing. . . '.

By 2nd September, when the Committee began its work, its powers had been greatly extended. The Minister had called for a review of rationing organisation in the light of its first year's working, and, at his wish, the Committee was bidden to examine the principles as well as the mechanics of the rationing system and to devise, if need be, a new one:

'Everyone who has been in large-scale business', wrote the Minister on 5th September, 'has had to go through the experience of "killing his babies" and throwing on to the scrap-heap the systems that he has devised with so much trouble and so much hope and which have outworn their use. This is the atmosphere that we want to get into your committee.'

In carrying out this wider mandate, the Committee did not lack for advice. It received hundreds of suggestions from local and Headquarters officials, from traders, and from the public. All were sifted, and the results constitute an invaluable detailed survey of the rationing system as it stood at the end of 1940.

Among them was a candid and somewhat sceptical essay by an official who had lately been in charge of rationing. The coupon (he began) was obviously expendable. It did not serve as the basis of distribution, and its value for the prevention of illegal sales or as a check upon the accuracy of the retailer's statement depended upon coupons being counted, or upon retailers believing that they were counted. 'Very few are . . . and everyone knows it.' Furthermore, the system assumed that a retailer who was short of coupons would render an accurate return; but

'Since at present we have no means of checking whether his purchases are honestly stated, he must be very foolish to fall into this trap.'

The coupon also acted as a buying permit between customer and retailer, but a space to be cancelled could, and later did, serve this purpose equally well.

It was nearly as difficult to justify the retailer's statement, the '3' form. This was not a complete check upon a retailer's performance; even in theory there was no check on his purchases, and in practice his sales too largely went unverified. The return could, therefore, be regarded only as a statement arrived at by calculation; Food Offices were wasting time by treating it as a statement of fact:

'... Stock returns, etc., on the "3" forms are certainly only approximate. To suppose otherwise is sheer delusion. There can scarcely be a retailer in the country who does not indulge in a good deal of faking in order to make his figures on these forms balance even though he has behaved perfectly honestly.'

It followed that permits could no longer be adjusted to sales but must be based simply on the number of registered customers.¹

Having argued that it was impracticable to try to make permits more exact, the sceptical critic went on to suggest that it was also undesirable. Rations were subject to change in the middle of permit periods. Permits had therefore to be manipulated: declared to be worth, say, half or twice their face value. Such manipulation was inconsistent with 'adjusted' permits; a retailer who had a 75 per cent. 'take-up' of a 4-ounce ration of, say, butter, might very well have a 100 per cent. 'take-up' of a 2-ounce ration. To halve an 'adjusted' permit would, therefore, be arbitrary. But the existing situation was even more arbitrary because some permits were 'adjusted' and some were not. There were Food Offices that undoubtedly did count coupons, check returns, and try to relate permits to the demand actually experienced in each shop—if, for example, a week's excess stock of sugar were revealed, they deducted $\frac{1}{3}$ th from the weekly quantity authorised on the permit—but there were others to whom permits were merely 'theoretical calculations based on the momentary number of registered customers'.

This uncertainty about the nature and function of permits was to persist: 'Were they', asked the head of Rationing Division, in July 1941, 'ceilings' representing the retailer's maximum regular trade, or were they 'as accurate a shot as could be made at what the retailer

¹ 'The Ministry', stated a group of Scottish retailers, 'can only base supplies to the Retailer on the assumption that each person who is entitled to the ration requires it. Having done so . . . it is suggested that the Ministry of Food have done all that they can be expected to do'.

(Memorandum dated 4th September 1940, from the Scottish Federation of Grocers' and Provision Merchants' Associations.)

ought to buy?' The pre-war planners had undoubtedly intended permits to be the latter; the rationers of 1940 tried to make them both, striving to have them adjusted to sales, yet constantly warning Commodity Divisions not to regard them as orders, and 'themselves as bound to set in motion the machinery to supply up to the permit quantity, instead of waiting to feel the actual demand'.

The ambiguity of this attitude had been very well illustrated by the introduction of margarine rationing. The current butter permits, written for a 4-ounce ration, had been increased in value by one-half in case consumers wished to take the whole of the new 6-ounce combined ration in butter. If all butter permits were 'adjusted' permits, this increase was *prima facie* excessive; for it was most unlikely that consumers who were not taking up the full 4-ounce ration would suddenly wish to buy 6 ounces. Rationing Division, however, regarded the increase as 'notional', that is, permissive; it was Butter Division that did the damage by automatically releasing at first-hand nearly the full 50 per cent. increase which, coupons or no coupons, was disposed of. In this, it was in full accord with the trade; most retailers and wholesalers did regard permits as orders; and if permits were 'adjusted' to actual requirements, there was no harm in this view, and no need to warn Commodity Divisions against it. On the other hand, if permits were to be regarded only as 'ceilings', the simplification should be admitted and a uniform basis for permit calculation enforced. It was imperative, concluded the survey, that rationing officials should make up their minds exactly what permits stood for, and then make this clear to both Food Offices and Commodity Divisions.

Rationing Division eventually did so, in March 1943; in order to understand the delay it is necessary to examine the implications of what might seem to be a comparatively simple decision. The root problem was that of inflation of supplies. It has been explained how, under the registration system, there was likely to be over-issue somewhere. The question was, where should an attempt be made to recover it? The rationing system had been intended to trap it at the retailer level by adjusting his permit to his actual sales. As long as this system worked there was no danger in Commodity Divisions treating permits as orders. If it did not work, or were abandoned, and permits became 'ceilings', the surplus would remain with the retailer. If Food Offices managed to discipline him into ordering only what he required, it would, if Commodity Divisions continued to release full permit quantities at first-hand, remain with the wholesaler. To turn permits into 'ceilings', therefore, must entail telling Commodity Divisions that the rationing system could not do what it had been meant to do, that there was a surplus somewhere, and that if Food Offices succeeded in keeping it away from retailers, the Commodity

Divisions must themselves 'turn off the tap' higher up. The conditions of 1940 were not stringent enough to bring Rationing Division to this point; it was the expansion of rationing in 1941 that was to produce the 'ceiling' permit.

Hence the critical survey of 1940, with its conclusions that the rationing system was too much for the resources of retailers and Food Offices, that 'permits could not be elaborated into a means of close control', that it would be better to rely on direct enforcement, i.e., 'police', methods rather than 'pretending that you can and do carry out a remote check in the local Food Offices by playing with figures and coupons', was strong meat for the Ministry Committee. It represented an attitude that most local officers held to be too pessimistic. The rationing system was, after all, less than a year old and the worst of the war was obviously ahead. On the other hand, they were very conscious of the thousands of small shop-keepers who were 'quite able to conduct their business in their own simple way' but who did not practise, or need to practise, the kind of efficiency postulated by the rationing system.¹ The Committee decided, therefore, that, although there should be no large-scale 'killing of babies', the existing structure was capable of some improvement.

The first recommendation of the Committee's final and very comprehensive report, dated 9th November 1940, was that the compulsory general re-registration of consumers that accompanied each re-issue of ration books should be abandoned; instead, consumers should be allowed to change retailers without question every six months. This had been strongly pressed by traders, especially as one of the half-yearly re-registrations happened to fall at Christmas. (That the re-issue of ration books should fall in January and July was, of course, entirely fortuitous; both months could hardly have been more inconvenient.) The ration books should be made to run for twelve months instead of six, so as to save paper and the labour of reissue.

Secondly, coupons should be kept. They were 'the instrument of control as between the retailer and the customer'; they were needed for unregistered customers, and they 'offered a basis for the control of the unsold ration'. But they should be cancelled and not cut out. All traders' organisations and most local officers favoured this, although some of the latter, notably in the Northern Division (Newcastle-upon-Tyne), indignantly rebutted the suggestion that coupon-cutting had been a bluff; they at least had carried it out

¹ The Commodity Divisions' attitude to permits was more realistic than that of the rationing officials if these shop-keepers are borne in mind. Such retailers often did not send on their permits, let alone orders, until the traveller called, in which case wholesalers went on supplying not only permit quantities, but the last permit quantities. No doubt multiples and the branch managers of chain stores conducted their affairs in a 'business-like' way, but the thousands of 'man and boy' grocers maintained extremely informal relations with their suppliers.

methodically (10 per cent. in rotation) and had instituted prosecutions on the results. The Committee did not jettison coupon-cutting without considering alternative methods of controlling retailers' sales, but all of these, unfortunately, meant extra work for someone. The two recommended were a sales register, which had been strongly opposed by traders and Commodity Divisions,¹ and was to be encouraged, not prescribed, and a wholesaler's certificate of deliveries to be attached to the permit, which was favoured by everyone except wholesalers.²

Thirdly, the Applications for Supplies forms should be abolished. Fourthly, buying permits should not be dispensed with. They were the main instrument for the control of the retailer; control by means of the proposed wholesaler's certificate and the retailer's returns³ would not be strong enough. The Committee also rejected the suggestion, much favoured by Commodity Divisions, that permits should be sent direct to wholesalers, on the grounds that this would encourage automatic delivery of full permit quantities.

Fifthly, retailers' returns should be retained, but should be amalgamated into one composite form to include all commodities except meat and bacon. Sixthly, consumers should be able to buy two weeks' rations at once, either in advance or in arrears. These measures, claimed the Committee, would save time and labour in shops and Food Offices, as well as considerable quantities of paper.⁴

Immediate action was taken on the recommendations. In January 1941 coupon-cutting, the Applications for Supplies forms, and general re-registration⁵ were given up and purchasing periods for some commodities extended. In July the first twelve-month ration book appeared;⁶ in November, the composite return form. The wider

¹ See p. 546 for the attempt to introduce sales registers for sales made against deposited pages. This suggestion was always received tepidly by grocers and with extreme hostility by butchers.

² And, on their behalf, by the Commodity Divisions. Bacon Division pointed out that a wholesaler with 2,000 customers delivering twice a week during an 8-week permit period would have to refer back to 32,000 entries as well as to the claims and returns ledger.

³ S.E. Scotland sketched a system for a continuing record of quantities authorised, and the carrying-over of surpluses, that in some respects anticipated the procedure adopted after the war.

⁴ The amalgamation of retailers' returns would, it was estimated, save 13 tons of paper a year; the abolition of the 'r' forms, 6 tons; the yearly ration book, 1,000 tons. The abolition of the general re-registration would save the handling of some 360,000,000 counterfoils a year; of coupon-cutting, the handling of about 14,500,000,000 coupons a year, and 15,000,000 coupon envelopes.

⁵ It was restored in July; there was no other way in which the inflation caused by uncanceled registrations could be cleared. In 1943 another attempt to do without compulsory general re-registration was made, but local officials were unanimous that it was less trouble and more effective than any substitute. In 1944 it was restored again. See above, pp. 525-7.

⁶ This, of course, made the problem of inflated registrations worse; nor was it an advantage when new developments in rationing were coming thick and fast. In July 1941 a supplement had to be issued (R.B.g) and in the autumn, a separate points book

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aspects of the Committee's work, however, can be fully appreciated only in retrospect. What it had done was to make a conscious break with tradition. It had ranged over the whole of rationing procedures applying one criterion only; how each worked in contemporary conditions. From this point starts the drive for standardisation and simplification that was to be pursued with increasing and seemingly inexhaustible virtuosity in the devising and handling of forms and returns.

When the Committee passed, however, to deeper matters of rationing principle, this confident iconoclasm seems to have evaporated. (The critical memorandum bequeathed to it was not recognised as an important contribution to the subject.) In consequence the Committee's influence on principles, though in the end profound, was unintentional. The Committee intended to modernise rationing, not to loosen it. Supplies were still to be related to performance. The cancelled coupon, stated the report, would offer 'a basis for the control of the unsold ration';¹ the retailers' returns would afford 'material for checking consumption'. Most important, the abolition of coupon-cutting had been linked with the wholesaler's certificate; evidence of sales was to be exchanged for evidence of purchases. This would have left the rationing system very much where it had always been, for to be complete it needed both; but the exchange would probably have made the system more workable. It would have transferred responsibility from retailers, who were numerous and hard to police, to wholesalers, who were more concentrated and better equipped for clerical work; and if one were to say that to shift a burden is not to lighten it, the Committee could at least plead that to exchange what had been attacked as a troublesome nominal control for a troublesome real one would be an improvement. In practice, however, rationing officials never achieved the wholesaler's certificate, and the abolition of coupon-cutting had an unexpectedly far-reaching effect. The only logical conclusion, once coupons were lost, was to accept the standpoint of the Beveridge Committee of 1936, and rely solely on the counterfoil.

Rationing had begun with four devices for measuring a retailer's needs: counterfoils—the number of his customers, coupons—what he had sold, the '3' forms—what he said he had sold, and the '1' forms—what he said he needed. By January 1941, only counterfoils and the returns were left, and as the latter were but paper fortifications there was no logical alternative to basing permits upon the

printed. Nevertheless, the heavy burden of the reissue operation and printing difficulties made the step inevitable.

¹ There were various suggestions about retailers returning cancelled pages to Food Offices. Commodity Divisions, it should be noted, were nervous about the abandonment of coupons, and would have liked some other method of checking retailers' sales to have been devised.

number of registrations and recognising them to be 'ceilings'. This was not immediately obvious because, although the Committee threw away the cut coupon, it set rationing groping for a lighter weapon, the wholesaler's certificate, and so left the permit system rather more uncertain than before. Even as it was presenting its report, however, the first intimations of what was to prove a notable clarifier could be felt—the food shortage of 1941. In January, when coupon-cutting, the '1' forms, and general re-registration were given up, the meat crisis was in full swing and Commodity Divisions, fearing for their stocks, were hedging about the extension of the consumer's purchasing periods. In July, when the first twelve-month ration book went into operation, the 'intolerable clerical burden' of 1940 would have been regarded lightly. But 1940 then seemed as far away as 1918 and, in some respects, it was.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Extensions of Rationing, February 1941—July 1942

I

THE WINTER of 1940–41, the air-raid winter, was the nearest Britain came in the second World War to the food conditions of December 1917. Rations were low, the meat ration uncertain, and pressure on unrationed foods, themselves scarce, was intensified. The stringencies of December 1917 generated the rationing system for the major foods; those of January 1941, rationing systems for the minor foods.

Public and political reaction to the food situation was that the Ministry should 'ration everything'. But the problem could not be solved by putting the disputed foods through the existing rationing machine. Most of them proved to be not suitable for 'orthodox' rationing, and new methods had to be found. From February 1941 the Ministry was fermenting with ideas. Most of them, however, were in the opposite direction from the solution that emerged in the end; the points scheme of December 1941. That was rationing without registration; what the Ministry was contemplating for most of the year was registration without rationing.

Registration used to the full was a formidable weapon. Its extension entailed tying the retailer of the food in question to his suppliers, issuing buying permits, sending the permits up the chain, bringing supplies down again in exact quantities, printing and issuing documents for people who could not register, translating the coupons from these documents into supplies by means of supplementary permits, keeping the Food Office record of the number of a retailer's registrations, notifying him of registrations lost, and adding fresh paper to an already massive removals procedure. It was backed by Statutory Order, and accompanied by Ministry ownership of supplies and control of distribution at every stage. It was, moreover, fraught with risk for the Ministry; first, because the Conditions of Sale Order of November 1940¹ had in effect tied the retailer's customers for unrationed as well as rationed foods, secondly, because it had come to be considered a guarantee of supply—consumers expected a regular and sizable *quid pro quo* for their loss of freedom. 'Rationing, if it is to be worth the name', laid down the Food Controller in October 1919,

¹ See p. 562 above.

'requires time and systematic construction. Improvised schemes are worse than useless because they hold out a promise which they cannot perform'. The rationers of 1941, disinclined to invoke this dangerous and demanding Juggernaut for the sake of an occasional orange, or 4 oz. of cake, had to make this point anew to those who looked upon registration as a simple cure-all. Although the projects being canvassed did not propose to use registration to the full, but merely hoped, harking back to sugar in 1917, that it might assist distribution, the political danger in them was no less great, for they would be promising what they had no intention to perform.

The most rudimentary form of registration-without-rationing was that suggested by the Minister in March 1941. Consumers would register for all major foods and be forbidden to buy them elsewhere. The idea was to prevent 'shop-crawling' and queues and to counteract the effect of the Conditions of Sale Order which, by encouraging consumers to 'spread' registrations, had intensified the pressure on each retailer's stock of unrationed foods. It would, in short, assist distribution by narrowing the outlet. But retailers had themselves set up unofficial rationing schemes that controlled the movement of food out of the shop; what they wanted was some device short of full rationing that would control the movement of food into it, i.e., that actually used registrations as the basis of distribution.

The registrations might be used only once, to give a Commodity Division a new datum line. This was done in November 1941 for Dried Fruits and, in 1943, was hankered after by Fish Division. Its disadvantage was that the new datum would rapidly get out of date. A more advanced stage of registration-without-rationing would therefore be to continue to supply the retailer according to the number of registrations, leaving to him the final distribution. This is what retailers had turned down in 1938,¹ but by now they were ready to consider it. A more advanced stage still would be to prescribe and guarantee an individual entitlement but leave the retailer free to sell any surplus; that is, a minimum share scheme. This principle had been the basis of the household sugar scheme of August 1917, and of tea rationing in 1918. In March 1941 it was applied to preserves; but the preserves scheme very well illustrated the dangers of 'quasi-rationing'. The use of registration or even the marking of the ration book always created a feeling of entitlement. If a scheme were to succeed this entitlement had to be met. Either, therefore, the supply side must be able to afford plenty of 'slack', or it must have reversed the usual situation and already have perfected distribution down to the retailer. In the case of tea and soap, 'quasi-rationing' had to be turned into full rationing when the Commodity Divisions could no longer afford the 'slack'; in the case of preserves, the Ministry had to

¹ See p. 449 above.

take full control of distribution in order to meet the entitlement; in the case of fish, 'quasi-rationing' was refused because distribution down to the retailer had not been perfected.

All these variants of 'quasi-rationing' were considered by the Ministry Committee on the Distribution of Unrationed Foodstuffs, which reported in June 1941. It recommended minimum share schemes and a milder use of registration-without-rationing, provided that distribution was linked to the registration. It also recommended the extension of orthodox rationing; but as most of the candidates for this could not be treated individually either because they were too scarce to provide a regular weekly share, or because people did not want a regular weekly share, they would be rationed in groups. For example, people would register for rice/tapioca/cornflour/sago and be allowed to buy only one item from this group at a time. Group rationing was not the same as another device being contemplated at this time—group registration. The former combined several foods for the purpose of one ration; the latter merely required that certain rations, such as fats, be bought from the same retailer. The purpose of this was to reduce the number of counterfoils that Food Offices had to handle, to keep down the size of the ration book, and to reduce the 'spreading' of registrations.

In June 1941, therefore, with the points scheme still in the future, Rationing Division were preparing to extend orthodox rationing to condensed milk, preserves, dried fruits, and certain cereals. The last would be a group ration; the first three would be a group registration with sugar. Butter/margarine/cooking fats were also to be made a group registration. Onions and oranges were candidates for registration without rationing; so, at one time, were eggs. Milk registration was pending but the Supply Division were not ready; canned meat and canned fish would be considered later for a group ration when supply prospects were clearer. The rationing of the cereals was postponed, however, because they were not yet scarce enough, that of dried fruit until it was seen what Lend/Lease supplies would be. The points scheme then began to make headway, and neither the extension of orthodox rationing nor registration-without-rationing was used on the scale that had been contemplated.

II

Some quasi-rationing schemes, however, did go into operation, and the most important of these was the minimum share scheme for *preserves*. This was to provide a classic example of the results of imposing registration on a shortage without controlling supplies. As

first proposed in February 1941 it was simple. Consumers would be entitled to a minimum share of half-a-pound a month of jam, marmalade, syrup, or treacle.¹ The Ministry would not own or control preserves; instead, voluntary arrangements would be made by the trade to re-direct supplies where they were needed. The retailer would continue to receive his usual supplies. But he would keep a record of deliveries on a card (Preserves D) for which Food Offices would provide a label showing the amount he required in order to meet the minimum share of his registered customers and the establishments that bought from him. If his normal supplies were not enough, he would send a duplicate of this card to a clearing house maintained at the Ministry's Jam Section in Oxford, which would direct supplies to him. If, on the other hand, his normal supplies were more than enough to meet the minimum shares, he could sell the surplus to anyone.

This scheme did not set out to ensure exact distribution, but only to give consumers in 'deficiency' areas a minimum half-a-pound a month. It was bound to be inflationary, for the basis of distribution was to be 'usual supplies or more'. The same basis was, at this time, being used for tea,² for which it did not work very well; for preserves it was more dangerous still. The tea ration was guaranteed, but not in any particular shop; consumers could be told that there was enough tea in the district, retailers, that they must turn customers away. The preserves share, on the other hand, had to be in the shop where the customer had registered.

The preserves scheme lost a good deal of its pristine simplicity before it came into operation. Retailers made it clear that they would prefer some kind of a permit, but this was impossible because they were not tied to suppliers, and it was decided to give them vouchers instead. (A voucher system bore the same relation to a permit system as coupon-replacement bore to registration. With vouchers, the retailer could 'shop anywhere'; with permits, he was tied to one or more suppliers.) This could not be done, however, in time for the beginning of the scheme. The theory of the scheme also came under attack, for not all the Minister's colleagues liked the idea of some people getting a larger share than others under the aegis of the Ministry. The most damaging criticism came from the Co-operatives, which intensely disliked the thought of a ration-free surplus that could be manipulated to secure registrations. The size of the surplus was therefore to be restricted to about 10 per cent.,

¹ Lemon curd was to have been included, but it was feared that as few people would want their share as lemon curd the trade might be killed. In May 1942, however, fruit curds and honey were added to the preserves ration. Mincemeat was added in October 1941 and, in July 1942, syrup and treacle were withdrawn and added to the points scheme.

² p. 712 *seq.*

and its disposal hedged about with conditions. Manufacturers were to be licensed, so that they could be called upon to deliver only in accordance with Ministry instructions, and only the minimum share was to be sold during the first month, when registration would be taking place. Thereafter, any surplus was to be sold to registered customers only.

Manufacturers hoped that the scheme would begin on 3rd March 1941. The date was put back to the 10th, then to the 13th, then to the 17th.¹ The Ministry's careful plans to prevent a last-minute shopping rush were upset by a 'leak' that impelled the Minister to announce the scheme at a Press Conference on Friday the 14th, instead of waiting till the next evening when the shops would be shut. Meanwhile Food Offices were obeying their instructions not to send any information out to the retailers until Saturday midday. For them this was the last straw. The delays and procrastinations of the previous fortnight had filtered through to them in the shape of instructions arriving without documents and *vice-versa*, a false start for the 10th, constant amendments to their instructions, and a fine confusion over the Notes that had been printed to explain the unusual scheme to retailers. These had been got ready well in advance so that the scheme could begin at short notice, but officials' intelligent anticipation recoiled upon them. The first set of Notes to reach Food Offices had to be scrapped; the second set amended. Not unnaturally some of the first set found their way out. It was unfortunate that Headquarters should have just circularised Divisional Food Officers asking them to do their best to keep Food Office staffs 'serene' in the face of the new burdens to be laid on them. The Division was as much the victim of policy changes as the Food Offices, and the effect of these was magnified by the geographical separation under which responsibility lay, for policy in London, for detailed mechanism in Colwyn Bay, and for the commodity in Oxford.

The scheme duly came into force on 17th March, and consumers settled down hopefully to await their share of a surplus that had been whittled down to 10 per cent. before the scheme began and, in any case, was not to materialise during the first month. In fact it never materialised at all. Within a few weeks, the efforts of Sugar and Rationing Divisions and Jam Section were concentrated not on the benevolent disposal of a surplus but on scraping together the

¹ The scheme had to be approved by the Food Policy Committee and the War Cabinet. The date set was the 10th. But Cabinet approval was not given until the 7th. It was then hoped to start on the 13th, but Rationing Division had not received the 'all clear' in time to allow of the distribution of the documents printed for the scheme from H.M. Stationery Office (Manchester) to Food Offices. On the 12th, there was some doubt whether Cabinet approval still held because there was talk of adjusting the import programme to allow more jam.

minimum share. On 10th April the senior official in charge of rationing was hoping that they could 'rescue the sinking ship before it sinks and somehow get through to the end of April honouring coupons'.¹

When the scheme began, output was still slightly more than consumption. It had been expected that there would be a heavy demand at first, because, as the scheme was starting in the middle of a month, two months' share had to be given in the first six weeks. But the inflation inherent in the scheme soon became apparent. 'Owing to the absence of a buying permit', noted Jam Section, 'there has been no economy by the reduction of supplies to certain districts'—a remark that was also made at various times by those responsible for tea and for cheese. But the principle of 'usual supplies or more' operated with particular virulence for preserves, partly because it was combined with registration, partly because of the nature of the jam trade. The trade had no uniform distribution system; wholesalers played only a small part in it and most manufacturers distributed direct, some on a national scale, others only within a short radius of their factories. As registration implied a guarantee of supplies, retailers with empty shelves looked upon their purchases record cards as buying permits, and flooded the Oxford 'clearing house' with them.² The clearing house found manufacturers reluctant to run down stocks earmarked until the new season for regular buyers, or, because of the restriction to the minimum share, to take on new credit risks or open distant accounts; indeed, it had never been intended to disturb the trade to that extent. What the scheme nearly foundered on in the first month was not the maldistribution it had set up to cure, but a new and fiercer one for which registration was responsible. Consumers had apparently decided not to register with their usual retailers; the basis of usual supplies was therefore completely out of touch with registrations; and trade arrangements designed to make minor adjustments here and there were being called on to effect a major re-distribution. In April the situation was saved for the moment³ by extra syrup. Wholesalers bulked much larger in this trade, and Sugar Division could stock up those who supplied retailers in 'deficiency' areas. In May, the maldistribution was finally overcome by the abandonment of the 'usual supplies or more'

¹ The reference to coupons was metaphorical. There was no coupon for jam. Retailers marked a suitable space in the ration book.

² Applications were reaching the clearing house at the rate of 100 a day by the end of March and reached 600 a day in April. The confusion was increased by the fact that the Food Office labels for these cards did not arrive until the end of April. (H.M. Stationery Office was suffering from the bombardment of the enemy as well as that of the Ministry.) For some time neither Colwyn Bay nor Oxford knew this, and the cards were liable to be returned as not in order because they had no label on them certifying the number of registrations.

³ By the Jam Distribution Advisory Committee, which represented the trade, Sugar Division, and Jam Section.

principle, and the introduction of the vouchers,¹ which were related to the number of registrations. Applications to the clearing house promptly fell from 900 to 50 a day.²

Meanwhile consumers' hopes of their share in the surplus steadily receded. In May, retailers were again warned to keep to the minimum share. This warning was only to be expected. The minimum share scheme had merely proposed to leave undisturbed any surpluses to be found under the old system of distribution. There had been no intention of deliberately providing a surplus, and there was no need for one under the system with vouchers. But large shops, which had started the scheme with stocks bought or made for them at the beginning of the season,³ and which could replenish these because their jam came in by the same transport as their other supplies, were accused by small retailers of having raised the minimum to 1 lb. Certainly, in June, one chain quietly prepared to do so on the grounds that its competitors had jumped the gun. But it reaped an ill reward for its previous conformity. On 9th June, the minimum share scheme was turned into rationing. The $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. minimum share became a maximum ration and this was made retrospective, i.e., any jam bought since 1st June counted as part of the ration for June and July.

This was done for one reason only; to prevent canvassing for registrations by multiples during the general re-registration in June

¹ There were 14-lb. vouchers for jam, 12-lb. vouchers for syrup. Preserves were a difficult rationing subject because of the size of the packs. (Hence the monthly ration and the provision that the holder of a single ration book could buy two months ration at a time.) The two largest syrup firms turned out cases of 12 or 24 1-lb. jars and 12 2-lb. jars; but Tate and Lyle *tins* were in 56-lb. cases and some firms packed only 1 cwt. cases. Thus an exact rationing system would have reduced many retailers to a jug-and-bottle trade in syrup and treacle. Retailers' vouchers were therefore liable to add up to a good deal more than their two-monthly requirements, and Food Offices had to try to adjust this by a prolonged carry-over of surpluses.

² All this time, Rationing Division had been busy with the insistent details usual to any rationing scheme:

- (i) Servicemen holding temporary cards. They were not likely to get any jam at all unless the card was presented in conjunction with ration books. But cards might be saved up and four presented at one time to obtain $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. Retailers were told to mark the purchase on the instruction leaf of the card. (Three instruction leaves and one current card could be presented.) See Appendix D.
- (ii) Diabetic jam, which after some hesitation was treated as ordinary jam.
- (iii) Black Treacle used by pharmacists for dispensing.
This was to be dealt with under the manufacturers and small users' part of the scheme.
- (iv) Women's Institutes taking part in the co-operative fruit preservation scheme. (See Appendix D.)
- (v) Shopping by post.
There was no jam *coupon* to be deposited so the ration book had to be sent on each occasion.
- (vi) Caterers who bought syrup retail, marmalade wholesale, and jam direct.
They might buy syrup retail, and jam and marmalade wholesale.
- (vii) Licensing.
Retailers who sold jam would automatically be licensed for syrup.

There had not been time to tackle these matters in advance.

³ They therefore felt able to indulge literally in some window dressing. Small retailers with empty shelves, in a Welsh town, indignantly counted 10 tons of jam in the windows of one chain of shops.

and July.¹ But the Commodity Division pressed for the measure to be permanent; first, because 'the principle of a minimum without a maximum ration can be said to have been tested by experience and to have failed', secondly, because they wished to disperse stocks. The first point was hardly valid. The preserves scheme had been 'hurriedly devised and put into operation at short notice and without adequate preparation'. The principle, as distinct from the scheme, had not, therefore, had a fair run (it had not failed with tea in 1918). By June 1941 the preserves scheme might, in fact, have fulfilled its promise. More sugar had been allocated to jam, and because of the restriction to the minimum share, stocks were piling up, to the embarrassment of manufacturers. The Commodity Division saw these as an insurance against failure of imports. It wished to disperse them among retailers; but not if the retailers were allowed to disperse them among their customers.

Rationing officials, for purely administrative reasons, were also looking at the preserves scheme with distaste. The 'violent extensions of rationing both actual and projected' were giving rise to a movement for simplicity and uniformity of procedures. Jam with its two-month vouchers and calendar-month period would need a good deal of flattening into conformity. A start was made from 28th July, when a new rationing year began. The ration was doubled, and jam at last achieved a coupon of its own. This was a monthly coupon from the supplementary ration book that had been put together at the last moment as an insurance against the new rationing methods being discussed. The rationers, regretting their dalliance with the calendar month, set out to convince retailers and consumers that a coupon marked 'July' really meant the 28th July–25th August four-week period, and the Commodity Division that it could afford to supply 13 rations in the year instead of 12.² (They did not succeed, however, in getting the ration doubled on 1st July and so avoiding the problem of the single ration-book holder. He bought his jam a month in advance, i.e., 1 lb. for March/April, May/June, July/August, and so was going to lose $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. by the change-over.) A start was also made with the new order in permits by giving multiples permits instead of vouchers.³

¹ One chain of stores, however, was reported in October to have lost 'several hundred thousand registrations' during the general re-registration. As a result, stocks piled up in the group's factory, which had no storage space, and Jam Section had to find markets for the jam outside the group.

² The fact that they would be one coupon short did not worry them. They had already extended the life of the old main ration book for three weeks by marking the backs of coupons. (See p. 490, n. 2.) This was to allow time for the printing of the supplementary book.

³ Both permits and vouchers were manipulated. In order to disperse stocks, the value of the jam vouchers was to be 4 times their face value. This was neatly calculated to enable retailers to meet the doubled ration and be left with 4 weeks stock at the end of

[Continued overleaf]

III

The second quasi-rationing scheme was that for *onions*. Early in 1941, as the result of a departmental committee of inquiry into vegetable distribution, the Ministry decided to set up a Government-owned company to distribute the onion and carrot crops. On 29th May this *National Vegetable Marketing Company* broke the news to rationing officials that some months previously the Ministry had promised to help it by imposing registration for onions. They were not enthusiastic, more especially when they discovered, three weeks later, that there were not likely to be more than 3 lb. a head of onions over the season. To invoke the carefully-guarded authority of the ration book and the majestic process of registration for that many onions would, they argued, invite rebellion from Food Offices and ridicule from consumers. Furthermore, it would extend to greengrocers the powers granted by the amended Conditions of Sale Order. No doubt they were already exercising them; but Rationing Division had no desire to give them an official stranglehold, especially in view of the plans afoot for oranges. 'Higher authority' agreed, but though regretting the commitment could not climb out of it. The most that could be secured was the avoidance of the 'dangerous word "register"'. Onions were to be 'reserved'.¹

Consumers would 'reserve' their onions by handing in a counterfoil; greengrocers would mark purchases on the ration book; Food Offices would issue onion permits to be handed on to wholesalers; a share for catering establishments and a surplus for unregistered customers² was wrung from the Company; but at this point all resemblance to rationing ended. No account was to be taken of removals, nor of late 'reservations', and no supplementary permits would be issued. It was to be made clear to consumers that their reservation counterfoils lapsed when their purchase was made and that, if they moved, their onions would not follow them. It was to be made equally clear to greengrocers that they had no registered customers to whom conditional sales were allowed.

September. The value of the vouchers was also manipulated when it was necessary to vary the proportions of syrup and jam. Jam vouchers, it may be added, were still being used at the end of the war.

¹ A word roughly the same length as 'registration' had to be chosen because the Company's instructions were in proof.

² The Company first refused a surplus; then offered 2 per cent. Rationing Division asked for 10 per cent. and got 5 per cent. They had to emphasise that unregistered customers included important people like seamen. 'The tugboatman who serves his country faithfully is a constant source of embarrassment to us. Furthermore there are weekly seamen. . . . If we produce a scheme which leaves these people out in the cold we are for it. . . .'

For success, speed and good publicity were essential; but everything went wrong. Consumers were to 'reserve' between 1st and 6th September; distribution would begin in mid-September. This did not leave much time for Food Offices to get out permits and pass the distribution figures on to the Company; but as no account was to be taken of removals, 'reservation' might not be fixed too long before distribution began, and certainly not during the August holiday season. The publicity ought therefore to blaze forth on 31st August and continue the whole week, giving no one time to breathe the word 'register' and hammering home the point that no one who 'reserved' after the 6th September would ever get any onions. This, however, was the Company's responsibility and the news was allowed to seep through to the public by way of a Press conference on the 19th; the scheme was put about therefore, not by official announcements but by 'inefficient Press accounts' that nearly all used the word 'register'. This nearly wrecked the scheme. It led to provision for removals being taken for granted, and, on 17th September, the newspapers stated so categorically¹ that people who had been on holiday could 'register' late that Colwyn Bay had to make it so. The Food Office time-table was moved back a week; permits could not be sent out until the 27th at the earliest; late applications from retailers had to be accepted, and in the first week of October the Company, with its onions lifted and deteriorating, was calling piteously for its distribution figures. After all this, the individual share turned out to be only 1 lb., and the greengrocer, as had been feared, was wielding his onion 'registration' on his customers for oranges. 'It was, with the best will in the world,' pronounced the official in charge, '. . . one of the worst things we have ever done'.

The year after, the rationers began to enquire about onions very insistently as early as February. However, by this time, the Company was to be wound up; the Ministry's Fruit and Vegetable Division simply distributed the onions under its control to 'deficiency', i.e., industrial, areas, and left allocation to retailers to their wholesalers. The ration book was marked when a purchase was made and Food Offices gave permits to catering establishments, showing that they could be considered equivalent to so many ration book holders. Onions were never taken so seriously again. In 1943, the crop proved unexpectedly large and the problem was not to restrict them, but to get them sold at all. After this, home-grown onions were left to market themselves; imported onions, however, were distributed to districts in turn, much as oranges had been in 1941, and it was for these only that the ration book was marked.

¹ As a result of a Ministry Press conference in London at which a higher official had incautiously agreed that it was hard luck on people on holiday that they should get no onions and that they might go and talk to their Food Executive Officer.

IV

'The word *oranges* appears on the horizon every now and then', wrote a senior rationing official in June 1941, 'although it repeatedly sinks below it again'. Oranges had been under discussion since March. At that time, they were being distributed to bombed cities; but this caused heartburning between cities and between citizens. There were never likely to be enough oranges to provide even an exiguous share for all; there was also likely to be a shortage of Vitamin C for children. The obvious solution was to reserve them for children under six.¹ 'Higher authority' decided that it would be less invidious to turn the oranges into orange juice; only to discover that there was no plant in this country for the commercial manufacture of orange juice. On 30th May, therefore, the Minister instructed officials to work out a scheme for distributing oranges to children.² By this time oranges had become linked with onions, for it was thought that the same registration might do for both. On 22nd July, Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Division presented a rationing plan, based on the registration of children under six. However, the situation had changed. It was now clear that there were going to be fewer oranges than had been expected; they were no longer a necessity for children because of the blackcurrant juice scheme and the prospect of concentrated orange juice from the United States; and it had been realised that, as the smallest wholesale unit of oranges was 66 lb. it would be extremely difficult to distribute them to each retailer in exact accordance with his registrations. The Minister, deciding that a fixed ration and registration could hardly be applied to a 'perishable fruit arriving in small irregular shipments', ordained that they must be looked upon as an occasional bonus, not a regular item of diet, that no suggestion must be made that they were particularly valuable, and that they must be distributed with the minimum of fuss and the simplest of machinery.

¹ The Scientific Adviser said that they were essential only to children under two. But these could not easily be identified whereas most children under six held the green ration book. The fact that not all children under six held the R.B.2 was to be irritating later on. Press announcements tended to refer to 'Children under six' instead of to 'R.B.2 holders'. Rationing Division had no desire for a stream of six-year olds to come to Food Offices on their birthdays to acquire an adult ration book, so when ration books were reissued an arbitrary date was set; children born on one side of this received an adult book, those on the far side of it, a new R.B.2. Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Division thought this rather unethical when it was explained to them, but Rationing Division pointed out that although children lost oranges, milk, and eggs, by officially becoming six too soon, they got more meat. Parents, however, thinking that all children under six should have oranges complained if their children were unable to get them because they had been given an adult book in advance of their birthday. See pp. 651-2 for the question of the age limit of R.B.2.

² And to hospitals and child-welfare clinics. But the former were ruled out because if an impression were given that oranges were medical necessities there would be a flood of applications from special cases. It was considered unnecessary to look after the latter, as children would get their oranges individually.

On 29th September, therefore, a 'curious and extremely sanctionless' scheme went into operation. Oranges were sent to districts according to the number of R.B.2 holders living there; distribution to retailers was supervised by voluntary trade committees; shops must display their oranges and, for the first seven days,¹ sell them to R.B.2 holders only. The ration book was to be marked with the amount and date of purchase. It was, however, unlikely that any thing could be distributed with 'the minimum of fuss' once the ration book had been invoked. At the beginning, the scheme was jeopardised, as the rationers had feared, by the failure to keep onion 'reservation' apart from registration. Greengrocers had soon to be warned by Press notice that in refusing oranges to those not 'registered' with them for onions they were imposing a condition of sale, and once onions were cleared out of the way, they continued to reserve oranges for their regular customers.

In July 1942, public sense of entitlement was increased, when the coupon left unused by the withdrawal of the under-fives' tea ration² was allotted to oranges, as if they were a *quid pro quo*. Both Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Division and the Retail Fruit Trade Federation were pressing by this time for the scheme to be tightened up, so as to eliminate under-the-counter sales and discrimination. The former suggested registration, the latter, coupon-cutting and the restriction of sales to people actually living in an area. The last point was particularly thorny; oranges were distributed on the basis of the resident population, but they might be bought by people who only shopped in an area. All three suggestions were turned down at rationing headquarters; registration was not worthwhile except for commodities completely controlled by the Ministry; coupon-cutting, a useless bluff unless the coupons were actually used as the basis of distribution; people could not be forced to shop in areas where they lived, nor could retailers be expected to look at addresses on ration books.

Rationing Division did agree to take a more active part in the orange scheme. Hitherto, they confessed, they had not been much interested in oranges—the first commodity to use the ration book without actually being rationed. Now, however, they had become so used to such camp-followers—dried milk, dried eggs, etc.—that they had come to accord them the same care as the staple foods. From August 1943, therefore, Rationing Division was to handle the correspondence from the public, Food Executive Officers were to tackle retailers said to be refusing customers, and Divisional Food Officers were to help the hard-worked Imported Fruit Distribution Com-

¹ Reduced in December 1941 to 5 days.

² See pp. 730-2, below.

mittees.¹ The new order was signalled by a new method of marking the ration book. The child's book for 1943 had coupons specifically designed for oranges. The eggs technique was borrowed, and the oranges allocation number was to be marked on the coupon for the period in which the purchase was made.

Towards the end of the war, as the supply of oranges improved, allocations of 1 lb. a head for the whole population became more frequent and, after the war, bananas re-appeared, to be sold upon the same conditions as oranges. In 1945, too, there were lemons, grapefruit, and Canadian apples, all of which were allocated to the local distribution committees on a population basis. Complaints of conditional sales, of refusal to sell, of queues created by retailers selling their fruit at a fixed time, were numerous. Persistent offenders with oranges received warning letters followed, if need be, by the withholding of allocations. But the Commodity Division had to move warily, for there was no legal backing for these sanctions. A retailer could not be compelled to reserve oranges for children during the first five days, or to sell fruit to anyone. Requests for the rationing of imported fruit were frequent, but there was not enough of it to sustain a ration. For lemons, grapefruit, apples, and, in 1944, 'edible nuts', Rationing Division would not even allow the ration book to be marked. Some retailers did, of course, run their own unofficial rationing schemes, especially for the much-prized tomato, and marked an odd corner of the ration book.

In November 1941, there was a short-lived distribution scheme for *dried fruits* that was, like points rationing and preserves, based on vouchers. The Commodity Division had been asking for some time for registration for dried fruits; at first because they were scarce, then because they would become plentiful under Lend/Lease, and it did not want this improvement in supplies to be negated by the inequalities of datum distribution. Rationing Division therefore prepared to introduce orthodox rationing of dried fruits. The special difficulty of rationing was that dates and figs were handled mainly by greengrocers. An initial decision that dates and figs must be excluded from rationing was superseded by a second, that they must be withheld from greengrocers. The ration would be four-weekly, retailers would be tied to suppliers, and there would be a combined registration for dried fruits, sugar, and preserves. The details of the rationing scheme were still being filled in when a new factor appeared. 'The point scheme is forging ahead with considerable vigour', Dried Fruits Division were warned. '... If ... you would much prefer

¹ e.g., by arranging local publicity for allocations, giving authority for consignments of oranges that might not keep five days to be sold to all members of the public, reporting erring retailers to Headquarters. The Distribution Committees were voluntary, and most of their active members were also engaged with the Onions and Green Vegetable Distribution Committees and the Tomato Associations.

dried fruits to be part of the [straight] rationing system and not a small insignificant item in the large points scheme I suggest that you put up *immediately* an urgent plea'. But opinion was divided, and rationing hung fire while the general combat over points went on.

At length a distribution scheme, designed to give the Branch a new datum line, was introduced instead. Retailers received vouchers (in 7 lb. units) equivalent to 6 oz. of dried fruit for each customer registered for sugar. Retailers without sugar registrations were asked for an up-to-date sales return. The vouchers were passed by retailers to their wholesalers, who summarised them and passed them on, with the summaries, to their suppliers, and so on. Retailers got the fruit and the Branch its new basis for future distributions, but, wrote Rationing Division cheerfully, 'vouchers are horrible things. They nearly killed wholesalers in dried fruits'. In January 1942, dried fruits were added to the points scheme; but after an initial period of 'free' buying within it, the unit voucher system was restored.¹

In February 1942, *soap* was rationed. The scheme could not be taken very seriously as a rationing scheme. A ration was prescribed, and a coupon cancelled when the ration was bought,² but the retailer continued to receive his supplies on a datum basis. The difficulties of soap rationing at this time lay in the arrangements for non-domestic users, and they served to confirm the T.U.C. Advisory Committee's feeling against differential rationing. After the war, however, the soap scheme was turned into a real rationing system on a coupon replacement basis,³ with a banking system like that for 'points'.

In June 1942, another example of a coupon replacement system appeared when *sweets* were rationed and, in December, a third, when *tea* rationing was put on a new basis for the last time. Also in June came another quasi-rationing scheme when *dried eggs* were distributed on a basis of egg registrations, and the ration book marked when they were bought.

V

Nearly as interesting as the schemes that did materialise were the ones that did not. These were one and all generated about March 1941, by the need to make the meat ration look larger. Sausages, meat pies, offals, poultry, rabbit, and game, it was often calculated, constituted an unofficial meat ration as large as the official one, and

¹ The distribution system for dried fruits was wholly re-cast by this operation. Bakers' allocations were related to their sugar allocations; caterers' to the number of meals served; and manufacturers were given a new datum line—the 12 months ended 30th June 1939. The old basis of distribution had been average trade in 1936, 1937, and 1938. For the troubles of dried fruit 'on points' see Vol. I, pp. 204-5.

² A coupon from the supplementary book, R.B.g, was used.

³ Soap rationing is more conveniently discussed in the context of oils and fats control.

it seemed a pity that food control should not be credited with it. Furthermore, a feeling among consumers that the bulk of these supplements were cornered by catering establishments constituted a source of discontent that officials were anxious to remove. On several occasions during 1941, a sausage ration seemed imminent, but was abandoned because of the disruption of trade channels that it would mean. Rationing of poultry was mooted; but Meat and Livestock Division calculated that there would be only three-quarters of a bird per head per year. In 1942, however, these extensions of rationing seemed both more necessary and more possible. With the success of the points scheme, all the main foods had been tamed, leaving the rest 'strikingly uncovered', and, if coupons for meals and bread rationing were to be adopted, pressure on them would increase. At the same time, there were by now plenty of alternatives to an orthodox flat ration with a distribution system attached—points, the egg allocation scheme with the 'ration' announced when eggs were available, the milk maximum entitlement scheme, and the simple restriction of soap. Meaty oddments, including fish, should provide a group 'ration' of 14 oz. a week, which, in the rationers' opinion, 'is by no means to be sniffed at'. Two projects emerged: 'F.F.F.'—a fish, flesh, fowl group-ration, and 'P.P.P.'—perishable protein points.

Under the first scheme, a weekly 'ration' of, say, 12 oz. would be announced, and varied according to seasonal supply. It could be bought at any time during the four-week period, enabling even a 'singleton' to buy a bird occasionally. The retailer would mark the size of the purchase on the coupon. Under the second scheme, the articles would be given points values and consumers would have points to spend. Under neither scheme would there be any steering of supplies to retailers according to demand or, to avoid waste, any positive prohibition not to sell more than the 'ration'. 'It would be simply and solely an attempt to cajole retailers and consumers to help each other in securing equitable distribution . . . more or less a mixture of soap and oranges, with a flavour of egg in it'. By October 1943, it had occurred to Rationing Division that 'P.P.P.' might be expanded to take care of their other tormentors—cake, soft fruit, tomatoes—and the scheme came to stand for 'perishable produce points'.

The Commodity Divisions' reactions to these schemes were kindly but destructive.

'I need hardly add', wrote their inventor, 'that no Commodity Division yet has liked to be drawn into the Points Scheme, each preferring that its commodity should be regarded on its own merits in its own way. The same tendency is already evident when I talk to my colleagues about my quasiperishable Points Scheme. Their reactions

are to think (a) fish (b) sausage (c) rabbit. My pressure is towards thinking of the lot together'.

When, therefore, Meat and Livestock Division pressed for the restriction of poultry to caterers (in October 1943), or Fish Division urged that all they needed to put a final polish on their new distribution system was registration (in March 1943), the rationers' attitude was that it must be 'all for one and one for all'. Each item in the F.F.F. group was so perishable, or so fitful in supply, that to control it separately was impossible. Whether it were F.F.F. or P.P.P. the whole range must be attempted.

The discussions on *fish* are noteworthy because they reproduced exactly the discussions on the control of unrationed foods of March 1941. In 1942, Fish Division was reconstructing distribution by requiring wholesalers to furnish lists of customers with the amount supplied to each during part of 1941.¹ The response was not good. The Division therefore turned to the other end of the chain of distribution, and sought to supplement its incomplete knowledge of what retailers ought to have with complete knowledge of what they were actually getting. From January 1943, retailers were required to make monthly returns of fish received. Food Offices sent out these forms and got them back; Divisional Food Offices sent them on to Fish Division. In March 1943, however, the Minister suggested registration for fish. This had been extensively discussed from July to December 1942, and Fish Division had reluctantly recognised it to be impossible. What the Minister had in mind was registration without rationing, to stop shop-crawling and selling behind closed doors. Furthermore, this would give Fish Division what in November 1941 it had given Dried Fruits, an up-to-date datum line for distribution. But (objected the rationers), it would not be up-to-date for very long; furthermore, there had been no overt registration for dried fruits and, therefore, no dangerous sense of entitlement. They felt that if registration were used, the distribution system must be re-cast so as to provide at least an average amount for each registration. The first preserves scheme, however, had been a warning against light-hearted use of registration merely to iron out inequalities in a distribution system. Its supporters in Fish Division were told that they were better off as they were. 'I am afraid', minuted the Minister on 22nd March, 'that this decision is right'. The Commodity Division was therefore enjoined to continue to perfect distribution down to the retailer; then perhaps an 'F.F.F.' scheme on the lines of soap might be considered.

Fish Division thereupon asked if the fish receipts returns could not be speeded up. 'This return is our only means of knowing the actual

¹ See above, pp. 25-6.

receipts of fish in each . . . area. . . . It is the policeman of the Distribution Scheme'. Food Offices were being dilatory in sending out and collecting these returns which were not much use if analysis of them was not available until six weeks after the month to which they related. The work was therefore decentralised; Divisional Food Offices ceased to be merely post offices, and in December 1943, took on the task of summarising and analysing. By this time, the peak of control had passed, and the senior official in charge of rationing could now frankly admit that 'we really have not been able to discover any means of dealing with these perishables in short supply'.

VI

The staple foods that formed the backbone of rationing had given little trouble while Food Offices were engaging the newcomers, except for tea, meat, and bacon. A new system was devised for tea in November 1941, but it did not finally settle down until it was recognised a year later as a separate coupon system. Meat problems overwhelmed Food Offices from January to March 1941, but the big reform of meat rationing machinery did not come until 1943. Bacon, however, in 1941 steadily pursued its policy of contracting out.

The vicissitudes of 1940 had left Food Offices with a somewhat tremulous attitude to bacon rationing. But some, apparently undaunted, were still trying, in spite of the licence officially accorded it, to make bacon conform. In March, Bacon Division complained that some Food Offices were adjusting permits in the light of the stock figures given on the B.H.3 return. These stocks, however, were working stocks; bacon was allocated weekly, and as some shops might not receive deliveries until the end of a week, they must carry stocks over. Food Offices were therefore told not to deduct 'reasonable stocks' from permit quantities.¹ Thus it was openly acknowledged that bacon permits must be based solely on the number of registered customers and that no attempt could be made to bring them down to sales.

Bacon rationing was thus made vulnerable to the retailer who cooked bacon that was not really surplus to his ration requirements, and then applied for supplementary permits in order to meet the ration. In June 1941, this was undoubtedly happening. Food Offices were told to scrutinise applications very carefully and to issue supplementaries only to meet an increase in the number of registrations. (Applications to meet uncovenanted demands would, of course, be

¹ 'Reasonable stocks' was interpreted as meaning up to a week's supply.

Some Food Offices, however, concluded that retailers *must* have a week's stock in reserve and began to shower supplementary permits on them, only to be called off by Headquarters.

supported by coupons.) At the same time, a new source of bacon for 'cooking' appeared; the fat American bellies received as Lend/Lease supplies. Some of these were issued as Category A rationed bacon, but the very fat ones could only be used for the creation of a new category—F—for sale to catering establishments and canteens. This did not get rid of them fast enough, and in August Bacon Division became worried about the amount of storage they were occupying. They were therefore used to re-animate Category C, i.e., bacon cooked, or for cooking, that had been dormant for a year. Bacon Division decided, however, not to allow this belly bacon to be sold off the ration uncooked. To have had some bacon on the ration lean, and off it fat, would have surpassed the wildest confusion of the previous year.

Although the distinction was preserved between cooked unrationed and uncooked rationed, the first class had perforce to be extended. The retailer had to be allowed to cook streak and belly, as well as ham and gammon, for off-ration sale. Thus, although no more category C issues were made after October 1942, and the retailer was confined once more to cooking only his surplus rationed bacon, his field of manoeuvre had been alarmingly widened and, as the supply position returned to normal austerity, Bacon Division viewed his cooking activities more and more sombrely.

Meanwhile the rationing machinery had been loosened still more. In October 1942 bacon was dropped from the retailer's stock returns. Bacon Division, which had consistently maintained that this return was of no use to it, or (it suspected) to anyone else either, saw no harm in asking instead for a statement of purchases (at invoice weights), provided that separate figures were given for Category A, C, and F. Rationing Division, however, on thinking it over, came to the 'odd conclusion . . . that once we have disposed of stocks there is really nothing to be gained by asking for purchases at all'. In February 1943, therefore, the bacon return was dropped altogether. Control now rested with the Commodity side; it lay with them rather than with Food Offices to see that a retailer did not get more bacon than he could legitimately sell.

In November 1941, rationing officials managed to get rid of the *margarine/cooking fats* option,¹ which like the butter/margarine option, was troublesome because it prevented permits from settling down. In May 1941, Food Offices had had to be reminded that, if a retailer found himself short of margarine because some of his customers were varying their demand for butter and cooking fats, he must be given a supplementary permit for margarine, and his suppliers for butter and cooking fats notified of any consequent decrease in these permits. Food Offices had evidently been taking a short cut by telling retailers

¹ Above p. 556 *seq.*

that they must meet unforeseen demands out of the fortnight's stock of margarine that Oils and Fats Division wanted them to hold. In July 1941, however, the Division had a much larger quantity of fats at its disposal and wished to increase the total ration from 8 to 10 oz. The increase was in the form of animal lard from the United States; the only way to dispose of this and at the same time avoid the risk of having to find extra margarine in lieu, was to abolish the margarine/cooking fats option. The Commodity Division therefore proposed a ratio of 2 oz. butter, 5 oz. margarine and 3 oz. cooking fats. Thus the maximum entitlement of margarine would be reduced from 8 to 7 oz. (The margarine/butter option was sacrosanct, on account of the 'poor consumer'.) The problem of odd weights was met by allowing the retailer to round off margarine to a multiple of four, i.e., serve 4 oz. margarine and 4 oz. cooking fats, or 6 oz. margarine and 2 oz. cooking fats.¹

The new arrangements came into force on 17th November and were not altogether popular. Those who had been accustomed to buy 8 oz. margarine could now get this amount only if their grocers happened to round up instead of down. The option, in short, had been transferred from customer to retailer, and many people regarded the increase in the fats ration as a decrease of 1 oz. in theory and 2 oz. in practice. Moreover, consumers soon lost their jam (the 2 oz. increase) and were left with the pill, the withdrawal of the option. The new arrangements were less than a month old when Pearl Harbour made necessary a reassessment of supply prospects. On 12th January 1942, the ration returned to 8 oz.—2 oz. butter, 4 oz. margarine (or 6 oz. margarine) and 2 oz. cooking fats. The need to round off had disappeared.²

¹ Another problem was that of people who did not eat animal fat, e.g., Jews, vegetarians. For them the option was to continue. They could have vegetable margarine instead of lard. Vegetarians proved their bona fides by showing a 'special cheese document', Jews by giving up their bacon coupons. These arrangements applied to anyone who for religious reasons did not eat animal fat.

² This alteration did not, like so many of the others, take place in the middle of a permit period. But it took place at the beginning of a new period after new permits had been written. Wholesalers had to adjust cooking fats permits to two-thirds of face value, and margarine permits to four-fifths of face value.

CHAPTER XXXIV

The Problem of Supplementary Rations: 'Special Cheese'

I

ONE FOOD rationed during 1941—cheese—has been reserved for separate treatment, because it occasioned the first (and last) overt breach with a principle laid down in the early months of the war; that there should be no supplementary rations for ordinary adults. The breach, in the circumstances of 1941, was all but inevitable; but rationing administrators never ceased to regret it, and strove with some degree of success to prevent it from being widened.

The principle had been established in circumstances that caused the Ministry of Food some surprise. Before the war, supplementary ration books had been printed for 'heavy workers', on the model of those used in 1918; and there had again been some difficulty in defining a 'heavy worker', or even a 'heavy industry' (in which, of course, not all would be doing heavy work).¹ When, in September 1939, the British Employers Confederation and the Trades Union Congress were invited to consider how supplementary rations might be allotted to heavy workers, the latter immediately protested to the Prime Minister against the mere suggestion of differential rations, because of the invidious distinctions that would arise. In December, this view was formally reiterated at a meeting of the Advisory Committee that had been set up to maintain regular contact between the Ministry of Food and the T.U.C. The Committee

'indicated the definite view of the T.U.C. General Council that distinctions between related grades of workers would be invidious and unworkable. . . . The Committee was prepared to be quoted as having tendered this advice, and suggested that Unions which might dissent should be referred to them'.

Unions did dissent. Miners and steelworkers asked for extra rations in 1939, before rationing had begun, and there was constant pressure from them in 1940. But the Ministry, armed with the T.U.C. statement, could in those days of comparative plenty fend off pressure by

¹ A baker mixing and kneading by hand was doing heavy work; one doing so by machine was not. In 1918 a committee had laboured through thirty-five meetings to classify over 500 occupations.

asserting that ration levels, together with the unrationed foods available, were adequate for heavy work.

When, in the winter of 1940-41, supplies became more stringent, the problem of feeding industrial workers was met, not by granting extra allowances to individuals, but by encouraging the provision of canteens and granting preferential food supplies to them.¹ The policy of 'feeding the worker on the job', said the Ministry, ensured that the extra food went to the people it was meant for; it related the additional food to output; it was more economical, in that the catering allowances were based on proved demand and not, like retailers' supplies, on possible maximum demand; it side-stepped both the administrative difficulties of an individual supplementary ration—the printing and issue of documents, the problem of identification, special registration, the adjustment of permits, and so on—and its psychological dangers. It had, however, one serious drawback; it could not, or did not, reach two vital classes, miners and agricultural workers. In order to give these a *quid pro quo* for the industrial worker's canteen, the Ministry had to concede an individual supplementary ration as well.

Pressure on the Ministry on behalf of industrial workers increased after the rationing of tea in July 1940. Many tea concessions were made for 'communal brews'. Railwaymen who had no access to canteens or facilities for communal brews asked for a supplementary ration of dry tea to individuals. They also asked for extra allowances of rationed foods, on the ground that they could not take food with them on 'lodging turns' without depriving their families. In November 1940 the Ministry evaded the issue for the moment by an ingenious extension of railway staff-catering services. These might supply breakdown gangs, or hostels attached to booking-off depots, with rationed foods that the men could themselves turn into meals, but that would be accounted for on the parent establishment's consumption returns. This did not solve the problem of tea, and, in May 1941, the Ministry gave way to the extent that a supplementary allowance of 'dry tea' was authorised for certain railwaymen. Because this was to be issued to an official on behalf of the men, not directly to individuals, the concession could still be described as a catering facility, not a supplementary ration.

By then, however, the point of principle had been conceded by the proposal to ration cheese. The Ministry of Health's opinion, given in December 1939, that supplementary rations were not necessary; the T.U.C.'s declaration against them; the Ministry's early assurances that ration levels, together with ration-free meals and the unrationed foods available, were enough for all; these had occurred at a time when ration levels were 4 oz. butter, 12 oz. sugar, 4 oz. bacon, and 1s. 10d. to 2s. 2d. worth of meat, and unrationed foods were plentiful. In

¹ For the policy of communal feeding, including pie schemes, see Chapter XXV.

January 1941 the butter ration was 2 oz., the sugar ration 8 oz., the meat ration 1s. 2d. and not honoured in full; offals and pork were on the ration, and unrationed foods like cheese, preserves, canned meat, and eggs, were very scarce. A two-fold agitation developed: first, that rations were too low to maintain output; secondly, that workers without canteens could not find the materials for packed meals to take to work with them.

The Ministry resorted at first to *ad hoc* priorities. Cheese, regardless of datum distribution, was diverted to mining areas; works canteens were given meat at the expense of other catering establishments and priorities in unrationed foods; the long discussions over the railwaymen's tea had come to include arrangements for giving them canned meat, biscuits, and meat pies.¹ But the key to the situation was the meat ration. On 6th January this stood nominally at 1s. 6d. On the 7th, the T.U.C. Advisory Committee stated that a fall to 1s. 4d., which they had been warned was a possibility, would not justify embarking on the 'uncharted sea of supplementary rationing'. The meat ration fell to 1s. 2d. They were still of the opinion that 'it would be difficult and undesirable to attempt to distinguish between heavy and other workers', but they were under great pressure, and added that they 'recommended the Department to make arrangements to administer supplementary rations in case a change of policy proved to be unavoidable'. What they had in mind was a supplementary meat ration for miners. In February, at the Minister's request, cheese was diverted to mining areas in South Wales and Scotland; the Committee on the Distribution of Unrationed Foods recommended a minimum share scheme for cheese; on the 5th the T.U.C. Advisory Committee, still opposing supplementary rations in principle, pressed the case of miners who could not benefit from the preference being given to canteens; on the 13th the Ministry of Agriculture did the same for farm workers; by the middle of the month the 1s. 2d. meat ration was clearly in danger. The Ministry had to retreat; but not so far as a supplementary meat ration. On the 13th March, cheese rationing was approved by the Food Policy Committee.

In December 1940, when cheese rationing was first mooted, officials had hoped for a uniform ration, for 'previous conceptions that cheese was largely consumed by agricultural and heavy workers' had not

¹ This led to a reproach from the T.U.C. Advisory Committee. They had, they said, pressed only for tea for certain classes of railwaymen, and this was all that the Ministry should have been discussing with the Railway Executive Committee. But the field of discussion had been extended to cheese, canned meat, canned fish, biscuits, and meat rolls. If, they pointed out, "Trades Unions or employers had reason for thinking that they would get better terms by making direct contact with the Ministry rather than by working through the T.U.C. we might just as well wind up the Advisory Committee". "You must", rationing officials were told, "make arrangements which will prevent any "flirting" in future with special demands from individual Trade Unions and direct all such representations to the T.U.C."

been borne out by the datum returns for the cheese distribution scheme. In March 1941, however, these figures counted for little; those for meat consumption would have been more relevant, for it was to combat the shortage of meat that cheese was being rationed. Rationing was intended to ensure an estimated three million agricultural and heavy workers eight ounces of cheese a week. The one ounce left over for ordinary consumers was incidental; indeed, it was thought that this might have to be suspended in the second month of rationing.

Officially, 'special' cheese was not a supplementary ration at all; it was a peripatetic catering facility. It was not given for heavy work; it was given to workers who had no canteens and *who could not get home for a midday meal*. It was regarded as a measure to combat the shortage of unrationed foods—in particular, those generally used for packed meals—rather than as an acknowledgement of the low level of the general rations. Certainly, it was given on political and psychological, rather than nutritional grounds.

'There is absolutely clear-cut proof', wrote the Scientific Adviser, 'to show that increased muscular effort does not require additional protein-rich foods such as meat and cheese, but nothing will ever convince the British working man that this is a fact. He is convinced that beef means brawn; actually of course, all the necessary energy for heavy muscular work can be obtained by appropriate consumption of foods rich in fats, sugar and starch (potatoes, bread, margarine, etc.)'.

It may as well be said at once that these distinctions were never recognised by the general public, or by the beneficiaries, or by the would-be beneficiaries. To them, special cheese was given for the kind of work done, not for the conditions in which it was done—in short, a supplementary ration for heavy work.

Once the decision was taken, higher officials were dismayed to find that it could not be put into effect until 5th May. Even this date was a gamble. The ordinary processes of registration and permit-writing were complicated by the supply situation and the special classes. The Commodity Division had not enough cheese to stock up retailers in advance, and would have to wait until permits came right up the chain, and distribute stocks when rationed demand became known. It asked for three weeks to be allowed for this process, even though Food Offices were to by-pass retailers and send their permits direct to their wholesalers. But Food Offices could not begin to invite applications for supplies from retailers and write permits until the amount of the ration was known. Neither this, nor the date of rationing, could be settled until decisions had been reached about who should compose the special classes and how many of them there

would be. On 17th March the Division stated that it could not guarantee the full ration for both special and ordinary consumers if rationing were to begin before 2nd June.¹ The alternatives were to start on 5th May with half rations for all, or with the special classes only. On 25th March, it was decided to start the whole scheme on 5th May, and risk suspension of the ordinary ration in June if the expected supplies failed to arrive.

The Food Policy Committee had decided that miners and agricultural workers must have the special ration. There remained the problem of identification. Underground miners were to be listed by their employers; the Ministry of Agriculture was asked how agricultural workers could be picked out. The answer was: the agricultural Unemployment Insurance Book. Only at the last moment did rationing officials discover that this book was indistinguishable from the general book, and hastily add instructions that it should bear a stamp marked 'agriculture'. Later it was realised that a better criterion might have been the industry code letters on the book.

Meanwhile, officials were pondering how best to identify another special class, vegetarians. They had, in December 1939 and March and August 1940, asked for extra fats; but the Special Diets Advisory Committee had decided that they could obtain enough fats from the milk, eggs, and vegetable oils available. In February 1941, however, it was admitted that 'the position of claimants for special privileges has been radically altered by the sudden shortage that has developed over the whole field of animal proteins'. The Minister asked for the case of vegetarians to be considered, as 'with the existing shortage of cheese, eggs, and nuts, they must be finding life a little difficult'. On the 21st, he promised a deputation from vegetarian societies and Health Food Stores to do what he could. On the 13th March, the Food Policy Committee deferred a decision on vegetarians because of the difficulty of identifying them. What weighed on officials' minds was that there appeared to be two and a half million people not registered for meat (this estimate was later reduced to one million), and that the ranks of these might be swelled by those who considered the precarious meat ration well lost for a guaranteed 8 oz. of cheese a week. The 100,000 estimated genuine vegetarians was a more comforting figure, but to insist on membership of an accredited vegetarian society hardly came within the Ministry's province. When, therefore, vegetarians followed the other special classes into the scheme on the 29th March, they had to fulfil three conditions: a declaration of genuine vegetarianism (or membership of one of the two national societies), the production of intact meat and bacon coupons, and an undertaking to surrender these coupons in the future.

29th March was also the date by which registration of consumers

¹ Because 15,000 of the 17,000 tons stock they were relying on was still 'afloat'.

should have been completed. In the preceding week, Food Offices should have sent application forms to canteens (ordinary catering establishments were not to have cheese) and to retailers, and have dealt with the special classes. The latter received 'R.G.40', a separate page of cheese coupons with a counterfoil.¹ Their ordinary cheese registration was cancelled, and they had to register again for special cheese. By 2nd April, retailers should have sent in their applications for supplies and the counterfoils from R.G.40; by 10th April, Food Offices should have sent out the permits, including the duplicates that went to wholesalers.

This timetable was tight enough, and the late inclusion of vegetarians would by itself have ensured that the Supply Division would be vexed by a stream of supplementary permits following the main ones up the chain.² It was wrecked by the extreme reluctance of consumers to register. The trouble seems to have been partly that people could see no reason why they should register in March for 4 oz. of cheese in May, partly that cheese supplies suddenly improved as shops released stocks to attract registrations, partly that people were pre-occupied with registering (or with thinking of registering) for preserves. By the closing date less than half the population had registered. The figures crept up to 60 per cent. a week after permits should have been sent out and to 80 per cent. by the time rationing began.

The special classes, particularly miners, were even more dilatory. Food Office staffs attended at pit heads to issue the R.G.40's from lists prepared, in most cases, by the employers. But many miners did not come. It transpired that in the North they were not so fond of cheese as had been thought (unless it were coloured cheese) and would have preferred jam:

'I am not at all surprised to learn that in some areas miners are not particularly interested in a special ration of cheese', wrote the Director of Butter and Cheese on 20th May. 'Ever since cheese distribution came up for review in December last, I have stressed the fact that, in general terms, pre-war cheese consumption varied geographically rather than by classes. For example, the South Wales miner was a relatively heavy cheese consumer, so were other South Wales residents. In the North, however, the miner was not so interested, but in the North general cheese consumption was less than half of the average in the South'.³

¹ It was decided not to use the Heavy Worker's ration book, still in store, because both its name and contents - two pages of meat coupons - were dangerous.

² Cheese was released to first-hand suppliers on 23rd April; but it was realised that suppliers would have to deliver several times during May because of supplementary permits.

³ This was confirmed by W.V.S. members running catering services for miners. It applied also to some dockers. West Ham dockers, it was said, preferred dry bread to cheese, even when this was served as a savoury cheese pudding.

When the miners did apply, they had not always brought their ration books with them. This was essential, because the name of the cheese retailer had to be noted so that the ordinary registration could be cancelled. However, in many cases the book had been forgotten, or it had been left with the retailer so that preserves registration could be effected, or the cheese page had been deposited, or the cheese page only was brought. Even if the book were available the name of the cheese retailer was not always entered. Finally, if all these obstacles were surmounted, the miner might still not realise that he had to register again for his special cheese, and Food Offices waited in vain for these counterfoils to reach them.

The rationers had hoped that cheese rationing would

'provide us with an interesting experience for the next time we ration a new commodity, because we have never had to do this manœuvre since before rationing began, and we had no clue as to how long the process would take'.

In fact, no rationing scheme introduced during the war could serve entirely as a model of how to go about the business. The introduction of butter, sugar, and bacon rationing in January 1940 had been beset by political and extra-departmental complications; meat rationing was not normal because the permits were prepared by the Commodity Division; tea rationing did not affect distribution arrangements; for margarine there were no permits during the first months; preserves was not a full rationing scheme; as for cheese, the only one except for the first for which a preliminary issue of documents had to be made, it was not, concluded officials, an 'encouraging example'. The only lessons of general validity that could be drawn from it were that people were not interested in a very small ration, or in one that was too far distant, or in a registration that came too sharply on the heels of another.

Butter and Cheese Division had guaranteed to supply 8 oz. a head for some three million 'specialists'. By 21st June, the special ration had been claimed by 450,000 miners out of a potential 580,000; and 402,000 agricultural workers out of a potential 645,000. 'This', wrote a high official, '. . . shows that we cannot always accept well-intentioned . . . estimates. For example, where are the 100,000 vegetarians?' In fact, only 9,000 had appeared; but this was partly because the proviso about intact meat and bacon coupons had excluded those genuine but kindly vegetarians who had given theirs to their friends. Rationing Division could therefore set about the inevitable tidying-up process in a generous spirit. The ordinary cheese ration was doubled in June; vegetarians were allowed to qualify when they had amassed three months' meat and bacon coupons,

cheese was given to ordinary catering establishments, and the special classes were extended.

The last process had to be carried out very carefully. Rationing Division had a free hand from Butter and Cheese Division until the three million mark should be in sight; but not from the T.U.C., who had been given an undertaking that the special classes would not be extended without consulting them. The clamour for admittance was considerable and prolonged. All applications had to be considered in the light of the principle, whole-heartedly maintained by the T.U.C. as well as by the Ministry, that heavy work was irrelevant. This excluded working farmers, their families, and small-holders, who had the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, but not of a Trade Union, and who could never understand their exclusion.¹

II

There were inevitably anomalies even within the proper framework of the scheme. The 'agricultural stamp' had admitted some classes who should not have had the special ration—for instance private gardeners, cemetery workers, groundsmen, grooms and hunt servants—² and excluded some who had as good a claim as agricultural workers. Land drainage workers, for example, were classed with agricultural workers for the purpose of the National Service (Armed Forces) Act, and could be sent back by Employment Exchanges when they left land drainage work for work on aerodromes; but, by a pre-war and admittedly unsatisfactory decision, they were insured under the general scheme if only a small part of the drainage board's district lay within an urban area. Private forestry workers were insured under the agricultural schemes; employees of commercial timber firms and of the Ministry of Supply and their contractors under the general scheme. A man felling trees would generally be insured under the industrial scheme, one planting trees would be able to show an agricultural stamp. Employees of corporations like the L.C.C. would have no agricultural stamp because they were covered by a superannuation scheme; but a new employee, serving two or three years before qualifying for the superannuation scheme, would have one. Many of these classes ought clearly to be granted special cheese on the grounds that they worked in remote areas and had no access to canteens. The problem was one of identification.

¹ It was assumed, not always perhaps correctly, that they could go home to a midday meal.

² The T.U.C. would have liked the special ration to be withdrawn from these, but accepted the Ministry's explanation that the difficulty of identifying them would be too great. There were about 160,000 in this 'lucky category'.

Once rationing officials passed beyond the agricultural stamp, there was no automatic winnowing agent. They investigated the Ministry of Labour's industry code but this would have created anomalies of its own. The code letters of a timberman working for a commercial firm, for example, would relate to his employer's business. The Ministry therefore had to fall back on what it had always wanted to avoid—an employer's certificate.

The first batch of new entrants to the special classes was added in September 1941: county roadmen, forestry workers, land drainage workers, the Women's Land Army, train crews, signalmen and permanent-way men (without access to canteens), and workers on threshing machines and tractors. By December, the scheme had been extended to canal navigation maintenance workers,¹ rural roadmen,² some quarrymen (at the request of the T.U.C.), charcoal burners in forests (at the request of the Ministry of Supply), travelling scale repairers (pressed by the T.U.C. and in some measure a *quid pro quo* for the Ministry of Supply's charcoal burners), and diabetics.³ 'I am afraid', wrote a rationing official in February 1942, 'this will never cease to provide us with something to do'. Slate quarrymen and water-bailiffs were added; but 'I must warn you . . . there are other candidates lurking horribly near'. Among these were peat workers (sponsored by the Ministry of Aircraft Production) who made their way in in March 1942, and who were particularly alarming because no Department knew how many of them there were likely to be; inshore fishermen (sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries) and overhead linesmen employed by the Central Electricity Board (in April); railway electrical sub-station staff (in June); dry-stone dykers, Petroleum Board drivers (at the request of the Ministry of Transport), and, not surprisingly, overhead linesmen employed by private electricity undertakings (in August); Post Office engineers and Ordnance Survey field workers (in October). This list illustrates the difficulties that arose once any rule-of-thumb classification was departed from. The Ministry sought to confine the concession to identifiable groups; but some of the groups were, from its point of view, perilously small—for example, the twenty-odd men engaged in maintaining the New River between Ware and Enfield for the Metropolitan Water Board.

¹ i.e., men who cut reeds and maintained banks. These were analogous to land drainage workers. Canal boatmen were analogous to railwaymen, especially as some canals were owned by railway companies; but their claim was rejected on the grounds that they led a domestic life on barges.

² It came to light, after the concession had been made to roadmen employed by County Councils, that rural roadmen were employed by the Rural District Councils on behalf of the County Councils. Rural roadmen were therefore admitted as, happily, they could be distinguished from Urban District roadmen.

³ The Ministry of Health said that 6 oz. of cheese was enough for diabetics, but they had to have the full special ration for the sake of administrative simplicity.

By the end of the first year, the 'specialists' had fallen into two groups; those who were presumed, as a class, to have no canteens, e.g., farm workers, and those who were admitted only if they had no canteens, e.g., quarrymen. The snowball effect of any concession had been amply illustrated. The farm worker drew in other rural workers and craftsmen, e.g., those concerned with agricultural machinery; the railwaymen immediately revealed 'odds and ends of railwaymen', such as drivers of colliery locomotives and employees of light and other local railways. Travelling scale repairers, feared the Ministry, might open the door to travelling delivery men; the T.U.C. definition of quarrymen as 'working within the confines of a quarry' raised the hopes of men who drove locomotives in and out of quarries; charcoal burners in forests had to be carefully distinguished from charcoal burners in sawmills, and there were formidable complications in a class in which the Ministry of War Transport was interested — 'passed cleaners'. These were engine-cleaners who had qualified as firemen, but who had not been formally converted into firemen, and divided their time between the two sets of duties. Rationing Division, having drawn up a very pretty formula for the exact proportion of the week that should be spent in firemen's duties before a passed cleaner could be regarded as train crew, finally decided that it would be simpler just to give all passed cleaners special cheese. (The steam-roller driver who claimed to qualify twice, as a roadman and as a locomotive driver, was turned down by his local office, but got his cheese as a roadman on appeal.)

Throughout this process of expansion, the Ministry managed to maintain the principle that special cheese was not given for heavy work but for 'canteenlessness'. But this principle landed officials with the problem of taking it away again. The provision of canteens went on apace, and soon there were workers endowed with both canteens and special cheese. The principle demanded that the cheese be withdrawn; the T.U.C. agreed, and, in July 1942, the occasion presented itself—the issue of new ration books and new cheese documents.¹ The times were not altogether propitious; the Ministry now had so much cheese that, from the 26th, the ordinary ration stood at 8 oz., the special at 16 oz., and the public, which in general did not want more than 3 oz., was about to receive a publicity campaign on protein values.

The main drawback, however, was political:

'The big decision is', wrote an official on 15th April, 'whether we are ready now to take the bull by the horns and deny special cheese to

¹ The procedure was simplified. The separate sheet of coupons, R.G.40, was replaced by a slip, R.G.48, to be attached to the ordinary cheese page, making this available for special cheese. For the extension of the use of R.G.48 see p. 650, below.

miners who have canteens. Clearly it would be much better to refrain from giving them coupons than to take away coupons they have'.

On the 21st, the Minister agreed—adding 'take care with the publicity'; on 6th May, the T.U.C. Advisory Committee upheld the principle, but spoke doubtfully of the 'inherent conservatism' of the miners (though they had only had special cheese for a year), their 'segregation from general interests', and their dislike of canteens. The solution was the blind eye. The principle was to be that special cheese should be withdrawn where canteens were now provided¹ but, in the case of pit-head canteens, 'regard should be had to the extent to which they were used'. The result was that, in spite of a dulcet public announcement, and a warning to Food Executive Officers not to set about the business too vigorously, special cheese had to be allowed to remain in conjunction with canteens in some areas, notably in South Wales. In such cases, of course, special cheese had lost its cover and had become a naked supplementary ration for heavy work. As long, however, as this was not widely known, the Ministry preferred the dangers of expediency to those of pedantry.

III

For the rest of the war, special cheese constituted a bulge in the rationing system that officials would have liked to iron out, and others wanted to enlarge. The population of the bulge increased, but it was not extended; officials managed to ensure that special cheese remained the first and last individual supplementary ration. This task was not made easier by the progress of the other expedient forced on the Ministry by the meat crisis of 1941: the preferential treatment of canteens. In the gap between the meat crisis of January-May, and the appearance of Lend/Lease foods and the points scheme in December, this solidified into policy. The principle of extra food for industrial workers was conceded.

In June 1941, the new scheme for distributing meat to establishments on a 'meals served' basis was intended to restore equality of treatment for all catering establishments. The Minister of Labour, however, asserted that the meat ration was too low to maintain output, and the Ministry of Food feared that it might be driven into a system of differential rations for heavy workers. It was hoped that the return of the meat ration to 1s. 2d. might stave off the threat, especially if the proposed ration of sausages materialised; but the point of view of those who held that industrial absenteeism was

¹ They must be proper canteens providing 'sit-down' meals. Pie schemes, etc., were not to count. 'A few indifferent meat pies', declared Catering Division, 'can hardly be regarded as anything like the equivalent of the special cheese ration'.

caused by lack of proper food, though, as Lord Woolton thought, 'wrong as to the facts, expressed a widely held opinion'.¹ Because of this, he felt that an effort must be made to arrange differential rationing in some form. In the autumn, therefore, differential rationing became official policy; but 'in the guise of canteens'. Catering establishments were divided into three categories; those serving heavy industries (Category A) received twice the meat allowance of ordinary establishments, additional allowances of other rationed foods, and priority for such unrationed foods as cocoa, coffee essence, cakes, custard powder, and shredded suet. The classification of canteens was a less contentious operation than the classification of individual workers because it was rough and ready. It was accepted that Category A canteens would be used by some who were not doing heavy work, and the committee set up to consider whether categorization was practicable or not simply selected the heavy industries from the list of occupations used in 1918.²

This solution might not be final. Those responsible for communal feeding pointed out that

'if it is to be our policy to inject extra food through the medium of canteens or catering establishments into nearly 14,000,000 people daily'

then existing catering facilities (which were producing less than half this number of daily meals) would have to be doubled. The shortage of canteen equipment alone would prevent this. If, therefore, the food situation got worse, the Ministry might still have to concede individual supplementary rations. In fact, the food situation got a great deal better and the problem of the industrial worker in general was solved. That of the miner and farm worker in particular was not; indeed, it was intensified by the solution of the wider problem. The more that was done for workers with canteens, the more those without them pressed for a *quid pro quo*. Thus the Ministry's refuge

¹ See *Official Report*, Vol. 374, 5th Series, Cols. 757-814, for the debate on food distribution, 2nd October 1941. Mr. James Griffiths, opening, said that miners, railwaymen, steel and tinplate workers, and quarrymen in his constituency (Llanelli) were ill-fed. There were 751 pit-head canteens in existence, but 1,900 pits and some 700,000 workers. Only 16 of the canteens served full meals; the others were virtually tuckshops. Mr. R. J. Taylor (Morpeth) thought little of this kind of serving sausage rolls, etc. 'With the first bite you are an inch short of the sausage and with the next bite you are an inch past it.' Professor A. V. Hill (Cambridge University) said that 'scientific opinion on the subject of nutrition is wholly on the side of those who make this plea that special treatment is necessary for heavy workers'. Their greatest need was for more fat, as one-fifth of the energy requirements of heavy workers should be supplied as fat (about 2½ lb. a week). Normally much of this would come from fat meat or bacon. Contrast, however, the statement of the Ministry's Scientific Adviser (p. 594 above).

It was during this debate that the Parliamentary Secretary (Major Lloyd-George) announced the adoption of preferences for industrial canteens.

² It was agreed with the Ministry of Labour.

from supplementary rations engendered increased pressure for them. The Ministry, by means of its canteen policy, had equalised the industrial and clerical worker; next, by special cheese, equalised the agricultural and industrial worker. Preference to canteens now put the latter at an advantage, and the two had to be equalised at a new level.

The Ministry did its best to extend the canteen policy to the countryside. It encouraged the establishment of British Restaurants, and hoped that they might act as centres from which hot meals could be ferried to farm workers; with its pie schemes it was to have rather more success. The farm worker could hardly be expected to walk long distances to a meal; lack of petrol and transport restricted the chances of a hot meal being brought to him; and the agricultural unions considered pie schemes to be no equivalent for the industrial worker's 'three courses in a canteen'. What they wanted was a supplementary ration of meat, or bacon, or both.

In October 1941, the Minister of Agriculture wrote to Lord Woolton, emphasising how angry farm workers had been made by 'the steps taken to feed industrial workers in canteens'. What they had their eye on was the unpopular American fat bacon. On the 22nd, Lord Woolton minuted that 'in all our industrial feeding arrangements we are leaving out the agricultural worker', and suggested that the bacon allowance for women in the services might be lowered to the 4 oz. civilian level, and that of the agricultural worker raised by 2 oz. The Service Departments refused to lower the ration on the grounds that extra food was a compensation for poor pay; plans were discussed, however, for giving farm workers a ration-free allowance of the fat bacon, or cooked bacon, or extra points, or putting bacon and cheese on points.

At this point, rationing officials managed to make their way into the discussion and demolish the more spacious proposals that were circulating. Any concession, they argued, must apply to all 'specialists'; if not, the criterion of 'canteenlessness' would have been abandoned, that of the nature of the work adopted instead. Moreover, bacon was a particularly tricky food to experiment with. It was much prized by miners as well as by farm-workers, and the Ministry's defences against the Ministry of Fuel¹ would hardly hold against the sight of extra bacon in the hands of farm workers. The solution was to increase the special cheese ration to 12 oz. This, announced on 19th November 1941, was palatable to the supply side of the Ministry—as the bacon proposal was not—because they were beginning to feel oppressed by the amount of cheese they had to dispose of.

In August 1942, the Minister received a deputation from the agricultural unions. Their case was that rural families did not have

¹ See below, p. 608 *seq.*

the shopping or restaurant facilities of the towns; that rural workers were doing hard work in the open air; that they were producing far more than in peace-time and needed correspondingly more food to do it on. What they asked for was more meat. The deputation made the mistake, however, of not mentioning special cheese. (This now stood at 1 lb. a week.) The core of the Ministry's reply was therefore that the nutritional value of special cheese far exceeded that of the industrial worker's canteen meals or the town worker's restaurant meals.

It was, however, unfortunate that camps and hostels for temporary farm workers should be classified as Category A canteens. Thus the permanent farm worker was brought face to face with the industrial meat allowance, and could be forgiven for not understanding why he did not need more meat but the temporary farm worker did. The rationers could not explain this away. They would have liked to reduce these camps to domestic rations plus harvest allowances; but the scales had been agreed with the Ministry of Agriculture, which was reluctant to give up any concession won for any branch of farm labour. (They were also handicapped in debate by being unable to mention the opportunity enjoyed by farm workers of providing their own animal protein in the form of eggs, rabbits, and poultry,¹ as this would not have suited the Ministry's agricultural economists who, as part of their campaign to get more food off the farms, wanted to be able to tell the Ministry of Agriculture that the rural population was adequately fed without reliance on its domestic animals.)

Farm workers were also pursuing another grievance; the conditions attached to harvest allowances. These (of tea, sugar, cheese, preserves, and margarine) were made for all seasons of 'special activity', when the workers had to be in the fields for long hours.² To retain the semblance of catering facilities and avoid the flavour of supplementary rations, it was laid down that the farmer must apply for them on behalf of his men, and himself transform them into hot drinks and packed meals. Farmers were not eager to undertake this responsibility. At first the conditions were not rigorously enforced and no doubt many farmers simply doled out the extra food in kind. But in 1942 steps were taken to stop the 'irregular distribution of harvest allowances' lest this should give support to the mounting

¹ Farm workers said that these perquisites were not so generous as they had been in the days of low wages and low prices.

The Ministry also argued that rural families were no longer at a disadvantage in shopping, except for fish, because they now had their full share of 'points goods'. This was going rather far, as rural families had less choice of shops, and so of changing retailers and 'spreading' registrations.

² These allowances, unlike special cheese, also applied to farmers and their families. They were based on industrial scales (Category A) and designed to provide four drinks and two meals a day. Tea, sugar, and milk might be obtained all the year round on the industrial scale.

demand for supplementary rations. The farm worker, who could not be expected to appreciate the Ministry's fear of being pushed down a slope, complained that he was being deprived of his allowance by his employer's inertia, and should be able to buy it for himself as an individual ration. This issue was, unfortunately, clouded by the treatment of industrial 'hot and thirsty workers'—a 'nasty precedent for giving people food more or less individually however much we attempt to disguise it'. In July 1943, after another deputation (again asking for more meat) the Ministry made a further gesture of appeasement. Farmers might give the extra food to their men who, however, were to prepare it on the spot and not take it home with them. At the same time the Ministry made a joint announcement with the Ministry of Agriculture on the feeding of farm workers. This admitted the difficulty of applying the policy of 'meals on the job' to them, but emphasized the provision of a substitute, special cheese, and recited the other facilities available to farm workers. County War Agricultural Executive Committees should collaborate with Divisional Food Officers in extending pie schemes, farmers might apply for the harvest allowances (and for tea, sugar, and milk, throughout the year), set up simple canteens, and afford facilities for pig-keeping.

IV

What farming interests did not know was that, just two months before, a movement that might have given them differential rationing without any effort from them had just petered out. This had come from within Whitehall; impelled not by a current shortage of food, but by the desire to save shipping. The food situation had greatly improved since the last threat of differential rationing in the autumn of 1941. Lend/Lease supplies had increased the quantity and variety of 'minor' foods, the points scheme had cured their maldistribution, in June 1942 dried egg made its appearance, the meat ration was maintained at 1s. 2d. and by July 1942 there was far more cheese than most people wanted. The case for differential rationing was advanced by those who thought it necessary to go in for more 'belt-tightening' (as they liked to put it). This demand for reduction of the Ministry's imports and the recurrent threat of bread rationing, that were consequent upon the shipping situation, constrained officials to 'talk in calories'.

As early as February 1941 it had been pointed out that a planned minimum import programme must be tuned to the calorie requirements of the population, and that these could not be calculated until

the number of heavy workers was known. The problem was two-fold; to classify occupations, then to obtain the number of workers in each category. For rationing purposes, the first alone would suffice; but for import planning, the actual figures were essential. The classification of occupations would be a tedious business but it could be done; to obtain the figures would be much more difficult, for the Ministry of Labour's statistics did not necessarily correspond to the 'nutritional classification of workers'. Naturally, that Ministry was not anxious to take on the job unless the need for it was immediately apparent, and exchanges on the subject subsided in the autumn of 1941. The next year, under the pressure of shipping shortage, they were urgently renewed.

The Scientific Adviser's opinion was that supplementary rations for heavy workers need not be considered until the meat ration fell to 10d., the fats ration below 7 oz., and bread or potatoes were scarce. The Ministry of Food's argument was therefore that the current arrangements of priority allowances, preference to canteens, and special cheese, need not be departed from until the food situation deteriorated to that extent. It had, however, to face the 'purist differentiator and the extreme shipping saver' who would deliberately depreciate consumption levels, and who argued that 'we just cannot be right in not having differential rations. If our existing rations are in fact adequate for heavy workers, then they must be too liberal for the rest'.

In January 1942 import prospects¹ were said to be as bad as for the worst month of 1941; in February the Lord President asked for a 'trip-line' estimate—the absolute minimum level of food imports below which current feeding arrangements would break down; by March the Minister was under pressure from some of his colleagues to ration bread, not necessarily to reduce consumption but to prevent waste; in April the Lord President's Committee asked for a paper on differential rationing; in June the quarterly survey by the Economic Section of the War Cabinet Secretariat emphasised that 'the shortage of shipping dominates everything', noted that the consumption of food in the winter of 1941-42 was greater than that of the previous winter, and concluded ominously that 'these figures . . . are by no means irrelevant to consideration of the question whether present levels of consumption are unsusceptible of further change without danger to health and morale'. In August the Lord President's Committee asked the Minister to prepare a scheme for bread rationing.

Bread rationing would have to be differential rationing. It also implied coupons for meals. 'Free' bread and 'free' meals were, with potatoes, the shock absorbers of rationing. But, whereas bread was available to all, 'free' meals were not. To restrict the universal 'filler'

¹ See Vol. I, Chapters XX, XXII.

without touching meals would only increase inequality, particularly between the agricultural and the industrial worker. Meals must therefore be rationed as a matter of equity. By May, three schemes were running side by side; for bread rationing, for differential rationing, and for coupons for meals.

Coupons for meals rapidly drew out in front and stayed there; on the other two the Ministry stonewalled. By September, the tail was wagging the dog. The coupons-for-meals scheme, originally contingent upon the other two, had become desirable in its own right and was being used as a defence against one of them—differential rationing. The case for this, which often took the form, not that workers had too little but that others had too much, would be weakened if the ration-free meals of the 'wealthy and idle' were cut off. Furthermore, coupons for meals would lend itself to a mild form of differential rationing that would act as an inoculation against the more virulent variety. The scheme was linked with points—meals tokens would be 'bought' with points coupons—and workers could be given additional points with which they could buy either meals or the minor foods. Some individual entitlement would have been conceded; but there would be no issue of separate and conspicuous heavy worker's ration documents.

By July 1942, the paper on differential rationing, for which the Lord President's Committee had asked in April, was so worded that it could not be considered until coupons for meals had been approved. In August, the Committee asked for a bread rationing scheme, and there was not much point in putting forward a paper on differential rationing until decisions had been taken on the former. This tactical situation continued into the winter, with the three schemes on paper, but with the Ministry actively promoting only one of them and declaring that this must accompany or precede the others. Discussions with the Ministry of Labour on the classification of occupations did, indeed, continue; a list of 'very heavy' occupations was prepared in that Ministry in October 1942, and submitted to the expert scrutiny of Sir John Boyd-Orr and Professor E. P. Cathcart at the end of March 1943. By that time, however, coupons for meals had been virtually 'killed' by the T.U.C. Advisory Committee¹ and with the sudden improvement in the shipping situation, in May, all three schemes were laid aside.

The 'theoretical' case for differential rationing had not so much been beaten off as worn down; the importunity of special classes of workers was more difficult to deal with. In January 1944, the farm workers' unions, through the T.U.C., indicated that their members were very tired of the amount of cheese they were expected to eat, and would like the option of taking bacon. The Ministry replied that

¹ In February. See Vol. I, pp. 292-3.

it could only consider needs, not tastes; that options were a nuisance, and that the sugar/jam option could not be cited as a precedent, because these were similar non-perishable foods bought from the same shop. Agricultural camps and hostels were still a sore point, and the Ministry tried to persuade the Ministry of Agriculture that what these really needed was more cheese, which would be given in exchange for part of the meat allowance. The farm workers were, however, appeased by adding 'points' foods to the harvest allowances¹ and further relaxing the conditions governing them. They still had to be obtained through employers, but the workers could take the food away and do what they liked with it.

The firmness of rationing officials was not due entirely to principle; they were holding off the Ministry of Fuel with undertakings that they would not give way on farm workers. The doctrine of self-help could be preached rather more effectively to the Ministry of Fuel than to the Ministry of Agriculture; but the miners were not satisfied with their canteens. The industry had been late in setting them up and, unlike factory canteens, which had a longer history (and a simpler problem), they were slow in achieving efficiency. The miners, like the agricultural workers, found their diet unappetising as well as inadequate and complained that canteen managers were particularly unimaginative in providing the right kind of 'snap' to take underground.² In February 1944 they were asking for treble rations of meat, fats, and bacon. The T.U.C. Advisory Committee, though realising that 'the Ration Front could not be held in relation to other workers if it were given away on behalf of the miners', was also emphasising that miners

'were a community apart and were also just now in a very strong position to press their claims. They want, and are convinced that they need, more meat. Food shortage figures very largely among the causes of their discontent'.

The Ministry held that the solution lay with the Ministry of Fuel; extra food for miners was being and would be provided, but, as the Minister emphasised at a meeting with the T.U.C. Advisory Committee on 2nd February, within the canteen system. The number and

¹ The agricultural allowances at this time were

- (i) Group facilities available throughout the year:
 tea—1 lb. a week for 20 persons
 sugar— $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. for every 1 lb. of tea
 milk—10 pints a week for 20 persons

These conformed to the industrial scale which was more generous than that for office workers.

- (ii) Personal harvest allowances:

$\frac{1}{2}$ oz. tea, $\frac{4}{5}$ oz. sugar, $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. margarine, $\frac{2}{5}$ oz. cheese, $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. preserves, for each worker per day.

² See p. 415-8, above.

quality of pit-head canteens was the responsibility of the Ministry of Fuel.¹ But the Ministry of Food abandoned the line of defence it had taken up in 1940 when, in January 1944, it decided that 'it would be wiser in future to avoid expressing the view that for workers in heavy industries the domestic ration was enough without either unrationed meals or some equivalent'.

For the rest of the war the T.U.C. and the Ministry stood back to back, the former repelling the unions, the latter its fellow Government Departments.² The pressure naturally increased as war prospects grew brighter, for 'in view of the oft-trumpeted fact that we are winning the war, the workers are starting to feel that they ought to experience some advantage in their stomachs'. There were times when officials felt that the T.U.C. was lowering its point, for instance, over the episode of the Limpsfield seamen's home³—but, as the official responsible for liaison with the committee pointed out, 'they, with their ear to the ground, are aware of a growing shuffle of war weariness among workers'. In the end, it was not the Ministry but the T.U.C. that could, with justification, reproach its partner. When, in 1947, the pressure of the Mine-workers' Union and the Ministry of Fuel and Power at last obtained extra meat for miners, the T.U.C. was left exposed to other unions whose representations could hardly be repulsed on equitable grounds.

¹ Rationing officials pointed out with some indignation that only 11 out of 900 canteens had taken up the offer of the special allowance of $\frac{1}{4}$ oz. dripping for each packed meal served.

² 'The present situation on this front', wrote an official in January 1944, 'is roughly as follows:

- (i) The Home Office—pressing on behalf of certain firemen.
- (ii) The Ministry of Agriculture—pressing on behalf of harvest campers and self-employers.
- (iii) The Ministry of Labour—pressing on behalf of seamen's hostels, clubs for war workers and nurses.
- (iv) The Ministry of Fuel is busy on miners, but at the moment is accepting that it is better arrangements and not more food which are needed, and that it is up to them to improve matters.
- (v) The Ministry of War Transport is quiescent for the moment, but seldom for long, on behalf of seamen, or quasi-seamen or canal boat folk.
- (vi) The Board of Education are holding off boarding schools and telling them that they are all right'.

Many requests, he went on, arose from a 'general feeling of war weariness and restlessness which fundamentally have no connection with food but which can most easily express themselves in terms of food'.

³ See pp. 622–3, below.

Rationing officials were also disconcerted by the T.U.C.'s request that railway clerks be given special cheese. But, as the T.U.C. pointed out, they could not have it both ways. Either special cheese was for essential work in remote areas—in which case railway clerks in isolated districts qualified; or it was for heavy work—in which case they did not, but a good many people excluded from the present scheme did.

CHAPTER XXXV

Rations for Seamen

I

THE Ministry of Food's struggle, with the backing of the T.U.C., to avoid differential rationing was greatly complicated by the existence of a statutory differential ration: the minimum scale for merchant seamen 'fed under Articles', laid down by the Merchant Shipping Act of 1906.¹ Foreign-going ships and deep-sea trawlers, whose crews were victualled by the owners, came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry's Ships Stores Branch and H.M. Customs, and from the present point of view constituted no problem; nor did a minority of coastwise and home trade vessels. About three-quarters of the seamen in the latter, however, were accustomed to furnish their own provisions. For these, the Food (Defence Plans) Department had devised a *seaman's ration book* (designated 'R.B.6'), which enabled the holder to buy rations in advance, up to the statutory scale, at retailers authorised to serve seamen. (It will be noted that this ration book in effect converted the minimum scale into a maximum; however, the scale was exceedingly generous.) Food Officers were to issue the book against an application form, issued and countersigned by a Mercantile Marine Superintendent. The coupons were supposed to be used only for periods when the holder would be at sea, and for this reason bore weekly counterfoils for signature by the Master of the vessel; when on shore, seamen were to receive the ordinary temporary ration card.

Although the procedure for the issue of the R.B.6 had been clearly laid down before the war, the qualification for receiving it had not. The Department, on no very good authority,² appears to have believed that the men to be provided for were mainly those 'on Weekly Articles'; and in August 1939 it was proposed that all such, even if their food was obtained for them by the Master or Owner, should receive the book. Instructions in this sense were sent out in October 1939 to Food Offices; but it rapidly became apparent that the definition had been over-simplified. Not all seamen entitled to the statutory scale were on Weekly Articles; conversely, seamen on

¹ 6 Edw. 7. c. 48 (First Schedule). The rules concerning Articles were laid down in an Act of 1894 (57 & 58 Vict. c. 60).

² There is no evidence of either the Mercantile Marine Department or the Registrar-General of Shipping and Seamen, both of which might be considered qualified to advise, having been consulted.

estuarial craft might be on Articles. Certain fishermen were not on Articles at all; in December 1939 it was decided that the criterion to be applied to them must be 'the amount of time spent continuously at sea'. In short, the issue of seamen's ration books could not be confined within the four corners of the Merchant Shipping Acts; the way was left open for that bugbear of administrators, the exercise of local discretion with all the anomalies it implied.

Anomalies were not slow to develop. In due course it was to appear that the books had been awarded, not only for entitlement, moral or statutory, to the scale of sea rations, but variously for having to buy rations in advance, being away from home, or merely needing extra food. Scarborough fishermen got the book just for being fishermen, although they returned to port each night; lighthouse keepers got it because they had to buy rations as much as two months ahead¹; Thames and Humber tugboatmen were refused it (on headquarters ruling) as they were not away for more than seven days, but Scottish fishermen got it because they were away for three; Tollesbury (Essex) fishermen got it because they were away from *home* for long periods—unfortunately they spent much of this time at Brightlingsea whose fishermen did not get it; Barrow dredgermen got it, Fleetwood dredgermen did not—which caused heartburning when the Barrow men went to help at Fleetwood; above all, Tyne tugboatmen got it, objections from headquarters being stifled by the revelation that three of the tugs' crews were on Articles. The number of men concerned was small, but the danger in these anomalies was that they might create the impression that need, not statutory right, was the basis on which the book was granted. Once the claims of successful applicants ceased to be analogous, at least, with those covered by the Merchant Shipping Acts, it might be difficult to avoid giving the book the appearance of a heavy worker's ration book that could not be readily denied to deserving cases ashore.

Apart from these problems of entitlement, the book was troublesome to administer. Each issue ran for six months and was renewed on presentation of the expired book; any bad entitlement would therefore be perpetuated, and duplication was difficult to prevent. Nor could Food Offices be rigid about the issue of temporary cards, for use ashore, in days when hazardous voyages and loss of effects

¹ In England and Wales, only Rock lighthouse keepers, when on duty, qualified for the seamen's ration book; Shore lighthouses were, of course, not cut off from shops. Some Island and Shore lighthouses in Scotland, however, were as remote as English Rock lighthouses; moreover, the keepers frequently obtained supplies by post from Glasgow, on duty or off. For these, the book was given continuous validity, at the instance of the Northern Lighthouse Commissioners.

A good deal of discretion, e.g., in exchanging meat coupons for 'points', was allowed to Food Offices in dealing with lighthouses.

Lightship crews got the book, and so, until July 1942, did pilots, and crews of pilot cutters and tenders. After July 1942 these classes were subjected to the Port Arbitration Committees (p. 615 *seq.*, below).

were common, and the evidence of identity and entitlement might involve confidential information about ships and sailings. Neither the ordinary identity card at first issued to seamen, nor the Mercantile Marine Identity Card that replaced it in July 1940, made provision for endorsement when ration documents were issued. It was difficult to reclaim a book from a seaman no longer going to sea, or to prevent him using it on spells ashore; the weekly counterfoils were apt to be signed automatically by Masters, and if not signed were often accepted by retailers. Nor could the overlap of sea and shore rations be altogether prevented; for if a voyage turned out to be unexpectedly short, it was difficult to insist on the formal requirement that a seaman should live on the remains of his shipboard victuals instead of being allowed a temporary card. Nor, for that matter, could a seaman ashore for only a day or two be denied a temporary card valid for a week.

Awkward complications arose over the collective use of crew's ration books by owners who undertook to supply food. At Grimsby, for instance, trawlers might go 'deep sea' on one voyage, and to near fishing grounds on another; the firms were therefore licensed both as Ships' Stores dealers and as retailers, and the ships victualled with or without the use of the ration book according to the voyage. The owners found this alternation cumbersome, and naturally pressed for their ships to be victualled as deep-sea vessels regardless of destination. Other fishing ports worked out their own procedures; Fleetwood drew the line between victualling methods according to whether the voyage was for more or less than seven days, and Milford Haven devised buying authorities for ships (not individuals) based on the estimated length of the voyage in days and the number of crew. Milford Haven also, quite irregularly, allowed Masters to give their men daily ration cards for periods ashore, based on the sea-going scale. These variations were convenient, but their general adoption for seamen, who unlike fishermen were on Articles, raised difficulties of practice as well as principle. The Ministry Committee on rationing procedures, considering in the autumn of 1940 the admittedly unsatisfactory position of the seaman's ration book, concluded that nothing could be done about it until the question of entitlement was clarified.

II

Early in 1941, in an atmosphere of air-raids, falling rations, and maldistribution of unrationed foods, officials set themselves to clear the jungle of case-law that had grown up in a year of local option.

Hopes of finding some clear-cut definition to replace that of 'Weekly Seamen', which had broken in their hands, were disappointed. The shipping authorities could do no more than recommend a return to the original intention presumably underlying the Merchant Shipping Acts, stripped of the accretions that time, custom, and analogy had produced:

'We take the line', ran a letter from the Ministry of Shipping in February 1941, 'that as R.B.6 is available only for service at sea it may only be given to such men as are genuinely going to sea—thus, an occasional spell of two or three nights at sea does not justify R.B.6 but continuity of such spells would offer reasonable grounds for its issue'.

This view, inevitable though it may seem to have been, offered no escape from a continual series of *ad hoc* decisions; coming as it did on top of a year of decisions unguided even by so general a ruling, it promised even more trouble. Opportunity had already been taken, on the occasion of a new ration-book issue in January 1941, to deprive the tugboatmen on the Tyne, Wear, and Tees, whether on Articles or not, of the R.B.6's they had been allowed in February 1940. There followed a spirited and lengthy protest, which by June had drawn in the Admiralty, the House of Commons, and the Ministry of War Transport, besides the Minister of Food himself. Rationing officials were hard put to it not to give way; at one point they were driven to attempting to still the agitation by offering to sell the chief tug-boat firm two cases of meat roll (then very scarce), as an earnest of further supplies of food to come if it would set up a canteen for its men.

Canteens, some of them very 'curious', to use a term employed at the time, were the chief weapon the Ministry employed to fend off the claims of 'quasi-seamen'. It was ready to go to any lengths of dissimulation in order to preserve a solid front against differential rationing. Canteens for tugboatmen, as for quarrymen, need not have facilities for cooking or even for eating; they could be merely central depots from which packed meals and (say) meat pies could be distributed to the 'working premises'. Thus the trouble on the Tyne was settled by registering the Owners' offices as catering establishments; and on the Manchester Ship Canal were established three canteens from which meals were rushed by launch to vessels that could not stop. The establishment of parent canteens ashore was now urged in answer to all pleas on behalf of estuary, harbour, and canal-boat workers, and even inshore fishermen.

These arrangements bid fair to narrow the territory within which the R.B.6 would still operate; but there remained the problem of defining it. In October 1941 the Ministry of Food asked the Ministry of War Transport to undertake this; and it was eventually agreed

that upon the next issue of the books in January 1942 the task of sifting claims should be undertaken by the Port Superintendents. The crucial qualification for recipients was that they should 'regularly and frequently' put to sea, i.e., beyond 'partially smooth water limits'. Any disputed cases were to be referred to the Ministry of War Transport, books being provisionally issued in the meantime.

Of disputed cases, there proved to be ten thousand; and there was a strike of cattlemen on the Belfast-Liverpool run who, unlike their fellows from Londonderry, had lost their books. (The latter were on Articles; the former, dock labourers, signed on for the trip.) Lest the shipment of cattle be interrupted, the men were given temporary books, renewable from month to month, while the general problem of quasi-seamen was thrashed out. Those who had failed to qualify worked in five groups of vessels: estuarial craft, tugboats, dredgers, port and estuarial 'servicing' craft, and inshore fishing boats. Their trade unions, which had been consulted before the new procedure was introduced, did not claim that all these men required the full rations allowed on the R.B.6 (e.g., 7½ lb. of meat and 30 oz. of sugar a week). But they did claim that the men spent long hours on board, were liable to move at short notice, were cut off from shore catering and shopping facilities, and so needed some special provision other than 'curious' canteens. The Transport and General Workers' Union, at the end of February 1942, suggested that there should be a modified R.B.6, giving a ration scale somewhere between the statutory scale for seamen, and the ordinary adult ration.

A modified R.B.6, however, could not shelter behind the legal rights of seamen; it would, in fact, be a differential ration for heavy workers on water, and hence a dangerous precedent. The T.U.C. was, if anything, even hotter against differential rationing than the Ministry of Food; and in April, its standing Committee advising the Ministry rejected the Transport Union's proposal. Instead, the Committee suggested that the full R.B.6 be granted to all men 'normally living and working afloat . . . in conditions substantially identical to those of seamen on home trade and coastal vessels'; and that the sifting of these men from shore-based workers should be done by Port Superintendents in consultation with local Union officials. This was not felt by the Ministry to be very helpful; it shifted the boundary of entitlement without doing anything for those who were still left outside it. Yet another variant on canteens was devised; let the boats themselves be licensed as caterers, and receive the Category B industrial allowances by means of special permits. (Inshore fishermen, who could not be brought even into this scheme, were to get special cheese instead; they were, it was argued, akin not to seamen but to railwaymen on 'lodging turns'.) The special permits, it was thought, should 'allay all disgruntlement' and 'cause the demand for R.B.6 to fade

away'; the extension of entitlement proposed by the T.U.C. committee would not, therefore, be granted. The Ministry of War Transport was told that when the books were reissued in July, the January instructions might operate without the arrangement for provisional issue and appeal.

At this point a misunderstanding occurred. The Port Superintendents, said the Ministry of Food, should take the advice of the Unions when in doubt. The Ministry of War Transport replied that the task of consulting the Unions was not one that could be placed on the Superintendents, nor were they qualified to judge the conditions in which estuarial seamen worked. 'A Superintendent can decide... whether or not a man is a "seaman" but the question whether or not anybody else should be treated *like* a seaman is for somebody else to decide.' All that they could undertake was to direct rejected applicants to the Food Office, where the special permit scheme would be explained to them. Without further consultation with the T.U.C. or the Transport and General Workers' Union, one or both of which (as it turned out) were under the impression that the recommendations of April still stood, instructions to this effect were issued on 6th July.

They were shortly followed by uproar in the ports; at Belfast, on the Severn, at Southampton, from tugs in naval dockyards. On Merseyside the men refused ordinary ration books, and were given ordinary temporary cards; on the Clyde three hundred men refused these also and, at the instance of the Ministry of War Transport, were given a week's supply of R.B.6 coupons. Union representatives went to the spot urgently, only to discover that the source of the trouble was the decision not to extend the R.B.6 qualification, as the T.U.C. Advisory Committee had recommended. On the 28th July, at a meeting with the Unions, the Departments reversed this decision, but relieved Port Superintendents of the task of arbitrating in doubtful cases. Entitlement was to be decided by Port Committees, comprising the Chief Executive of the Port Emergency Committee (who was usually the head of the Port Authority), the Food Executive Officer, and a Trade Union official. A worker might be allowed R.B.6 if he spent most of his time on water and used his book to get food to eat on board; the 'three days and three nights continuous absence' rule was no longer to be enforced. Rationing officials hoped that this represented the limit of concessions.

III

The efforts to secure simplicity and uniformity had failed; the issue of R.B.6 was now governed by two sets of rules interpreted by

different people—Port Superintendents for seamen proper, Port Arbitration Committees for quasi-seamen. Even the first set of rules was not always easy to administer; seamen who sailed from Greenock to Inveraray, and might be away three days, did not qualify, but those who made daily trips from Ardrossan to Arran did, as being outside the Board of Trade smooth-water limit. The second set was necessarily vaguer and therefore more difficult to interpret. 'Living afloat' was a dangerous guide when taken out of context, and officials insisted that the whole description of a quasi-seaman's conditions of work must be borne in mind. The analogy with seamen on coastal craft was not helpful, for men on coasters between Liverpool and Barrow might spend only one day afloat; it might even be taken to mean simply 'going beyond partially smooth water', in which case there would not be much left of the quasi-seamen's regulations. Moreover, when all the winnowing of applicants had been done, it remained to provide for the rejected; and in the end the Ministry had to recognise that the special estuarial permits were not the answer.

The Port Arbitration Committees averted immediate trouble, but tended to be more generous than rationing officials would have liked; on the Mersey, for instance, they gave the R.B.6 to crews of dredgers, salvage vessels, tugs, and floating cranes. Their Ministry of Food members alone were guided by considerations of rationing policy generally, and were apt to find themselves in a minority of one. The wide gap between the seamen's scale and any alternative provision made the Committees reluctant to refuse the former in cases of hardship; one after another, therefore, they recommended that an intermediate scale be adopted. To the Ministry's retort that the Committees ought rather to persuade employers to provide or extend catering facilities, the rejoinder came back that this was impracticable. On the Humber, for instance, men might transfer from craft to craft during a break in the journey; Thames lightermen worked as individuals, not as crews, were drawn from a labour pool, and might have to set out at short notice on a journey of unpredictable length. The only way to victual men working in such conditions was to enable them to buy and pack their own food, as they had always done.

These representations were reinforced by trouble in other quarters. The crews of the seven tugs at the operational naval base at Kyle of Lochalsh lost their books because the Mercantile Marine Superintendent at Inverness, under the regulations, could not certify their applications; they could not have recourse to a Port Arbitration Committee because one did not exist, and the naval authorities would countenance neither the creation of one, nor the T.U.C. itself acting in its stead; 'the Base and its operations were

regarded as so vital and secret that its very existence should be kept from public knowledge so far as is possible'. The Ministry of War Transport pressed for the settlement of this case, and the Lords of Admiralty themselves seemed likely to be drawn in. 'Where we might expect to be bombarded by groups of workers', wrote a rationing official sadly, 'it is a bit hard to be pressed vigorously by our colleagues'. By November 1942, strikes were threatening on Humber and Thames, as a result of the withdrawal of *individual* special permits, irregularly conceded by certain Food Executive Officers. Finally, there was trouble among the Scottish fishermen about the anomalies that had—through no one's fault—arisen at different ports. It was not merely that one Mercantile Marine Superintendent's judgment on borderline cases was almost bound to differ from another's. The fishermen, as they followed the fish, might work under different conditions out of different ports, but their eligibility for R.B.6 arose out of conditions at their home port; violence was threatened at Stornoway when East Coast fishermen arrived with books denied to the local men.

The Ministry of Food at length decided—and persuaded the T.U.C.—that a modified R.B.6 was, after all, the answer. It so happened that merchant seamen were about to be transferred from the National Register to a separate marine register, with a British Seamen's Identity Card. This card would be confined to those 'usually proceeding beyond partially smooth water limits (winter)'; and it was decided that holders of this card (and deep-sea trawlermen) alone should be entitled to the full R.B.6. The modified R.B.6 which was merely a complete R.B.6 with holes punched through meat, sugar, and points coupons to devalue them, could be described as one for seamen who were excluded from the marine register,¹ which would avoid any awkward parallel with heavy

¹ *Seamen: Comparative Ration Scales December 1942*

	*Estuarial (1) Daily	Permits (2) Weekly	R.B.1 Weekly	R.B.1 +E.P. Weekly	R.B.6 Weekly	R.B.6 (mod) Weekly
Sugar	$\frac{3}{4}$ oz.	5 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.	8 oz.	13 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.	30 oz.	16 oz.
Meat	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. worth	10 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.	1s. 2d.	2s. 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.	120 oz. (7s. 6d.)	60 oz. (3s. 9d.)
Cheese	$\frac{4}{7}$ oz.	4 oz.	8 oz.	12 oz.	8 oz. †	8 oz.
Preserves	$\frac{1}{2}$ oz.	2 oz.	4 oz.	6 oz.	8 oz.	8 oz.
Milk	$\frac{1}{2}$ pt.	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ pts.	2 pts.	3 $\frac{1}{2}$ pts.	—	—
Tea	$\frac{1}{2}$ oz.	2 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.	2 oz.	4 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.	4 oz.	4 oz.
Bacon	$\frac{1}{2}$ oz.	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.	4 oz.	5 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.	8 oz. ‡	8 oz.
Fats	1 oz.	7 oz.	8 oz.	15 oz.	15 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.	15 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.
Points	$\frac{1}{2}$	3 $\frac{1}{2}$	5	8 $\frac{1}{2}$	22	11

* Estuarial permits were given for each working day over 8 hours. There was no guarantee, therefore, that men would receive the seven-day quantities. (It was pointed out that the system gave men doing a six-day week of eight hours a day plus overtime an advantage over those doing twenty-four hour shift with a whole day off.)

† 10 oz. might be shipped, to allow for bone and shrinkage.

‡ The Scale demanded 4 oz.

workers on land. Moreover, it partook of the professional dignity that made the original book a prized possession. Once again officials expressed the hope that it would end their troubles. The new registration came into force on 1st January 1943; the new books, on 24th January, amid yet another storm of protest.

For this the ration changes themselves were not wholly responsible. The instructions had been drawn up in haste and gone out at the last moment, leaving little time for the unions to explain them to the men; one union, the National Union of Seamen, had not been told about them at all, the T.U.C. having assumed that it would suffice to tell the Transport and General Workers' Union. There were rumblings from Liverpool, on 19th January, from those about to lose the complete book; at Scapa Flow it was disclosed that men holding the new British Seamen's Identity Cards were working on the same craft as men holding ordinary identity cards. On Merseyside a strike was averted by the firmness of union officials; on the Clyde, the men refused to exchange their old Mercantile Marine Identity Cards for ordinary civilian cards. They were pacified by being allowed to retain the old cards, and momentarily agreed to accept the modified R.B.6, but then changed their minds. Unfortunately there was an ambiguity in the instructions that led the Port Arbitration Committee to think that it still had the discretion to award full R.B.6's, and several hundred were wrongfully issued by the Mercantile Marine Office before Ministry of War Transport headquarters could stop it. The same thing happened over tugboatmen at Belfast; the Port Arbitration Committee, faced by a mixture of ordinary and seamen's identity cards on a single craft, had given full books to them all. Moreover, the four Londonderry cattlemen refused to sail until their right to the full R.B.6 was promised consideration. They did not hold British Seamen's Identity Cards, but worked under the same conditions as the rest of the crew; the Ministry conceded that they had a good case, but was afraid that to give way to it would mean giving way to the Belfast cattlemen, who had not.

Apart from the general grievances, there was a specific one; the modified book carried only 11 'points', instead of 22. For the seamen cut off from fresh milk supplies, points meant condensed milk; and condensed milk was 8 points a tin. From Scapa and Stornoway to the Thames tugs there arose a current of feeling about it. There was already in force machinery by which those who could not get fresh milk could get evaporated milk free of points; but this was unsweetened, and the seamen wanted sweetened milk. The Ministry would have been willing to restore the points allowance to 22, had the T.U.C. asked for it; but the T.U.C. did not. The cupidity of other unions, such as the railwaymen's, was already being aroused by the disclosure of the generous allowances to

estuarial workers under the modified R.B.6. The front against differential rationing was in danger of being weakened; but at this critical moment the Ministry offered to extend its 'free of points' concession to sweetened milk, for 'modified R.B.6' holders only. Moreover, the supply position allowed of 'down-pointing' evaporated milk from 8 points to 2, on 7th March 1943.

It was thus clear that the link between the full R.B.6 and the new identity card would not work; and revised instructions issued on 12th February abandoned it. The criterion was once again to be the behaviour of the ship, and Port Arbitration Committees were empowered to adjudicate between the full and the modified book, as well as between the modified and the ordinary adult book. Moreover, as a result of the whole problem having been thrashed out with the unions, the Ministry conceded another point to the importunity of canal workers' representatives: there were to be Inland Waterway Arbitration Committees. In future, however, the Ministry of Food representative on all these bodies was not to be bound by the majority vote (which had all too frequently gone against him). He might take any disputed case to the Divisional Food Officer and thence to Headquarters (and the T.U.C.).

IV

Meanwhile, the problem of the other boundary—at which the seaman's ration book gave way to victualling through H.M. Customs—had been exercising officials. In 1939, it had been thought that the use of ration books by all coastwise and short-sea vessels would assist the control by Ships' Stores Branch; in 1940, ration-book anomalies had led some to contemplate transferring coasters, and perhaps near-fishing vessels, to Customs procedure. By 1941, the position had been complicated by the entry into the coasting trade, and what was left of the home trade (i.e. to Eire), of ships normally foreign-going or on Allied registry. These ships were victualled through the Customs, and so the two procedures existed side by side; moreover, the crews of some foreign-registered vessels were known to have obtained ration books, which opened dangerous possibilities of abuse. H.M. Customs, for want of time and manpower, could not undertake a rigorous supervision of coastwise ships; moreover, harbour supplies, i.e., those not required for shipment, were not subject to Customs scrutiny. The Ministry's Ships Stores Branch therefore proposed that ration book procedure be applied to all ships actually engaged in the coastal trade.

In mid-December, Departments agreed that this proposal (which would be embodied in a new Ships' Stores Control Order) should be put before the Allied governments-in-exile. Shortly afterwards, however, the Ministry of War Transport had second thoughts, and proposed that the boundary should be shifted the other way, i.e., that all coasting vessels victualled under Articles should use Customs procedure. Seamen unaccustomed to the coasting trade objected to having to buy and cook their own food; the ration-book procedure was likely to lead to sailing delays, especially where a seaman might be drawn from a pool of replacements at the last moment, or in a small port remote from a Food Office; the Customs procedure was preferred by owners; and, most important, it was better suited to the comparatively large ships engaged in coasting under war conditions. The force of these arguments was recognised; but to include any coasters in Customs procedure raised difficult problems of legal definition, and consequently it was not until December 1942 that the new Ships' Stores Order was issued.¹ The Order sidestepped the positive definition of an eligible ship; instead, it provided that stores might be shipped only by Customs authorisation to all vessels except near-fishing vessels, and 'any ship during any period in which rationed food is bought for consumption . . . by means of ration documents'. The Customs would henceforth exact a declaration to this effect.

'Ration documents' was a deliberately wide term; unlike 'ration book', it excluded from Customs procedure the Southern Railway vessels based at Southampton that were licensed as catering establishments. Even so, near-fishing vessels had to be specified as an excepted class, on account of the time-honoured and convenient, but irregular, systems of victualling by bulk permits that had been established, in the first year of rationing, at Fleetwood, Milford Haven, Cardiff, and Swansea. (The Ministry of Food's definition of deep-sea fishing would have exempted the Fleetwood trawlers from ration-book procedure, as they habitually spent more than seven days at sea; the Customs authorities, however, held that as they fished within the limits of Lat. 61°N., Lat. 48° 30' S., and Long. 12° W., they were ineligible for victualling under Stores Authority.) At various times officials contemplated replacing these local arrangements by a tighter system of bulk permits applied to all near-fishing vessels, but as late as 1950 thought it best to let well alone.

V

The Ministry's efforts to prevent the seaman's ration book from

¹ S.R. & O. (1942) No. 2635, which came into force on 8th February 1943.

establishing itself on land had been hindered rather than helped by the invention of the modified book. The battle-front had been extended from the estuary to the inland waterway. The Transport and General Workers' Union, encouraged at first, rather injudiciously, by the Ministry of War Transport, put forward a strong claim to the modified book on behalf of canal boatmen. Like estuarial seamen, they worked long and irregular hours, were away from home for long periods, and could not be reached by normal catering facilities. What was worse, boatmen on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, working between Liverpool and Skipton, got the book because they were from time to time in an estuary; those working under the same conditions between Skipton and Leeds, did not. But the T.U.C. steadfastly refused to put the claim to the Ministry of Food, and the Ministry of War Transport was persuaded to leave these questions to the established channels of negotiation. Furthermore, liaison between the two Ministries was improved by the designation, in War Transport, of a single official to handle all food questions. In the end, the canal boatmen's claim was settled by a packed meals scheme worked through, e.g., lock-keepers' houses licensed as 'curious' canteens; the link between the modified R.B.6 and the coastline was preserved.

During the remainder of the war the Ministry of Food and the T.U.C. managed to stabilise the seamen's-rations front, though it was attacked and even dented from time to time. The Cardiff dredger and hopper crews who wanted the complete instead of the modified book brought a fresh union, the National Union of Railwaymen, into the arbitration procedure. (The docks at Cardiff belonged to the Great Western Railway.) A claim for the modified book from the crews of stationary dredgers on the Manchester Ship Canal was rejected by the T.U.C. The situation at Scapa Flow presented many complexities. Three supply ships not only never went to sea, they never moved, but the crew were on Articles and victualled by the owners; all salvage tugs had been designated as 'sea-going' although there was little difference between them and other tugs; the Admiralty definition of smooth water was apparently more rigorous than that of the Ministry of War Transport, with the result that naval drifters were regarded as 'sea-going' and their crews got not only better pay, but more rations, than those of civilian drifters, which were not so regarded. The Admiralty suggested that a 'Scapa allowance' should be made available to all civilian crews to bring up their rations to the naval level; but the Ministry of Food preferred to let all the cases go to a Port Arbitration Committee sitting at Aberdeen. This Committee awarded the full R.B.6 to the crews of 13 boats, and the modified R.B.6 to the remainder. A similar solution was applied in the Western Approaches Command,

by referring all cases, whether from the West of Scotland Food Division or from the North of Scotland Food Division, to the Arbitration Committee at Greenock.

From July 1943, the incidence of complaints was reduced because the seamen's ration books were made to run for a year, like all others. The injury to the estuarial seaman's dignity when offered an ordinary civilian identity card was got over by allowing him to have the special photograph-bearing card designed for Civil Defence Workers, on the decision of a Port Arbitration Committee. Nevertheless there was trouble yet again on the Clyde, where some 300 tugboatmen struck work because they were deprived by the Port Arbitration Committee of the full R.B.6. After a fortnight of hasty negotiations between the Committee, the T.U.C., and Ministry Headquarters, the Committee met again and—against its judgment of the merits of the case, but in face of the strike threat—reversed its decision. (The support of the T.U.C. had been enlisted by a claim—not substantiated before the Committee—that the tugs frequently went beyond smooth water, i.e., to Ireland.) There was renewal of an old grievance at Holyhead, that the crews of the two Irish mailboats, which during the summer season were laid up for alternate fortnights, were only allowed seamen's rations when their boats were actually running. The position of the Ministry in this case was undermined by the arrival at Holyhead (for repairs) of a third mailboat from Heysham whose crew were kept on Articles, and demanded that, as they were not allowed to go home, they must have their full rations. The claim of all three crews was conceded for the time being, and in March 1944, at the instance of the T.U.C., permanently. At Arbroath, in December 1943, the Port Arbitration Committee gave way before a continued agitation of inshore fishermen for the modified book, on the ground that it had already been given to fishermen in Fife; an unsatisfactory decision, because the men in question did not work for more than one tide, and moreover, did not go out every day.

More disturbing to rationing officials than these, however, was the agitation that began in July 1943 about the National Union of Seamen's rest home at Limpsfield. This was a place where the merchant mariner might recover from the trials of the war at sea, and as such, had a strong claim on grounds of sentiment to the special treatment for which it asked. Hospitals, convalescent homes, and similar institutions, however, got food allowances based on the civilian ration for each inmate; the only extras were priority supplies of fish, quantities of dried egg, and extra milk where necessary. Requests for extra rations from the Albert Dock Seamen's Hospital, from a police convalescent home at Bognor, and from a miners' convalescent home at Blackpool, had at various times been turned down.

The most the Ministry would at first offer the Limpsfield home, in response to a plea for, in particular, more meat, was the priority enjoyed by British Restaurants in (e.g.) soft drinks, shredded suet, and custard powder.¹

This did not satisfy the National Union of Seamen, who threatened the Ministry of War Transport with a Press campaign. The Ministry of Food was successful in diverting the union's demand into the proper channel, the T.U.C., but unfortunately for the Ministry the T.U.C. was impressed by the claim. The inmates of the home were denied access to restaurant and canteen meals; no substantial group of people (said the T.U.C.) could be expected to exist solely on their domestic rations, as was shown by the Ministry's communal feeding and catering policy; therefore the home ought to get extra rations. To rationing officials, this was heresy, for the Ministry's doctrine, backed by its scientific advisers, had always been that the domestic ration, plus unrationed bread and vegetables, was adequate for ordinary needs and for regaining health and fitness; it was only for extraordinary needs, such as those of school children and industrial workers, that extra provision was needed in the form of a meal 'on the job'. If the doctrine were now to be varied, for the sake of the Limpsfield home, officials did not see where concession would stop. Yet some concession had, if only on sentimental grounds, to be given. After casting about in various directions—a 'pie scheme' for the *whole* of Limpsfield, a collective medical certificate, or even a reduction of the meat allowances of industrial and day-school canteens in favour of boarding schools and convalescent homes for industrial workers—the Ministry hit upon a helpful analogy. Escaped prisoners of war, a mercifully small group, received double rations to build them up after privation; it would allow the 50 sailors at Limpsfield, who might be held to have had comparable experiences, double rations too. By 1st December 1943, the case was settled.

By the nature of things, there could be no end to the problem of seamen's rations. The evil precedent of the Clyde became known upon the Thames in June 1944, and a claim for the full book from the crews of small craft, working for Thames Naval Control out of Southend-on-Sea, was only defeated by a skilful display of ignorance about the Clyde on the part of the Ministry's representative on the Port Arbitration Committee. Hartlepool and Tyne pilots, and the crew on the Woolwich Free Ferry, tried vainly at various times to get the modified book; the Scottish herring drifters, working out of the reopened port of Lowestoft in 1945, got the full book, and what was worse, contrived to take it back to Scotland with them; next year full R.B.6 allowances had to be conceded to all herring fishermen leaving for a 'foreign' port.

¹ Above, pp. 405-6.

VI

The story of the seaman's ration book throws much light on the larger problem of differential rationing, of which it was, of course, a barely-disguised example. In retrospect it is clear that the search for a clear-cut formula for entitlement was vain from the beginning; though the belief that Weekly Seamen constituted a readily identifiable class was in its very origin unjustified, there is no reason to suppose that the embarrassments of officials were markedly increased on that account. There was no escape from determining each case on its merits, that is to say, on the conditions of a man's work. This did not invariably mean giving him more than he would have got by formula. The crew of the dredger at Whitby, which ranked as 'sea-going' because it regularly and frequently went beyond smooth-water limits to dump its 'catch', might be considered fortunate to get the modified book, for they lived at home. Nevertheless, they held British Seamen's Identity Cards, which would have normally qualified them for the full book.

The fears that individual adjudication might open the door to general differential rationing were not fulfilled; thanks partly to the watchfulness of the T.U.C., and the conscientious work of the Port Arbitration Committees, partly to tacit public acquiescence in the privileged position of anyone, however remotely, claiming to be a seafarer. The alarums and excursions, however, to which a very small problem, numerically speaking, gave rise, go far to justify the administrative case against supplementary rations for heavy workers. The reference of disputed cases to local arbitration, subject to headquarters guidance and veto, was just the procedure that would have had to operate in 1918, had the supplementary ration for heavy workers continued for more than a few weeks.¹ What seems doubtful, in the light of the seaman problem, is whether then or later, local tribunals could have shouldered the task of handling the borderline cases arising out of a schedule of several hundred occupations. One begins to understand the Ministry of Food's preference for even the most transparent of catering devices.²

¹ Beveridge, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-15.

² In January 1946, after much negotiation, cuts in the statutory scale of rations came into force, by virtue of S.R. & O. (1945) No. 1540. Meat fell from 140 to 90 ounces, sugar from 24 to 21 ounces, fats from 15½ to 14½ ounces. Proportionate reductions in the modified scale for meat and sugar were, however, not made owing to the opposition of the Transport and General Workers' Union and the T.U.C. In July 1946 the seaman's meat scale was further reduced to 75 ounces (S.R. & O. (1946) No. 891), and this time the T.U.C. agreed that the modified R.B.6 allowance should come down to 40 ounces. As cuts in the rations of H.M. Forces had been made at the same time, the effect was to leave the quasi-seaman, let alone the seaman proper, better off than the sea-going naval rating and the soldier on 'strenuous' service.

CHAPTER XXXVI

The Control of the Retailer, 1941-3

I

THE COMMITTEE of 1940¹ had turned away its face from the more radical proposals for reforming the rationing system that had been put before it. The ship had been lightened of some superfluous ballast, and of machinery that was not being put to use; that was all. The lightening was completed only just in time to prevent the vessel foundering under the new burdens that the expansion of 1941 forced it to carry. Even so, by June 1941 rationing officials were to declare that 'simplification is vitally necessary'.

The obvious field for simplification was that of the control of the retailer, which had been left in some uncertainty by the reforms of 1940. Coupon-cutting, the only effective means of achieving a fairly complete check of a retailer's sales, had been abolished, but his permits were presumably still supposed to be related to those sales by means of a return which, officially a 'picture of a retailer's performance', had now become entirely a self-portrait. The old system of controlling the retailer was thus moribund, but a successor was slow to appear; it did not take full shape until September 1943. It brought the rationing system very near to the point at which the Beveridge Committee had suggested it should start: 'Experience showed that the essential part is the counterfoil'.

The second system was based on a new kind of permit that was *continuing*—it ran until revised, instead of being re-issued every eight weeks; was *composite*—it covered more than one commodity; was *global*—it specified an eight-week total instead of a weekly quantity for eight weeks; was, finally, a '*ceiling*'—it represented the retailer's maximum needs for his regular trade instead of an attempted assessment of his minimum needs. Moreover, the retailer did not have to forward the permit to his suppliers; instead, Food Offices notified them direct of the quantities he was entitled to acquire.

The new system was not conceived as a whole, and its development must be traced from March 1941 to May 1943. It was the resultant of two forces, both of which had begun to be felt in 1940, but became powerful in the spring and summer of 1941; the Commodity Divisions' desire to tailor the permit procedures to fit the way in which food was actually distributed, and Rationing Division's own

¹ Above, pp. 565-71.

need to adjust the rationing system to the administrative resources available. In March 1941 work began on a reform that would have changed the appearance of permits while leaving their basis untouched. This aimed at getting rid of the delay and uncertainty that resulted from obliging the retailer to forward his own permit to the wholesaler, by arranging that the Food Office should send the latter an advice corresponding to the permit. It opened the way to a reduction in the number of separate forms, for if the permit did not have to leave the retailer, it could cover more than one commodity, i.e., could be *composite*. The reform was held up by events; meanwhile, from June onwards the second force, calling for economy of effort, was in operation, and at length resulted (March 1942) in the *ceiling* permit, simplified as to basis, but still requiring to be forwarded. The new permit was also *global*, in this respect deriving from the Commodity Divisions. No sooner had it been introduced than another proposal—for *continuing* permits—was made, partly as a result of the situation created by the global permit. In August 1942, the *composite* proposal at length came to fruition, and the permit acquired its omnibus character—at once *ceiling* in function, *continuing*, *composite*, and *global*, in form. A comprehensive overhaul followed of all the documents and procedures used for both retailers and establishments; this was completed in May 1943.

II

Early in 1941 the Commodity Divisions began to press strongly for some sort of advice note to wholesalers from Food Offices. 'The weak link in the present system', pronounced Sugar Division, 'has always been the delay which occurs before the permit . . . reaches the wholesaler'. Retailers were apt to forward their permits late, or simply wait until the traveller called and could collect them; had wholesalers worked to rule, distribution must have come to a standstill.¹ Permits in duplicate, of which one copy went to the wholesaler, were used to speed up the introduction of cheese rationing in March, and Bacon Division promptly asked whether it might not have them too. Oils and Fats Division put forward a plan resembling that used for meat: let its Area Distribution Officers prepare 'master-permits' for wholesalers, from information supplied in summary form by Food Offices. Rationing officials, though they had assented to duplicate permits on the one occasion for cheese, objected to them as a regular feature; they would use more paper, give Food Offices more work, encourage wholesalers to treat permits as orders, and

¹ As early as February 1940 labels, drawing attention to the need for prompt dispatch, had been gummed to the permits.

create the risk that both original and duplicate might get honoured.¹ The proposed summaries, however, were welcomed as a way of getting rid of separate permits for each commodity, and of securing the wholesaler's certificate of deliveries that was to replace the cut coupon by way of check.

Permit reform could not be considered alone; other measures of 'rationalisation' that should accompany or precede it were in contemplation: grouping of registrations, elimination of retailers with very few registered customers, restriction of retailers to one supplier for each rationed food.² The last was, indeed, an essential preliminary to the compiling of summaries by Food Offices (which was possible for meat, because the Ministry was itself the wholesaler); but it meant a considerable interference with existing trade channels, and was not achieved without a lengthy struggle. Hence the delay of the full permit reform until August 1942.

At first, it looked as if the principle of one supplier for each rationed food, mooted by rationing officials in June 1941, might win ready acceptance. True, there were reservations from some parts of the Ministry. Bacon Division had trouble in applying the principle to home-produced supplies; Preserves had similar difficulties over direct purchase from jam manufacturers;³ Tea considered that an option between *five* suppliers was essential to a full choice of brands.⁴ Emergency Services Division felt that a plurality of suppliers was a useful insurance against a breakdown of distribution in severe air-raids or invasion, though this objection might be met by making wholesalers' mutual assistance pacts really effective. There seemed, however, no obstacle to applying the new regime to butter, cheese, margarine, cooking fats, and syrup/treacle; and in July and August plans were made to do so on 17th November.

At this point, however, the straightforward 'one-supplier' proposal began to get involved with wider and more cloudy issues of transport economy, and rationalisation of distribution. In August, for instance, it was suggested that retailers should be required to nominate suppliers within their own Food Division or within 50-100 miles of their premises.⁵ Other proposals were in the air. A re-nomination of

¹ These arguments had been used when duplicate permits were suggested to the 1940 committee. The last difficulty cropped up in practice with cheese.

² Retailers were allowed at this time two suppliers for bacon, butter, margarine and cooking fats, one for sugar (but another for speciality sugars), an unlimited number for preserves, and an unlimited number of datum suppliers for tea.

³ Preserves were run on the voucher principle; the tie to one wholesaler would enable permits to be used instead. By the time the new procedure was in operation syrup and treacle had been transferred to the points scheme.

⁴ See p. 716.

⁵ The limitation to one supplier would probably have gone a good way to securing this without any positive prohibition. The Retail Trade Adviser explained that many retailers of good standing took a pride in having an account in London or a large provincial city, but it was hardly likely that they would nominate their distant supplier as their only supplier.

suppliers would give Food Offices a good deal of work, and it was desirable to avoid two such operations—one when the change to one wholesaler was made for rationing purposes, and a second when the transport reformers' zoning schemes came to fruition.

This was not the only complication making for delay. Retailers, at a Consultative Conference on 29th August, made it clear that while the shortage of unrationed foods persisted, they would be unwilling to break their established wholesale connections. Moreover, they wanted two suppliers for butter (bulk and packed), two for cheese (because of home-produced cheese), and a guarantee that their one sugar supplier would be able to provide lump sugar. These last requests were brushed aside by the Commodity Divisions; but all that the Ministry achieved on 17th November was 'one wholesaler' for cooking fats, for the difficulty of unrationed foods remained. It was removed by the introduction of points rationing; on 28th November, retailers agreed that the principle should be extended to butter, margarine, cheese, and syrup/treacle, and accepted geographical limitation as well. Rationing Division appointed 15th January 1942 as the date on which re-nomination of suppliers should be completed; 9th March for the introduction of the composite permit procedure. Draft proposals for a limitation of wholesale suppliers by zone (what became known as the 'Sector Scheme')¹ were circulated by the short-lived Distribution Plans Division at the end of December.

In the atmosphere of 'Thorough' that followed Pearl Harbour, however, the Sector Scheme seemed to some a very small mouse indeed, and the modesty of Rationing Division's own proposals almost sinful. The Ministry was split between those who argued that the Sector Scheme would constitute a useful first step in the right direction, and those who thought it an inadequate first step or a wrong approach altogether. Drastic proposals were put forward for the suppression of individual trading, and the establishment of wholesale trading companies on the lines of that for meat; these occupied 'higher authority' for three weeks at a critical time, and when at length the Sector Scheme was approved, for introduction in May, it was too late for rationing officials to do more in March than introduce the 'global' permit. Then the Sector Scheme was postponed till 29th June; it could not be ready earlier. On 6th May, for reasons connected with the proposed Points Banking Scheme, and the abortive scheme for limiting Double Margins, a plan for enforcing a total limitation of the suppliers that any retailer might have² was added to the Sector proposals; it resulted in such protests

¹ See Vol. I, Chapter XXVI.

² The total number of suppliers to be allowed was to be 4 (200 registrations or under), 6 (201-500), 8 (501-2,000), 10 (2,001-5,000) no maximum (over 5,000 registrations).

that the whole scheme had to be postponed again, and the offending suggestion withdrawn. At length the Scheme came into force on 24th August 1942 (the beginning of a new permit period), and with it, the new permit procedure.¹

III

The new procedure was not the one Rationing Division had begun the struggle with, fourteen months earlier. That had comprised, *inter alia*, a composite permit, covering six foods, for the retailer to keep, and a summary sheet for each food to be sent to the wholesaler, listing the names and addresses of the retailers attached to him and the quantities authorised to each.² This incorporated the prescribed *wholesaler's certificate*, in the form of a tear-off slip on which actual deliveries would be noted. At the same time (July 1941) Rationing Division was drawing up the composite *retailer's return* recommended by the 1940 committee. However, the extensions of rationing were already raising doubts whether the comprehensive check of certificate against return, implied in their preparation, would be feasible. Food Offices were asked to say if they really used the retailers' returns and, therefore, really wanted the wholesaler's certificate. The replies showed that, although some Food Offices were using the returns to the best of their ability and conscientiously 'adjusting' permits, a majority had come to regard them as a theoretical exercise on the part of the retailer, to be valued only as his *admission* of stock in hand. This was all the more so because the abolition of the cut coupon in January had left a hiatus of six months already, during which a check of the returns was not even theoretically possible.

By the time Food Offices' replies were received, however, Headquarters had already had its mind made up by the 'violent extensions of rationing both actual and projected'. In July 1941 the Ministry was still fending off the threat of 'points', and espousing, as an alternative, a system that would formidably enlarge the number of consumer registrations and their consequent permits. So far from adding to the burden of Food Offices by tightening the system of checks, rationing officials had to cast around for ways of lightening

¹ There were still exceptions to the 'one-wholesaler' rule. Retailers had to be allowed second suppliers for speciality sugars, and vegetarian fats.

² Food Offices would first compile a roll of wholesalers and assign a code number to each. Subsequently they would be referred to on the retailer's permit by their code numbers. (A list of suppliers with their code numbers would be sent to each retailer and kept by him.) Food Offices did not like the idea of code numbers because clerks were less likely to make mistakes with names and addresses than with numbers.

it, even by abandoning the chase after registered customers' unbought rations, and hence any attempt to relate the retailer's main permit to his actual sales. The wholesaler's certificate was therefore scrapped, and the composite return (Form G.C.3) so drafted as not to require a statement of sales. (This change was one of form rather than substance, for a figure for sales could still be inferred from the other information that was asked for.) The new return was introduced in November 1941, and in March 1942 the new principle was embodied in the 'global' permit, pending the restriction of the retailer to a single wholesaler.

The *global permit* was so called because it authorised the retailer to buy a total quantity over the eight-week period, instead of a quantity week by week. Rationing, to begin with, had postulated a weekly cycle for both consumer and retailer; the former had to buy his rations weekly or lose his coupons' value; the latter received a permit that, though it ran for eight (originally four) weeks, specified a weekly quantity that might not be exceeded. In January 1941, as a result of the 1940 committee's report, some extension of the consumer's purchasing periods began to be made;¹ but the weekly basis for retailers lasted until March 1942. Commodity Divisions disliked it intensely from the first; it did not fit trade habits, and it encouraged recourse to supplementary permits.

The earliest objection to the weekly 'ceiling' came from Bacon and Sugar Divisions. Bacon wholesalers could not cut less than 8 lb. (the usual minimum cut was from 12 to 14 lb.); in December 1940, Food Offices were reminded that bacon wholesalers could not deliver exact weekly quantities but must be allowed to 'even out' over the whole permit period. Sugar wholesalers dealt in multiples of 28 lb., and were at first allowed to charge 3d. on each delivery that entailed breaking a 28 lb. parcel. Small retailers complained that this charge swallowed their profits, and from March 1941, the wholesalers were allowed instead to 'round up' permit quantities to the nearest 28 lb. This, however, meant that Sugar Division's process of auditing wholesalers' indents against the exact figures shown on the permits was made impossible; the figures could not be expected to agree. In November 1941, therefore, the weekly quantity for sugar was abandoned altogether, and sugar permits written for a 'global' eight-week quantity that could be delivered as convenient.

By this time other commodities were affected in the same way; the difficulties natural to bacon and sugar had been artificially extended by the fewer and larger deliveries called for by transport economy. (Butter, for instance, was being delivered fortnightly, and cheese monthly.) In March 1942 the 'global' principle was extended to fats and cheese.

¹ See pp. 646-7, below.

'We feel', it was explained, 'that all we are doing . . . is to legalise a position that is already in existence. There is no doubt that retailers do not obtain deliveries of the amounts of their permits week by week. . . . If economy in transport is demanded the old weekly permit must surely be abolished'.

The abolition of the weekly quantity was not merely an adjustment of rationing procedures to the physical realities of food distribution; it aimed at eliminating Commodity Divisions' other bugbear, the supplementary permit. Under the existing system, the retailer was entitled, even compelled, to ask for a supplementary, should he experience extra demand in any single week. Rationing Division's attempts in December 1940, and again, under pressure of the meat shortage in March 1941, to reduce the number of supplementaries by reminding Food Offices that a retailer must surely have some 'slack' in his main permit, and that they should be granted only to meet a *net* increase in demand, did not go far enough. Supplementaries could be reduced only by allowing the retailer more working stock.

The system used in 1918 of allowing retailers supplies in advance for occasional sales (either by a margin on the main permit or by a separate emergency supply) was steadily rejected by Rationing Division,¹ whose policy was to narrow rather than expand the scope for local initiative in permit-writing. Instead, the retailer was freed from the weekly barrier. He was enabled, or rather required, to anticipate future supplies; to exhaust his full permit allowance and only then apply for a supplementary. He was not likely, it was thought, to use up his eight-week allowance in less than six weeks. Here again sugar presented a difficulty, for on this principle the retailer would be applying for a supplementary only during the period in which sugar supplementaries were expressly forbidden; Sugar Division took the permits so high up the chain that any supplementary issued after the sixth week would have expired before completing its journey. (Supplementaries issued in, say, the eighth week of a period were, of course, a nuisance to all Commodity Divisions.) Deliveries on the global sugar permit might therefore be made one week before or one week after the period to which they belonged. This provision was extended to other commodities when, in March 1942, the global permit was applied to them. Late delivery, however, was not liked by Oils and Fats Division, nor did

¹ Until after the war and except for preserves (see p. 579) and bacon (see pp. 588-9). Food Offices had, however, to be restrained from giving margins. 'We have had very considerable difficulty with some Food Offices', wrote a rationing official in June 1942, 'in preventing them from adding margins in respect of unregistered customers to their main permits'. They were particularly anxious to do so for shops that served weekly seamen and, wrote a rationing statistician, 'sometimes resort to stratagems to conceal such allowances in the statistics'.

it solve the problem of supplementaries for sugar issued in the 7th week of a period. In August 1942, therefore, the rule was changed to 14 days delivery in advance only. (By then, the sugar/jam option had compelled some loosening of the rules for the issue of supplementary permits for sugar.)

All these developments in themselves made it impossible to base the permit on ascertained sales, instead of the number of registered customers. When a retailer's stock might legitimately include a fortnight's advance delivery or, in an extreme case, an eight-week quantity received in one delivery, to say nothing of the reserve stocks¹ that he was encouraged to hold, Food Offices would be quite unable to identify any genuine surplus stock to subtract from the authorised quantity. The decision to abandon the attempt would thus have been forced, had it not already been taken on grounds of simplicity.

The permit that thus emerged, in March 1942, was designed to authorise, not as hitherto the minimum, but the maximum purchases a retailer might need for his standing commitments: eight weeks' rations for each registered customer, *plus* requirements for catering and permanent special authorisations. Stock control was to be exercised by issuing supplementaries or (on paper at least) by withholding a main permit altogether; not by manipulating quantities on the latter. 'No adjustment should be made in respect of Stocks' (Food Offices were told); 'the main buying permit will be for a global quantity irrespective of the take-up of registered customers'. Permit-writing was reduced to a simple routine operation,² and the rationing system brought near to a pure counterfoil system.

The global permit remained, however, 'old-style' in appearance, and had to travel from retailer to wholesaler. The composite permit and its counterpart, the advice form to be sent by Food Offices to wholesalers, were still awaiting the limitation of a retailer's suppliers. They were re-drafted several times during the waiting period, for it was by no means easy to devise forms that would meet the varying procedures of Commodity Divisions. Those like Butter and Cheese, and Bacon, that allowed wholesalers to retain the permits they received from retailers, and released supplies to them against a simple declaration that they held legitimate orders, would not be incom-

¹ By October 1941 these were one week's stock of butter, three weeks' of cooking fats and margarine, four weeks' of sugar, preserves, tea, and cheese. They were reserve, not working stocks, but the retailer could call on them for immediate necessities, and then apply for a supplementary to bring them up to the permitted level again. They must not be confused with the fortnight's emergency stock that, from 1942, retailers were required to hold by Order (p. 309 above).

² In which a very useful ready-reckoner could play a large part. This multiplied rations up to 16 oz. by numbers of registered customers up to 3,000, and gave the answers in eight-week totals of cwts. and lbs. The opportunity was taken to make a fresh start by writing permits for the rations in force. Butter permits, for instance, had continued to be written for a 4 oz. ration although for a year the ration had stood at 2 oz.

Bacon permits, it will be remembered, had virtually become ceilings a year earlier (see p. 589 above).

moded when the permits were replaced by Food Office advice forms. Oils and Fats, and Sugar, which had insisted that the wholesaler forward the permits to the Area Distribution Officer, now required some sort of certificate from Food Offices instead.

At one stage it was proposed to provide for this by a detachable portion of the advice form. If, however, Food Offices were to give a certificate, they would also have to indicate the total quantity represented by each advice form; instead of merely copying permit figures on to the advice form, the clerk would have to do an addition sum as well. This seems to have been the last straw for the Ministry's local officers. They were already objecting that the copying process in itself would afford scope for error, as well as making a lot of work. Birmingham Food Office, for instance, claimed that it would have to re-distribute figures from about 6,000 permits, to documents for 200 wholesalers. Another Food Office had 333 retailers and 71 wholesalers for sugar alone.

In February 1942 Headquarters tried to meet their objections by a complete and ingenious re-shaping of the forms. Retailers' and wholesalers' documents were to be combined on a single sheet. The formers' composite permit would be a vertical strip on the right-hand side, the wholesalers' advices (one for each food) horizontal strips on the left. By turning the vertical strip under and using carbon-paper, the quantities could be entered on both parts in one operation. The vertical strip would be detached and sent to the retailer, the horizontal strips separated, sorted, and sent to wholesalers with covering notes of the quantities they represented. Local officers liked the new document (though it did not dispense with addition); Enforcement Division, however, objected that the names and addresses of the suppliers did not appear on the permit slip.¹

Further re-drafting became necessary. At this point it began to occur to rationing officials that there was now no justification for recurrent permits at all. The eight-week period had lost its usefulness now that the Ministry no longer insisted that all transactions authorised by the permit must take place within it; moreover the permit was now based, not upon performance, but upon the retailer's standing commitments, which were not likely to vary much from one period to the next. An initial proposal to extend the life of the permit to sixteen weeks developed rapidly in April 1941 into the logical outcome of the new principles of permit writing; a perpetual or *continuing* permit, subject to an eight-weekly review in which changes of less than 5 per cent. would be ignored.² After a period of recovery from shock, the Commodity Divisions agreed.

¹ Food Offices were to keep records of each retailer's suppliers, but Enforcement had no faith in their ability to 'prove' these in a court of law.

² 5 per cent. was the figure eventually agreed on. The model for the procedure was the milk retailer's 'Certificate of Requirements' (Form M.K.2). Above, p. 217 *seq.*

There followed some exchanges between Rationing and Sugar Divisions that are illuminating because they illustrate how far out of touch with the principles of the rationing machine the commodity side of the Ministry might become. Members of Sugar Division had special reasons for apprehension at any looseness in rationing procedure, for (on Cost-of-Living-Index grounds) they were forced to operate a dual price system. In June 1942, for instance, the ex-refinery price of sugar for domestic consumption was 21s. 7d. a hundredweight; identical sugar for manufacture cost 49s. 10d. The proposal for continuing permits seemed to them to open up a prospect in which retailers would be entitled to more sugar than they required, and wholesalers be enabled to accumulate a tidy surplus, for sale at the manufacturing price (or more). These fears were to some extent stilled by an explanation that permits would still be revised up or down when necessary, and that wholesalers would continue to receive eight-weekly advices from Food Offices. (The last was a necessary consequence of the eight-weekly review, for an alteration to a single retailer's permit would alter the total quantity required of his wholesaler.)

Sugar Division's apprehensions were not so much ill-founded as belated. The time to have cried out was at the end of 1940, when the decision was taken to abolish coupon-cutting. Everything that had happened since then amounted to no more than the progressive recognition by rationing officials of the hard fact that there was no way automatically to claw back rations not consumed. The most that they could do, as they admitted in reply to Sugar Division, was to make the retailer account, by means of his purchase-and-stock return, for what he did with his supplies. The value of this return they tended to exaggerate;¹ in any case, the reply was small comfort to people who were worrying, not lest the retailer get too much, but lest he take too little. Nor were the rationers' other arguments more helpful. The suggestion that the wholesaler's supplies be based on a return of performance came ill from those who had found this impracticable for the retailer. To inveigh once more against the habit among wholesalers and Commodity Divisions of treating permit quantities as definite orders was futile. There would have been no point in introducing the advice form from Food Office to wholesaler, so as to speed up distribution, if the wholesaler had still to await a tardy order from the retailer. It was not, in short, possible to make up for unavoidable slackness at one part of the chain of controlled distribution by tightening up somewhere else; everywhere a compromise had to be struck between security and accuracy on the one hand, rapidity and economy in manpower and paper on the other.

¹ See pp. 640-1, below.

The introduction of the new procedure¹ was something of a debacle. Food Offices had had to cope with Sector nominations (many of which were received late), a general re-registration (many consumers as usual registered late), 'the unfortunate simultaneity of the Poultry Keepers Scheme', 'the late arrival of forms which was our [i.e., Headquarters'] fault', and a new meat procedure.² The wholesalers' summaries therefore went out very late and contained many mistakes. 'In the event our worst fears were realised and we lost face very considerably'. In October 1942, therefore, a fresh start was made with a complete re-issue of permits.

Food Offices settled down to the new procedure; Headquarters, however, remained in a welter of reform. The expansion of rationing was over, only one spectacular crisis was ahead—the issue of new ration books and identity cards in 1943—and an age of Organisation-and-Methods had set in. 'There is not a single . . . [document] . . .' it was declared in November 1942, 'which is not in the melting pot'.

IV

The most important document in the melting pot was the lately-introduced permit itself. The wholesaler's strips were felt to be too insubstantial for a continuing-permit régime, and both Food Offices and wholesalers found them difficult to handle and to summarise. The latter asked for a detailed summary sheet instead.³ This harked back to the summer of 1941; the changes actually introduced in May 1943⁴ harked back further still. The new permit was to be in *triplicate*; one copy to the retailer, another to the supplier, another kept by the Food Office. It covered sugar, butter, cooking fats, margarine,

¹ The new continuing permit (Form C.P.2) was made up on the lines indicated in the text. The wholesaler's slips were dubbed C.P.2A; C.P.2B was a summary of C.P.2A quantities, used only when permits were being re-written completely; C.P.2C, the eight-weekly notification of revisions, sent to the wholesaler along with the revised C.P.2A's relating to individual retailers. The procedure for *supplementary* permits was unaltered.

² Below, Chapter XL.

³ It was considered that a detailed list would be a more universal instrument. Sugar Division, for instance, required wholesalers to submit such summaries when there had been a re-issue of permits, and wholesalers had found it very difficult to construct them from the strips. There was criticism from some large firms of the differing requirements of the Commodity Divisions. A detailed list would satisfy the more exacting, and not harm the others.

⁴ This was as unlucky a date as August 1942, because it preceded the very onerous sixth issue of ration books. The new procedure entailed, of course, a complete reissue of permits.

cheese, bacon, and eggs,¹ and, by having the quantities written along the top edge, was ingeniously designed to enable Food Offices, by overlapping, to construct a temporary summary sheet for adding up wholesalers' quantities. At first sight, the new procedure seemed to have travelled a long way from one of the original motives behind permit reform—the saving of paper; if a retailer had a different supplier for each food, he would receive seven individual permits, and, moreover, the transaction would now call for twenty-one copies all told. This would, however, be an extreme case, and even so nothing compared with the days when several suppliers for each food were common.

The continuing-permit system was now being applied to eggs and to bacon. The former presented little difficulty; as the eight-week period meant nothing in egg distribution, and permits could be varied at any time, the old-style egg permits had virtually been continuing permits. Eggs therefore differed from other commodities in two ways; the permits might be revised at any time² on request and the 'supplier's copy' was sent not to the supplier, but to the Area Commodity Officer.³ This second point also applied to bacon, which was a less obvious subject for continuing permits as quantities had to be determined weekly. On the other hand, it was perishable, and therefore needed the Food-Office-to-wholesaler advice form. In February 1943, therefore, continuing but not 'global' permits were introduced for bacon.⁴

Continuing permits were also applied to catering establishments, and the document used by those buying retail was also used for continuing 'special authorities'.⁵ (Special authorities were of two kinds; those for one occasion only, or for a limited period, e.g., for cookery classes, the Home Guard on operational exercise, police and firemen on duties away from Headquarters, and the 'continuing' variety, e.g., tea, sugar, and milk, for blast-furnacemen and coast-guards, tea and milk, for agricultural and industrial workers.)⁶

¹ The form was actually two forms in triplicate, printed on the back of each other in such a way that by using carbon-paper and folding, a 'holder's copy', 'supplier's copy', and 'Food Office copy' of the permit for *either* bacon and eggs *or* the remaining foods could be produced in a single operation. The matter printed on the reverse side had always, of course, to be ignored.

² This meant that there were no supplementary permits for eggs. It should be remembered that eggs were not 'rationed', i.e., there was no guarantee of supply.

³ This was later said to have reduced allocations by 10 per cent.

⁴ This was when the retailer's bacon return was dropped (see p. 589 above).

⁵ All the 'catering' forms were changed during this period. The phrase 'special authority' replaced the earlier 'special permit', which was, strictly speaking, inappropriate for purchases by retail.

⁶ Temporary special authorities (S.A.1) were issued to: tea and coffee blenders (milk), blood donors (tea, sugar), estuarial seamen (all rationed foods), first aid posts (tea, sugar), fruit preservation centres (tea), seasonal agricultural workers (tea, sugar, margarine, cheese, preserves), voluntary working parties of a national character, e.g.,

The new permit was only one of a whole set of documents designed for Food Offices' central task, the control of the retailer. The others were a record of registrations (and priorities), a planned work-sheet and a record of supplementary permits issued, and the periodical return of stock and purchases. All these were housed in a file for each retailer, which also contained a copy of his licence, a list of his Sector nominations, and a note of his establishment and special authorities. The most important of these, the record of registrations, reached finality in two stages. The earlier, dating from January 1942, was, in officials' own opinion, the most momentous piece of simplification that they ever effected.

The recording of removals, from the present point of view, had four main objects:¹ to enable the consumer to re-register, to cancel the old registrations, to inform the retailer of registrations lost, and to store the information of registrations lost and gained, in readiness for his next permit. The procedure in the Food Offices, up to January 1942, was somewhat as follows: a clerk in the 'new' office filled in a removals application form and passed it, with the ration book, to another, who amended the address in and on the book, issued new registration counterfoils, and copied the names and addresses of the retailers from the inside covers on to a form, which was then sent to the 'old' office. There a clerk noted the cancelled registrations, passed these on to a counterfoil clerk who removed the counterfoils from the register, then to a reference-leaf clerk who looked out the reference leaf for sending to the 'new' Food Office. (New registrations were much simpler; the new counterfoils were sent in by the retailer and filed in the counterfoil register.)² At some time also, all this information had to be transferred to the basic record used for permit-writing, and lost registrations had to be notified to the retailer. The basic record was a separate 'log' for each commodity, on which total registrations were entered. The notification for the retailer was yet another

Red Cross (tea, milk), and wedding receptions (tea, sugar, butter or margarine, milk, cooking fats, cheese).

Continuing special permits (S.A.2) were issued to Civil Defence workers without canteens (all rationed foods), firewatchers (tea, milk), Home Guard on duty for long periods (rationed foods), certain classes of industrial workers, e.g., those handling lead products (milk), certain industrial processes (milk), maternity and child welfare centres (tea, sugar, milk) naval ships, shore establishments and messes (meat), Port War and Signal stations (tea, sugar, milk), special classes of railwaymen (tea in dry form, milk, sugar), Royal Observer Corps (rationed foods), schools (milk), schools providing hot drinks for children taking packed lunches (sugar), war-time nurseries (milk), and office tea clubs (tea, milk).

¹ The size of this problem may be judged by a single sample. Between 13th June and 8th August 1941, there were 153,290 removals—a weekly average of 102 for the 1,489 Food Offices of Great Britain and N. Ireland. The National Registration aspect of the problem is dealt with elsewhere.

² Counterfoils were filed in alphabetical order under each retailer and, within this classification, under each commodity. It might take 6 weeks to complete the filing after a general re-registration, and a largish Food Office might have six counterfoil clerks.

form, giving the names and addresses of customers lost, so that the retailer could bring his own record up to date. Food Offices had their own ways of linking all these papers. Some maintained ledgers of cancelled registrations, sending retailers copies of the entries, and transferring totals to the 'log' every four weeks; others kept a rough record of cancellations and notified retailers every week, again transferring totals every four weeks; and there were some that had ceased to cancel or destroy the old counterfoils.

The reform of January 1942 simplified the procedure in two ways. First, it transferred the retailers' names and addresses from the cover of the ration book to a detachable page that could be forwarded to the 'old' office without more ado. Secondly, it changed the method of 'storing' registration figures and notifying retailers. A form was now maintained for each retailer, on which all the changes in registrations—gains and losses—for whatever food were recorded, and this was sent to the retailer every four weeks. New registrations were also handled differently. New counterfoils were filed in front of the main body, so that they could easily be counted every four weeks; old ones were not extracted. The counterfoil register, that is to say, was no longer kept 'live' throughout the rationing year by physical manipulation of its contents; this was replaced by a system of book entries. Many Food Executive Officers regretted the change because it increased the possibility of error;¹ Headquarters, however, insisted that labour shortage made it imperative.

After the introduction of the 'composite' permit in August 1942, permit-writing could no longer be based on the 'log' of registrations that had been kept for each commodity separately; the basic records had now to be arranged so as to show each retailer's position for all the foods at a glance. For a time, therefore, until the reform of all the documents was complete, permits were written from carbon-copies of the forms recording changes in registrations, and the information on these transferred to the old 'logs' merely for statistical purposes. In May 1943, however, Food Office permit record and retailer's notification were combined on a single form, whose intricate appearance was designed to make the processes carried out upon it as simple as possible. It was a double-fold form, made out in duplicate on both sides by the use of carbon paper, and then separated—one page to the retailer every eight weeks, one page retained in the Food Office.

The duplicate aspect of the form was, however, only the beginning of its ingenuities. A space left blank on the 'retailer's copy' was utilised in the 'Food Office copy' for a series of ruled columns in which the clerk, guided by a set of stage-by-stage instructions, set out and

¹ And because the counterfoil register was useful when a branch of a multiple had to be identified, when the retailer disputed the registration figure, and when the consumer had entered the names and addresses of the retailers wrongly. (Food Offices found that the real registration was usually with a shop nearby.)

totalled the quantities of each food to which the retailer was theoretically entitled by reason of his standing commitments. The totals were then compared, by physical juxtaposition, with those on his current permit; if, and only if, those for any food differed by five per cent. or more, the next stage was embarked upon. A 'work-sheet', designed to register exactly with the columns on the form, was gummed immediately below the totals, and by further easy stages the clerk was guided to work out the new permit quantities, which thus remained on record for future use. Nor was this all; the same physical processes were applied to the checking of the retailer's composite return of purchases and stocks against the permit quantities.

The standard instructions (*Food Office Procedures*) drawn up for this¹ work were something in which Headquarters took especial pride. They were, in function if not in form, an adaptation to human beings of the punched cards fed into accounting machines; it was claimed that they enabled an important part of food control to be carried on by clerks who need not even realise that they were dealing with food. This is not to say that the Ministry preferred clerks not to know what they were doing. Blackboard lessons were given in Food Offices to explain the procedures and the reason for every step; this developed into the formation of clerk pools that could switch to each activity in turn instead of devoting themselves to one job, and to the establishment of an eight-week Food Office routine carefully time-tabled to eliminate 'peaks and troughs' of works. 'Armed with precise instructions and carefully drilled beforehand . . . the clerks could not only undertake a wide variety of duties, but also enjoyed it. . . .' Day-to-day instruction circulars were now carefully graded into those that involved clerks, and those that involved supervisors and Food Executive Officers, arranged so that they could be dismembered and the parts distributed within the Food Office to those concerned, and were codified every month. With the establishment of a corps of Food Office Visitors, Rationing Division could begin to hope for a millennium that would find every Food Office doing exactly the same thing in the same way on the same day.

V

Rationing Division, when allaying the fears of Sugar Division about continuing permits, had explained the difference between the old and the new systems for the control of the retailer.

'We have . . . come to regard the permit as being a control of supplies down the chain of distribution. As such, of course, it has very distinct

¹ A specimen which shows removals procedure will be found in Appendix J, p. 788 *seq.*

value, but it makes no attempt to be accurate to the ounce, in fact this is the basis of allowing ourselves 5 per cent. liberties here and there. At the same time we have switched our whole attention in control of the retailer on to the calculations we do with his statements on . . . [his eight-weekly return]. If in fact we give him too big a . . . permit of any kind, it does not stop us finding out if his figures are accurate. Even if his figures are not accurate . . . he cannot go on playing Old Harry with us without being discovered by a wideawake F.E.O.’

The difference between the old and the new function of the *permit* is best made clear by taking an extreme and impossible example. Under the old system, a retailer with 200 registered customers who bought only half their rations ought to have received a permit representing his usage, that is, 100 rations. Under the new system, his permit had nothing to do with usage; it would continue to represent full rations for 200 registrations. The corresponding difference between the old and new functions of the *return* was that, under the old system, Food Offices had been supposed to calculate usage from it, compare this with estimated justified demand, and then apply the result to a subsequent permit. The return, therefore, had had a specific object—the calculation of a permit—and a limited period of validity. Under the new system, the return stood apart from the permit, and was concerned only very indirectly with measurement of supplies; it had become primarily an instrument of enforcement.¹ The rationing system, instead of seeking to prevent illegal sales by depriving the retailer of the material for them, now left this with him; the return was intended to reveal if he used it.² Thus the imprecision of the main permit could be disregarded. It was now based upon a figure of registrations eight weeks old,³ but this did not affect the use of the return, which was no longer in theory concerned with how a retailer obtained his supplies.

The method of checking the return, formulated in September 1943, was to set the sum of the retailer’s opening stock (i.e. the closing stock on the previous return) and his purchases, against the sum of the estimated demand (i.e. the quantity on his permit) and the closing stock. The attempt was no longer directly made to estimate under-consumption, though this might appear in the form of an inflated stock figure, and hence in a demand side of the equation

¹ Cf. the use of the coupon in 1918 (see pp. 441–2 above).

² Organisation and Methods Division had calculated that there were 54 possible combinations of factors that produced a difference between opening and closing stocks.

³ The permit was still sent out 23 days before it was due to come into operation. In February 1944 Rationing Division tried to get this period reduced to 14 days, but the Commodity Divisions could not agree. The former’s motives were not to get the permit based on more up-to-date figures, but to obtain a smoother flow of work in Food Offices. There was a ‘major peak’ preceding the 23rd day before the end of the period. The ‘23 day’ rule lasted until after the war.

that was apparently too high; in such a case a retailer might be warned to reduce purchases, or denied supplementary permits, or even a main permit, to which he was in theory entitled. (The return thus entered the supply side by the back door.) Conversely, sales above the permit quantities would make their presence felt in a depleted stock figure, which, unless explained by 'emergency' coupons or other non-recurrent legal sales, would call for investigation on the spot.

As a piece of book-keeping, lending itself to the robot processes of the Food Office Procedures, the check was all that could be desired. Any attempt, however, to audit the figures, and still more to take punitive action on the results of an audit, encountered difficulties. The root weakness was the stock figure, which was properly the result of a physical stocktaking and was certified as such by the retailer; in practice (if the retail trade organisations are to be believed) it was seldom more than an estimate. Estimate or not, it could seldom be usefully compared with a previous figure, because of the latitude that, under the régime of 'global' permits, was now allowed in the matter of deliveries to the retailer. Food Offices soon found that any rewarding check must extend over three returns, or nearly six months. If a glaring discrepancy were discovered and the retailer questioned, he would most likely say that he had made a mistake, and take the return away to make the figures come right. As these were at least a week old by the time he was being questioned, a stock-taking under supervision would prove little.

Even if the suspicions aroused by the return were confirmed, it still remained to prove illegal disposal in court; it was not enough to demonstrate that stock was missing. A classic case of this kind concerned a grocer on the West Coast of Scotland. He admitted to having received 18 cwt. of sugar in November 1943; on 20th December he had none left, yet his three to four hundred registered customers had received none during that time. The grocer (reported the Divisional Food Officer at Inverness) 'says simply "It is a mystery".' To local enforcement officials, police and the excise, it was not a mystery, for they connected the disappearance of the sugar with the existence in the neighbourhood of illicit whisky distillers. All that they could prove, however, was that the grocer had mislaid 18 cwt. of sugar; they could not prove what he had actually done with it. The only ground for prosecution was, therefore, the purely technical one of failing to maintain the 14 days emergency stock.¹

¹ Under the Rationed Foods (Emergency Retail Stock) Order, S.R. & O. (1942) No. 1500. The grocer's customers could not be transferred because (1) they had not complained, (2) there was only one other grocer in the neighbourhood. Nor could he be reached through his licence, because the cardinal principle of licensing policy was that a licence was withdrawn only if the retailer had been convicted of a serious breach of regulations, i.e., he was not considered to be 'an unsatisfactory link in the chain of

[continued overleaf]

It cannot be denied that the pursuit by Food Offices of inconsistencies in returns might serve to exert moral pressure on retailers, even though the more intelligent might rapidly realise that a care for paper conformity was all that was necessary to escape persecution. But rationing officials had claimed, and continued to claim, that the return played a major part in the control of the retailer; this, as had been pointed out in 1940, was 'sheer delusion'. Rationing methods had come a long way since then, but the journey had been without the maps that a thorough and relentless examination of principles might have provided; it had traversed, not a Roman road, but one whose course was obedient to the natural obstacles it encountered. The application of a streamlined Organisation-and-Methods technique to the checking of an inherently unverifiable document like the return was, indeed, a revealing anachronism. By clinging to this remnant of an ideal, officials displayed that the realism of the reformed rationing system sprang from necessity, not from conviction.

distribution' until he had been proved one. This grocer, however, was in the happy position of being virtually the only link in the chain of distribution in his part of the world.

The same problem was felt acutely in Northern Ireland over tea. In Eire, tea was fetching nearly 3s. an ounce; Northern Irish retailers were being canvassed by smuggling agents. Coupons were no deterrent in this case because the retailer could, in view of the prices paid, stand the loss of legitimate trade with equanimity. Local officials pressed strongly for a revival of Article 40 of the Rationing Order (S.R. & O. (1939) No. 1856). This had laid down that the amount of rationed food disposed of must not exceed that represented by the coupons, etc., collected. It had been dropped from the 1942 Rationing Order because (1) coupons had been dispensed with, (2) Legal Branch felt that it conflicted with the principle of criminal law that the onus of proof must not be placed on the defendant. The situation was, therefore, that the retailer no longer had to account for the rationed food entrusted to him. The Ministry agreed to reinstate the Article for Northern Ireland alone if Stormont would ask for it. This was unlikely, and the local officials pointed out that it was the Ministry's responsibility to safeguard its tea supplies, and see that Northern Ireland consumers got their rations. The Ministry decided to reword the envelopes in which tea coupons were returned by including references to the Defence Regulations and Rationing Orders, so making it possible to prosecute for false declaration.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Other Reforms in the Rationing System,

1941 - 5

I

PERMIT REFORM was by far the most important of the changes in the rationing system from 1941 onwards; it was, however, accompanied by a general 'tidying-up', ranging from the retail food trades themselves to the number of ration documents in use.

The measure that gave the most trouble was an attempt to withdraw supplies from retailers with less than 25 registrations. (This figure was chosen because it represented the smallest 'reasonable wholesale quantity'.) Such a minimum registration rule would, it was claimed, save transport, the waste of food entailed in breaking bulk and cutting small amounts, and—by reducing the number of permits, invoices, and records—considerable clerical work and paper.

There had been some discussion in 1940 of the problem of 'absurdly small' wholesale quantities;¹ but the first positive move appeared as a response to retailers' pressure for higher retail margins, generated by declining turnover and increasing costs:

'I am certain', wrote the Minister on 11th February 1941, 'that with the reduced turnover in food it is inevitable that the country cannot economically support the present number of shops. The Rationing System will, of course, tend to keep all of them in existence'.

An investigation, covering five towns,² showed that 60 per cent. of the retailers in them (excluding butchers) had less than 100 registered customers. Out of 2,366 shops, 23 had only from 1 to 4 registrations for butter and margarine; 83 had from 5 to 9; 350 had from 10 to 24. The figures for sugar were very similar. There appeared to be a case for a 'planned and orderly reduction in the number of retail shops', as the Ministry's Economics Division put it, 'in order to allow those which remain to operate on margins compatible with the policy of the Treasury in respect of retail prices'. On 17th June the Minister approved what might be taken as a first step in this direction. In the coming general re-registration,

¹ See p. 549 above.

² Yeovil, Wolverhampton, Stockport, Paisley, and Reading.

Food Executive Officers were told (on the 28th), retailers with less than 25 registrations¹ for any one commodity must not be given a permit for it. Any registrations they had accepted must be transferred. The rule could be waived only where hardship might be caused to the public in *rural* areas.

The multitude of small shopkeepers, however, were not only a sizable field for reform but a sizable influence on public opinion. 'If we put the figure at 25,' noted a rationing official on 3rd June, 'we knock out about 20 per cent. of the retailers, which is rather startling'. Their cause was heartily taken up in Press and Parliament. The Ministry rested its case, in the first instance, upon transport economy; when critics pointed out that to deny a retailer, say, bacon, but to continue to allow him deliveries of other rationed goods for which he might have 25 registrations or more, would not save much transport, and that his supplier would still have to visit him with unrationed goods, it fell back on two inner lines of defence. First, 'rationalisation' would still save work and paper in both Food and wholesalers' offices; secondly, that the traders whose registrations represented only their families and friends must be eliminated. An unwary trader who admitted that he had obtained a licence merely to buy his family provisions at wholesale rates was cited on every possible occasion; this, however, could not justify a minimum as high as 25 registrations. In vain the Ministry argued that a gross profit of 7s. 6d. a week, the most that could be made from 24 customers² for all rationed foods, could hardly be described as a livelihood; the reply was that even a small trade in rationed goods drew unrationed trade into a shop. With much citing of Napoleon, the Ministry was accused on all sides of bringing ruin to a large section of a nation of shopkeepers. As a result, the Ministry's demands were modified; by inadvertence, rather more than had been intended. The Food Executive Officer's discretion was extended to town as well as country, and he was authorised to take hardship to the trader, as well as to the public, into account. Doubtful cases were to be passed on to the Divisional Office, and permits issued in the meantime; the intention was that the axe should fall later. The Minister, however, stated at a Press Conference on 22nd July that Food Control *Committees* had been given the task of review, and it had hastily to be made over to them. On the same day, the Parliamentary

¹ 50 for eggs, which were newly subject to control.

² Food	24 registrations	Gross profit
Bacon	6 lb.	2s. 3d.
Butter	3 lb.	10d.
Margarine	9 lb.	1s. 9d.
Cheese	3 lb.	5d.
Preserves	3 lb.	7d.
Sugar	12 lb.	8d.
Tea	3 lb.	1s. 0d.

Secretary gave a pledge in the House of Commons that the Ministry would not cause undue hardship to any *bona fide* food trader.¹

The simple fall of the axe at 25 had thus been transformed into a complex sifting of genuine small traders from those who would not suffer hardship by the withdrawal of a small part of their turnover. In September 1941 came a further complication; a decision that a hardship class created by the concessions themselves—those who had voluntarily refused registrations when the rule was announced—might apply for reinstatement. By October, the Ministry had done better than it had expected. Thirteen thousand retailers had lost permits, and 8,000 rested in the uncomfortable position of temporary reprieve. True, 93 traders with less than 6 registrations, and 369 with less than 11, had kept permits for sugar; but it was decided to let 'comparatively well' alone and not to proceed with the logical next step—the withdrawal of licences from those who had lost permits.

In July 1942, however, another general re-registration came round. If the '25 rule' were not enforced afresh, those who had suffered under it the previous year would have a just grievance; if, on the other hand, they were allowed to accept registrations again, the Ministry would look foolish. Moreover, the case for 'rationalisation' seemed even stronger; at one point it was actually proposed to raise the minimum to 50 registrations, and apply a similar rule to tea and 'points'. There were 42,000 retailers with less than 50 registrations; and it was therefore decided to concentrate quietly on 8,000 who still had less than 25. No public announcement was to be made; Food Control Committees were to be given to understand that the rule was again to be enforced and that, subject to the Parliamentary Secretary's 'hard-case' pledge, they might keep the increased manpower and transport difficulties in mind and enforce it rather more rigorously than the year before. The pledge acted as a safety-valve and, that year, there was no trouble.²

The Ministry continued to advance very cautiously. 'Let us proceed generally', laid down 'higher authority', 'with a view to this being and appearing a part of our normal administration, showing the maximum of consideration and no sudden swooping on individual

¹ Official Report, Cols. 780-2. 22nd July, 1941.

² Except for a case in Edinburgh which was alarming because it turned up in the constituency of the M.P. who, the year before, had led a deputation of the 1922 Committee to the Minister on the subject.

The Food Control Committee had gone about the business very gently (taking 20 as its minimum) and considered appeals very thoroughly. The trouble was that the retailer had been let through the year before (when the Food Executive Officer had done the reviewing) and since then had gained one more customer. (He had 11 for fats, 13 for sugar, and 7 for cheese.) Moreover, several of the customers were personally known to the M.P. The Food Executive Officer maintained that the retailer's main trade was in 'intoxicating liquors', and the Ministry's Retail Trade Adviser agreed. The retailer, he said, was trying to hold on to 'a grocery trade of a most miserable nature yielding him about 2s. a week, merely to justify his claim to be a licensed grocer'.

small traders'. In January 1943 the rule was extended to tea;¹ in November it was made continuing, that is, it could be applied at any time during the year;² it was also, at the instance of the Commodity Division, applied to milk.³ Thereafter, as each general re-registration came round, discussions were in reverse; what was considered was whether the rule could be dispensed with. By 1952 it had come to be looked upon as directed only at retailers who wanted permits for the benefit of their families, and the figure of 25 only as a guide to the point at which it might be advisable to begin investigating.

II

The restriction of purchases of rations to the week in which ration coupons were valid, abandoned for retailers in March 1942, was also gradually relaxed for consumers. They were, however, persuaded to think in terms of four, not eight weeks, and were not allowed to anticipate to the same extent. It was tea, with its 4 oz. packet, that had first breached the weekly period;⁴ then, in November 1940, the Committee for the Simplification of Forms and Documents had recommended that two weeks' rations might be bought at once, either in advance or in arrear.⁵ (The object was to legalise what must be taking place when shopping was interfered with by bombing.) The resulting effort to extend *purchasing periods* coincided with the food and transport crisis of that winter, and was not as successful as the Committee had hoped. Commodity Divisions, fearing that they might be called upon to meet two weeks' rations in the first week, withdrew their consent to buying in advance. Meat Division would not even concede buying in arrear. In March 1941 came the four-week period for cheese (with the ration at 1 oz. it could hardly have been less), then the calendar-month period for preserves.

The situation had become chaotic. Tea could be bought in the current week and a week in arrear or in advance;⁶ meat in the current

¹ The sale of 25 lb. in an eight-week period being substituted for 25 registrations.

² Food Offices were warned against 'arbitrary and precipitate action'.

³ It never became effective because of protests from the trade. When, in 1949, Midland Division proposed to insure against pressure to reduce staffs by streamlining 'certain rather fussy Food Office procedures' (i.e., the multiplicity of tiny milk permits that resulted from the pledge of 22nd July 1941), Headquarters replied that 'it is far too late in the day to begin applying an instruction made some years ago but which has never been put into effect'.

⁴ See p. 712.

⁵ See p. 569 above.

⁶ Or, if bought by post, at any time during the four-week period.

week only; cheese at any time during a four-week period; preserves at any time during a month and, because of the $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. ration and the 1 lb. pack, a month in advance; all other commodities in the current week and a week in arrear. Rationing officials' dislike of this untidiness was reinforced by packaging and transport difficulties. In June they set out to secure a week's latitude, in advance or arrear, for perishables, and the right to purchase at any time in a four-weekly ration period for non-perishables (including cheese). By October they had achieved only four-week purchase of tea and sugar,¹ for they had had to repel a move in the opposite direction; there was a feeling among 'higher authority' that buying in arrear encouraged consumption, and that preserves and cheese ought therefore to be limited to two-weeks' purchase at a time and buying in advance substituted for buying in arrear. However, purchasing periods, if not greatly extended, had been tidied up. Commodities were now divided into those that might be bought at any time during a four-week period (cheese, preserves, sugar, tea, and points goods); those that might be bought in the current week and a week in arrear (fats, bacon); and meat, which could be bought in the current week only.

The principle of the four-week period could, by 1942, be seen clearly in the ration book itself.² In the fifth edition, issued that year, the weekly coupons had become very small and were boldly grouped into four-week blocks, each marked with the number of the ration period. In the 1943 book the coupons were replaced by narrow spaces grouped into fours. The rationing calendar was becoming familiar to all; even the occasional egg was marked-off in the appropriate four-week square. The 1942 book also reflected the policy of combined registrations. Fats, of course, shared one coupon, and the sugar page consisted of blocks of tiny coupons and blocks of 'spares' marked P.Q.R.S. 'P' was for preserves; 'Q' was later used for dried milk; 'R' for the special jam ration that was issued between September and December 1943.³ The ration book had become a very flexible instrument that could cover all the degrees of control being exercised; after 1942, for instance, it carried on its covers grids and panels that could be used for schemes that only required the ration book to be marked.⁴

III

The adult ration book was held by the main body of consumers.

¹ For tea, this was later to become compulsory for the single ration-book holder. Sugar Division would have liked to make it so, but this was ruled out on the ground that some people might not be able to afford so much at one time.

² See Appendix A on the development of the ration book.

³ See p. 773.

⁴ These had been carried over from the R.B.9, the supplementary ration book issued in 1941. They had been designed for the rationing devices being discussed at that time, e.g., value rationing. The grid was really a set of daily coupons.

They constituted the bulkiest, but also the simplest part of the rationing system, in that the problems they posed were problems of size, not refinements. The ideal consumer never removed, or took a holiday, or had a baby; was not a vegetarian, or a Moslem, or an estuarial seaman, or a hop-picker; did not keep bees or poultry, or spend nights in police cells; above all, was not under two, or under five, or under six, or under eighteen. The ordinary as distinct from the ideal consumer probably did remove or go on holiday; even so, he exacted little administration in proportion to his numbers, and the part of the rationing system that related to him operated, in spite of any impression that the preceding accounts of behind-the-scenes history may have given to the contrary, with remarkable smoothness. The really tricky problems were posed by those who needed special treatment. For instance, the time, effort, and paper, needed to launch cheese rationing in general, were less in proportion to the numbers involved than that expended in identifying and issuing special documents to the 'specialists'. In 1941, therefore, the Ministry set out to simplify this part of the rationing system by relating special benefits, or special treatment either to the main ration book itself or to books created to distinguish certain 'food ages'. This eliminated not only the separate documents that had hitherto been necessary, but also many of the special procedures, e.g., to prove entitlement, that had been behind those documents. A child under five, for instance, could participate in the benefits of its age-group simply by holding the child's ration book; its entitlement would have to be proved only once, when the book was issued.

There were two main groups of 'specialists': those who could not register with a retailer, and those who received special rations. The first group consisted of the temporarily unregistered, e.g., people on holiday, and the permanently unregistered, e.g., servicemen on leave or billeted, and travellers. The second group comprised invalids, expectant and nursing mothers, children, adolescents, and recipients of special cheese. Seamen constituted a third group.¹

For the first group a variety of documents existed, or had existed. In January 1940 there were an 'emergency' card of civilian coupons for one week, similar cards for the Services, covering one week or 72 hours,² and a special ration book for travellers. The emergency card was issued to those temporarily away from home; the holder's name and address had to be written on it, and the week's coupons in the ration book cancelled. In June 1940 a simpler document was devised³—a form that when attached to the ration book, temporarily

¹ Seamen are dealt with in Chapter XXXV.

² These carried Service rations at first, but in March 1941 were reduced to civilian scales.

³ Partly because supplies of the cards were liable to run out.

freed it from registration.¹ It could be used for trades holidays, like Wakes Weeks, but its main purpose was to meet large population movements like an influx of hop and fruit pickers.² In December 1940 a four-week temporary card was introduced. When coupon-cutting for registered customers was abolished in January 1941, the form for those unregistered was replaced by a page of coupons that could be stuck into the ration book. Henceforth the temporary cards³ would be used when the ration book was not available, e.g., by seamen or by people who had lost their books. In January 1942 all these weekly temporary documents were scrapped, and replaced by a new document designed to take in all the new complications of rationing. It was a miniature ration book, including points coupons, a milk frame, and a soap panel. It was used by all those unregistered, Service or civilian.

Unregistered consumers were an impediment to distribution based on registration, for they accounted for a large part of the demand for supplementary permits. In 1941 rationing officials set out to reduce their numbers. In July an adapted ordinary ration book enabled members of naval shore establishments to register; in September, a special card with a registration counterfoil was issued for all members of the Services billeted for more than 28 days. But the most spectacular advance was the abolition of the traveller's ration book.

This book, which had seemed essential before the war when it had been assumed that meat meals in restaurants would be rationed, was disliked by the Ministry because it had grown too popular; the qualification that it should be used only by those who had to move about, and who could not eat in catering establishments, was difficult to enforce. (Its popularity received a setback when retailers began to reserve scarce goods for registered customers.) The security authorities

¹ Cf. the Visitor's Declaration Form of 1918 (p. 452, n.1, above).

² Some 150,000 hop-pickers moved into South Eastern, Southern and Midland Divisions for about 3½ weeks (6 if the season were wet). The ordinary process of issuing emergency cards would overwhelm rural Food Offices, but the form (R.G.33) enabled the ration book itself to be used. The retailer estimated what supplies he would need, and accounted for them afterwards by coupon. In 1941, however, coupons were no longer cut out, and some other method of controlling his supplies had to be found. The H.P.33 was devised. This was a form with a counterfoil for registration (the holder had to register with one retailer for all groceries) used in conjunction with the cancellation of the coupons in the ration book. If the holder had not brought a ration book he received a temporary card (R.B.7). Retailers complained at having to turn over the coupon pages, so in 1942 it was decided to give all pickers an H.P.33 and a temporary card (then R.B.12). (Rationing Division decided to ignore the fact that the coupons in the ration book would not be cancelled, on the grounds that they could not be used in the hop-garden and might be out-of-date when the holder got home.) The local Divisions went further and dispensed with the R.B.12; but had to be restrained from doing this again because the H.P.33 was not a rationing document within the meaning of the Rationing Order, i.e., it was not an authority to supply, but must be used in conjunction with a document that was.

³ R.B.7, the temporary card, was also the document given to the police on behalf of people spending the night in police cells (provided that the police station had no canteen and did not receive enough prisoners to warrant its being treated as an institution).

objected to it because, as it could be used anywhere, it was the obvious book to forge; most of the enemy agents uncovered had been equipped with it. 'Free' restaurant meals, thought the Ministry, should eliminate the hard core of users—commercial travellers—leaving only canal-boat families, gypsies, and Members of Parliament, as the classes to whom traveller's facilities were essential. At the reissue of ration books in July 1941, the book was abolished; holders received ordinary ration books but might make special application for traveller's facilities. These now consisted of four sets of weekly coupons stuck into an ordinary ration book (its coupon pages having been removed) and both the initial issue and the four-weekly renewals were made the occasions for security checks,¹ thus affording a tighter control over a class of consumer that was potentially dangerous because it was the one into which enemy agents and domestic wrong-doers would endeavour to sink themselves. The number of travellers' documents in use immediately dropped from 258,000 to 35,000. At the next issue, in 1942, the same process was repeated; thereafter it became possible to dispense with some of the precautions. The traveller virtually disappeared, becoming merely a person who had to collect temporary cards every four weeks.

The second group of 'specialists', those who received differential rations, were more difficult to deal with. When rationing started, this class consisted of invalids, diabetics, and children. The first two groups were catered for by means of separate sheets of coupons for fats, sugar, and meat;² a cumbersome procedure that was extended, in March 1941, to those receiving special cheese. Children were covered by the green ration book, that at the beginning carried no benefits but only a half meat ration. By 1942, with the development of priority and welfare schemes, the situation had become much more complicated. It was met in two ways. First, in July 1942, by the use of a slip that, when attached to the appropriate page or pages of the ordinary ration book,³ made the book itself the authority to supply a specified 'extra'. This device covered priority eggs and milk, special cheese, invalids, and diabetics; it eliminated the household milk and eggs permits and the separate invalids' documents, and greatly

¹ Rationing officials overcame their caution about the Identity Card (see Chapter XXIX) and required it to be produced when application was made. Their justification was that they might be allowed to make special demands on people demanding special treatment. (Special arrangements were made for Members of Parliament.)

² Extra rations of one commodity were given in exchange for another; e.g., diabetics gave up sugar coupons for extra meat, sufferers from coeliac disease had meat in exchange for butter. The Special Diets Advisory Committee of the Medical Research Council decided what diseases needed special rations and what these rations should be. Food Offices were periodically given lists of illnesses and conditions for which applications had been rejected.

³ Or the hop-picker's H.P.33. Officials later devised an H.P.33 with a 'built-in' slip.

simplified removals procedure.¹ In 1943 simplification was taken further by the brilliant device of giving the expectant mother, whose ration book bristled with priority slips, a ration book for her unborn child.² Secondly, for those who could not be covered by the adult ration book, there was the 'Junior' book introduced in 1943, and the child's book. The former was intended for the 5-18 age group (who had 3½ pints of milk a week) but, for the first year, the age limit was set at 16 because of the needs of National Registration and clothes rationing.³ In 1944 the age-limit was raised to the 'food age' of 18.

The child's (green) ration book, however, presented a more difficult problem. This was held by children under six, the age set in 1918.⁴ The age was reduced to five in 1942, primarily to simplify the administration of the welfare schemes. These were independent of the main rationing system (and, for a time, of each other) so that, by 1942, children were receiving special treatment in three ways: through possession of the green book (priority milk and eggs, and first claim on oranges),⁵ through the National Milk and Vitamins Schemes (free or cheap milk, cod-liver oil, and orange juice),⁶ and through the Milk-in-Schools scheme. The first set of benefits ceased roughly at six, the second at five; the third began at five. The intention in 1942 was to dovetail all three and, in particular, by relating the National Milk and Vitamins Schemes to the green book, to eliminate their separate permits and records.

This was not as simple as might be supposed, because the age limits did not fit exactly; in particular, the age when a child became, ration-wise, an adult was elastic. To avoid changing ration books and adjusting records and permits on birthdays all through the year, the Ministry at first issued an adult book to all children who would attain six during the life of the book.⁷ In July 1941, however, when the ration book began to run for a year, the child's book was given to all who would still be under six in January 1942, and so might be held by children who were 6½. This looseness would not suit the welfare schemes because they gave financial benefit, and so brought down

¹ Retailers were notified every 4 weeks of such priorities.

² It was 'doctored' to provide the child's share of meat, eggs (shell and dried), oranges, milk, and vitamins. (In 1947 a special expectant-mother's book was issued.)

³ See Appendix G.

In 1944 the clothing age was also raised to 18.

⁴ See p. 452 above.

⁵ See p. 582 *seq.* above.

⁶ The National Milk Scheme was handed over to Food Offices in December 1940; the Vitamins Scheme began a year later. For over a year, a separate removals counter for milk had to be maintained in Food Offices.

⁷ In October 1939 the green ration book had been given to children under six at the time of issue. In February 1940 an optional change to the adult book after the 6th birthday was allowed. At the second issue, in July 1940, a child becoming six before 30th December got an adult book; in January 1941, a child becoming six before 29th June.

the guillotine sharply in the month in which the child became five. The solution adopted for the priority milk scheme, substituting the possession of a green ration book for a formal age qualification (and so, of course, giving some children a double benefit, of priority milk at home and milk in school) might not therefore be repeated. The age at which the child lost the green book had to be lowered to five. In 1940 this would have been welcomed, because it did not, at that time, pay a consumer to be under six; by 1942, however, the child's book carried benefits, and some protests were heard when, in July, it was issued only to those who would be under five on 1st August. However, the rationing side could not go the whole way with the welfare schemes and change books on birthdays. Instead, an optional change was allowed; it was not at first publicised, in case parents wanting the tea ration¹ and the full meat ration should change and afterwards, when the linking of the welfare schemes to the green book was announced, regret their choice. In February 1943, the revised arrangements for the welfare schemes were ready and the option to change announced.

IV

For the last two years of war the newly-streamlined rationing system operated in conditions that were trying but unspectacular. Decisive developments took place in the rationing of meat and of tea;² for the rest, retailers and rationing officials united in a 'fervent prayer for nothing new'. The latter, however, did attempt one more piece of simplification.

The control of the retailer had been loosened so that beneath his permit 'ceiling', he enjoyed a fair amount of freedom. There remained, however, in the number of registrations, tangible evidence of his approximate requirements. For establishments there was nothing of the sort. Their authorisations were based on information that was 'self-stated, over-stated, and out-dated'—their returns of the number and type of meals served. Neither Food Offices, nor the establishments themselves could estimate with certainty what future requirements would be, and it was known that because of variations in trade, there was a good deal of slack in establishments' allowances. (Astute consumers were said to take care to register with retailers who had catering customers.) To reduce establishment authorisations to minimum requirements might therefore tighten the control

¹ See Chapter XLIII for the withdrawal of the children's tea ration.

² See Chapters XL and XLIII respectively.

of the retailer as well, and this was being done with some success for meat.

Establishments buying at retail ordered on the pages from their Official Order Books; they also made returns of how much they had bought from each retailer; the retailer sent in the Order-Book pages with his own composite return. The collation of these documents was difficult;¹ and in March 1944, therefore, the Ministry proposed to replace them by a certification procedure. Retailers would complete, in duplicate, a form for each catering customer that would show the amount of each rationed food delivered each week during the eight-week period. Retailers were told that this form would save them work, by serving as their own record of sales to establishments, and facilitating the completion of their own returns. Representatives of the retail trades received the new form with approval, one going so far as to congratulate rationing officials on their 'latest effort at simplification' because 'it had been a real problem to keep a check on supplies to caterers'; and there was some complaint when the introduction of the form was delayed (because of printing difficulties) until December. The general body of retailers, however, proved to have other views. They averred that the old forms had been less trouble because the caterer had filled them in, and all that the retailer had had to do was to sort and send them to the Food Office, and that the Ministry was using the 'well-disciplined retailer' to tighten up the 'casual' caterer. 'Every retailer', the Ministry retorted 'or at any rate, every retailer who was not heading for the Bankruptcy Court, would have to maintain some system for recording goods supplied to establishments . . . unless he was prepared to act as a charitable institution'. But it was late in the war for more controls and the agitation against the 'policeman form' mounted.

Another campaign had begun about October 1943, and from February 1944 onwards was unremitting—against the eight-weekly return itself. It was founded on two arguments. The first was the peculiar one that, as retailers did not complete the form correctly, it could be of no use to food control; the second, that retailers should not be expected to make a physical check of stock every eight weeks. For three years rationing officials fought a rearguard action in defence of the return. It was, they said, a striking example of simplification, having reduced to 12 the 180 entries on separate forms required in 1940; it asked only for closing stock and purchases, which could be taken in his stride by any efficient retailer. They added, among themselves, that if it were given up the 'ceiling' permit must go, and authorisations be reduced once more to the minimum requirements

¹ Especially as, for economy reasons, establishments were allowed to order more than one food on a page. (See pp. 455-6 above for the inception of these forms.) The forms had never been taken very seriously because they were orders; what the caterer actually received might be different.

(how, they did not say); moreover, though it was not a powerful weapon, it was the only one they had:

‘It is the fact that . . . [the return] is the sole means by which we can put the trading of the retailer through the toothcomb of a routine Food Office check and that if we were to discard the form we should have to confess we had released control.’

It was this psychological aspect of the form that was emphasised in the replies given by Food Executive Officers, when in March 1945, they were asked, as they had been in July 1941, what value they placed on it. Four years had made little difference to their opinions (except that advance deliveries and the sugar/jam switch had made checking even more difficult). ‘After all,’ one pointed out, ‘no forms of Return are really satisfactory when you have to depend to such a large extent upon the figures inserted by the person filling in the form’.

By 1945 a third document had joined the others under attack—the continuing permit. At first sight it was disconcerting to find first retailers, then local officers, suggesting a return to the old system of the eight-week issue of permits, as though all the labour and skill that had gone into the reforms counted for nothing. Apart, however, from the usual tendency to think better of the system one does not have, than of the system that one has, there was a sound reason for this apparent back-sliding. The continuing permit had been made possible by conditions that no longer existed. Ration levels were no longer stable, and people were on the move again.

Continuing permits were ‘notional’; they had been written for the rations in force in May 1943. Frequent ration changes brought about an ‘embarrassing’ difference between the real and the nominal value of the permits. This was cumbersome for both wholesalers and retailers, especially as supplementary permits, written for the ration in force, were always at face value. After the war, a rationing official was to write that

‘This position is intolerable for every party concerned and cannot but give rise to unfortunate error or to misdemeanour under the guise of error. Within the Department it is admitted that a completely satisfactory check of Form G.C.3 [the return] is well-nigh impossible.’

The real value of permits had, of course, been varied even in 1940¹ but any confusion cleared itself when they were customarily re-written at four or eight-weekly intervals.

The second disadvantage, population movements, was felt in 1944 as a result of the flying-bomb attacks. With the end of the war in

¹ See p. 557 *seq.* above.

sight there came a general post of people returning to their homes; then demobilisation set in. Retailers, finding that they were unable to meet increased demand promptly, asked for permits that were more up-to-date. Permits were more out-of-date than ever; although they were reviewed every eight weeks,¹ it was in the light of registration figures that were eight weeks old. According to rationing officials' ideas, this ought not to matter now that so much tolerance was allowed in the system. If the permit fell short of requirements, the retailer had his official working stock, together with any unofficial stock built up from under-consumption, and the result of the 5 per cent. margin before permit quantities were altered; moreover he could call on his eight-week quantity in advance and on the first two weeks' supplies from the next period. All this, in normal times, should see him through until he obtained a supplementary. But times were not normal. Retailers, as early as November 1943, had won a 2½ per cent. margin for bacon; they were now asking for eight-week permits and a margin for all commodities.

None of these questions was settled before the end of the war, so that the story must, briefly, be taken further. In March 1946, the retailer's certificate for establishments was abolished; in March 1947, the return was at length 'suspended'; in October 1948 eight-weekly revision of permits² (held off while bread rationing lasted) and a margin for unregistered sales were conceded.

The abolition of the return brought down the paper structure of the rationing system of the Second World War, although, for reasons already given, this made less difference in practice than in theory. The retailer's trade was now overtly divided into two parts; his basic trade, which Food Offices, lacking knowledge of stocks, could not investigate, and his unregistered trade which, being related to coupons, they could investigate. They could not link the two. There was no question, that is, of taking stocks into account when issuing main permits (as they had been supposed to do before March 1942), or when considering an application for a supplementary (as they had been supposed to do before March 1947). When, in October 1948, the margin for unregistered sales was added, it became more necessary than ever that there should be some investigation of what the retailer had done with his supplies before a supplementary was granted.

The third, post-war, rationing system came by way of Northern Ireland, where, by 1946, a *Stock Record* procedure had been brought into operation. Supplementary permits issued and under-consumption

¹ Permit reviews and checking of returns were suspended or modified during a ration book issue and also, in some Food Offices, during the flying-bomb attacks.

² There had been several complete re-issues of permits to enable retailers to change suppliers. But permits had been written for 'standard ration factors', not for the rations in force.

by establishments had been balanced against loose coupons sent in and standing commitments. Any surplus of supplies over requirements was carried forward and, in due course, deducted from a main permit. (Northern Ireland, it will be noted, did not subscribe wholeheartedly to the doctrine of the ceiling permit.) The essence of this method was its continuity; the principle that had been at the heart of the ledger accounting system of January 1918.¹ In June 1949, a milder version of the system was adopted generally. Food Offices kept *continuous* records of 'purchases' (permit quantities) and 'sales', (loose coupons, numbers of registrations, catering authorisations). 'The Food Office', it was explained, 'does not . . . have evidence of *actual* sales and purchases and strictly therefore the records are, and can only be of authorities to sell and of permits to purchase. . . . The main object of these stock records is to enable Food Offices to assess whether, and if so, to what extent, the issue of supplementary permits is justified'. When 'sales' exceeded 'purchases' the retailer had a 'credit balance'; when 'purchases' exceeded 'sales' he had a 'debit balance'. A debit balance was considered to be stock in hand. When, therefore, a retailer with a debit balance asked for a supplementary, he was refused, or given one for the difference between the amount asked for and the debit balance. If the retailer should protest that the stock existed on paper but not on his shelves, the Food Office was unmoved. In the last resort, his customers were given temporary cards so that they could shop elsewhere. This was a very effective control with only one snag; the disappearance of retail stocks. Pilfering, carelessness, and mislaid coupons, were mishaps taken for granted by retailers, but not by the rationing system. The successful agitation against the return was succeeded by cries for an amnesty; and in May 1951 the system came to terms with human imperfection. Debit (but not credit) balances were wiped out—for that once—and a fresh start was made.

¹ See pp. 439-40 above.

C:

Rationing as an Administrative Problem

Part IV: The Rationing of Meat

CHAPTER XXXVIII

New Wine in Old Bottles, 1940—41

I

THE RATIONING of meat presented administrators with problems all its own. The commodity itself was intractable; like bacon, it was highly perishable and, because it might be cooked or manufactured at the retail stage, elusive. Because it came in different kinds and in different cuts, it was rationed by value instead of by weight, and this made difficulties in converting the customer's ration into the retailer's allocation. On the other hand, the commodity control, operated by the Ministry's Meat and Livestock Division, was the most extensive of any; the Ministry did not relinquish ownership of the meat until it reached the retail shop, and the process of allocation therefore took place further down the chain of distribution for meat than for any other food. One might have supposed, therefore, that rationing problems proper—those concerning Food Offices, permits, and so forth—would have been light compared with, say sugar or oils and fats, as the main burden would be taken by the Ministry's own distributive machinery.

Eventually this proved to be so, but only after a period of intense stress and difficulty. Before the war, commodity and rationing plans had not been completely integrated, with the result that the meat-rationing forms and documents had been drawn up to suit, not the all-embracing control of 1940, but the looser control of 1918, when the butcher might still buy and slaughter his own livestock. Furthermore, two last-minute changes before the control was introduced upset its functioning: the decision to have, not one single price scale for all types of meat, but three, according to quality; and the decision not to exact the surrender of a coupon for meat meals taken in restaurants.¹ There was thus both confusion of ends and confusion of means, and it was not until a severe supply crisis had exposed the weaknesses of the system that a new one was devised.

To the rationers of the first World War, 'meat was meat',² irrespective of quality; the value ration operated only in the butcher's shop, his supplies being calculated in terms of weight. The Food (Defence Plans) Department had proposed to follow this example, and the forms of *permit* and *return* had been printed accordingly.

¹ Vol. I, p. 119.

² Beveridge, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

When, at the end of 1939, separate price schedules for home-produced meat: first grade, home-produced meat: second grade, and imported meat, were decided upon, a simple conversion from value to weight became impossible, and the forms had hastily to be over-written in terms of value. This gave meat rationing a bad start by making it look as if the Ministry of Food did not know its own mind. It also had unfortunate consequences for the machinery of rationing.

To the Meat and Livestock Division itself, that machinery appeared cumbersome even before rationing had started. Like other retailers, the butcher had to fill up a fresh *application for supplies* every four weeks, giving the number of his registered customers and the requirements of his catering customers, as set out on their *preliminary demand notes*. (These were made out in triplicate—one part for the butcher, another for the Food Office, and a third for the caterer himself; and, unlike the others, they were still in terms of *weight*.)¹ The Food Office was to compare his application with its own records of the number of registrations—for subsequent permits it was to take his fortnightly *return* of stocks, sales, and purchases, into account as well—and send him a *preliminary authority*, showing the amount he might buy (in retail value) every week for four weeks. It then summarised the authorities issued in a *schedule*, showing the amount authorised (in retail value) to every buyer by wholesale in its district. This was sent to the Area Meat Agent of the Meat and Livestock Control, who checked the preliminary authorities, sent him by butchers, against the schedule, sent each butcher a *buying permit* which was for *wholesale* value, and included a $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. margin for manufacturing meat,² completed the schedules by entering on them the wholesale value of the authorisations and, lastly, sent various summaries and abstracts of the schedules to the Chairman of the Retail Buying Committees, the managers of wholesale depots and the Chief Meat Agent at Headquarters. The expired permits, endorsed with actual purchases, ultimately found their way back to the Area Meat Agents. Not only was there a vast amount of paper to circulate, but delay at any one stage might hold up the whole operation. The Food Office should not move until the butcher had sent in his forms; the Area Meat Agent until he received the schedules and, by a different route, the preliminary authorities; the supply officers until they received the information about requirements from the Area Meat Agents.

A word is necessary at this point about the commodity organisation. At the top were the Area Meat and Livestock Officers (six for

¹ Therefore an arbitrary conversion factor (taken as 1s. a lb.) had to be used, in order to turn these amounts (and those represented by Services Leave and Duty Cards, also in terms of weight) into value, for addition to the butcher's permit.

² Wholesale value was $77\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of retail. In order to simplify calculation, the conversion was carried out at the rate of 80 per cent. and the margin of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. treated as an allowance for manufacturing.

England and Wales, two for Scotland) who corresponded roughly to Divisional Food Officers, except that their provinces embraced two or more local Food Divisions. These had general supervision of both supply and distribution in their areas. Next came the Area Meat Agents, one for each Food Division (except that there were four for London) with a roving commission over the whole field of distribution that lay between the Food Office and the wholesale depot. Below the Area Meat Agent came his Deputy Meat Agents (who were retail butchers) whose boundaries he himself set. These looked after anything up to six Retailers' Buying Committees each, and their main task was to police distribution from depot to retailer. A Buying Committee usually comprised all the butchers in a Food Office area,¹ and supplies were allocated to a Committee, not to individual butchers. Its Chairman and allocating officers (or, if preferred, paid officials) attended allocations at the wholesale depot, took possession of the Committee's supplies, and re-distributed them to the members. Bulk allocation was made necessary by the differing varieties and qualities of meat; but the Committees, like the Meat Agents, constituted a safeguard for the butcher and did not directly instruct, supervise, or control him in any way.

The relationship between this organisation and that of the Food Offices was, and remained, in many respects anomalous. At first sight it seems odd that one part of the Ministry—the Area Meat Agent—should engage himself in verifying that two sets of forms sent out by another part of the Ministry corresponded with one another. It is impossible to escape the conclusion that this position had been reached because the difference between a private wholesaler and an official wholesaler had been overlooked. Thereafter, however, it was put to use by the Commodity Division, which claimed not merely to verify, but actually to criticise the figures of authorisations. The Area Meat Agent was to examine these for errors not only of calculation, but of principle. The final responsibility for them lay with the Food Executive Officer, but the Area Meat Agent could, if he wished, take any disagreement up to his Area Meat and Livestock Officer who might, in turn, take the matter to the Divisional Food Officer. Later, under the stress of meat shortage, Meat Division was to seek to extend the Meat Agent's powers over butchers' authorisations.

The first change in the meat rationing machinery was, however, in the other direction. The delays that accompanied the initial issue of permits were repeated for the second four-week period; over 1,000 butchers in Glasgow (where they were said to be especially averse to forms) had to be supplied without waiting for new permits. It

¹ Not always, and there were none in Scotland. There, wholesale depots allocated directly to individual butchers. The allocations were supposed to be supervised by Butchers' Vigilance Committees, but these never functioned very vigorously; in many areas, they did not function at all.

was now clear that the Area Meat Agents' offices were not equipped to shoulder the clerical burden of permit-writing. Meat Division urged that either the work must be reduced by substituting bulk permits to Buying Committees for individual ones to butchers, or it must be transferred to Food Offices; and that all meat forms, particularly the butcher's fortnightly return, ought to be simplified. In mid-April it was agreed that, with the new ration book in July, the application for supplies should be used only every six months (after a general re-registration) instead of every four weeks; that Food Offices should write and issue the buying permits;¹ that the fortnightly return should be re-drafted, and that meat permits should run for eight, not four weeks. Caterers were in future to state their requirements in terms of value instead of weight, and Food Offices would thus be relieved of the work of conversion.

Meat Division looked upon the new arrangements as a stop-gap; its real goal was the abolition of individual permits. The idea of a bulk permit to Retail Buying Committees had been put forward before the war, only to be abandoned because the trade advisers had declared that butchers would expect individual permits. Now, however, the Division secured the concurrence of its local officers, who were, of course, in close touch with trade opinion, and prepared to take the step. This did not, however, suit the rationers at all. They were about to have the permit constituted a 'legal document', so that to supply or obtain more than the amount it specified would constitute an offence. Although Meat Division argued rightly that this provision was meaningless in its case, as a retailer could only exceed his permit with his wholesaler's, i.e., the Ministry's, permission, it withdrew the proposal for the time being.

II

The Commodity Division had a more weighty objection to the permit system; it did not serve as a reliable guide to allocation:

'... we ignore permit values for allocating purposes', wrote an Area Meat and Livestock Officer in September, 'and rely on Retail Buying Committees giving early intimation to the Wholesale Meat Supply Association of the percentage of the permits likely to be required in the following week. This . . . means that the Ministry have a fictitious permit value in front of them when making inter-area allocations of livestock. . . .'

¹ This meant the disappearance of the preliminary authority which was now combined with the permit in a single form.

Permit values, the Division claimed, were far too high. Many butchers bought only 70 per cent. to 80 per cent. of their permit quantities when the ration was 1s. 10d., only 50 per cent. when it was 2s. 2d.; and although the population of some areas had fallen since May 1940, permit values there had not fallen. By August, a situation had been reached that from the point of view of rationing machinery was absurd: namely, that any butcher who took more than four-fifths of his permitted quantity might be regarded as an object of suspicion.

This inflation of permit values needs close analysis, for in early 1941 it came to affect the size of the domestic ration. By 'permit values' was meant the total amount of meat authorised on main and supplementary permits; by 'inflation', that this figure considerably exceeded a theoretical total of civilian requirements computed from population figures. The theoretical minimum would be the amount of the ration multiplied by the number of ration-book holders. This figure was bound to be exceeded, on account of supplies that were additional to the domestic ration. The butcher's main permit included supplies for his catering, as well as his household, customers; in addition, any supplementary permits given him might include replacement of sales made against coupons from the Leave-or-Duty Card issued to members of the Forces. These cards were used by men billeted out as well as by men on leave, and in some areas might make up an appreciable part of permit values, for all that they were held by people who would not appear in civilian population statistics at all. Meat Division did not know how much meat was accounted for in this way; it insisted, however, that even allowing for this, permits must still be inflated. If the butcher did not need to buy more than 80 per cent. of his permit then, argued the Division, that permit was too generous; Food Offices were not enforcing the rationing system. This was true enough; but there were more fundamental reasons for the inflation of permit values. The nominal value of the meat ration was over-stated; and meat was more vulnerable to the inherent weakness of a rationing system based on the tie—inflation of legitimate demand—than any other food.

When the initial size of the meat ration was being discussed, early in 1940, estimates of the supply had indicated a ration of slightly less than 1s. 6d. For political reasons, the ration was fixed at 1s. 10d. This step was thereupon justified by the argument that the consumption of meat varied widely; that although some people would undoubtedly wish to spend more than 1s. 6d., others would spend less and the former could be satisfied—up to a ceiling of 1s. 10d.—out of the surplus left by the latter. Thus the meat ration was not really a guaranteed ration; if every registered customer had demanded the full 1s. 10d. worth, Meat Division would not have

been able to supply it. Hence permits written on the basis of 1s. 10d. for *every* registered customer could not but be inflated in comparison with allocations. The events of the spring of 1941 cannot easily be understood, unless it is borne in mind that a ration of 1s. 10d. meant the issue of, say only four-fifths of that quantity.

The inflation of supplies under the registration system¹ arose partly from the time factor, which delayed the influence of lost customers on a retailer's permit, but did not work the other way—for customers gained; partly from a similar phenomenon resulting from temporary absences of customers from home. Coupons and retailers' returns had been provided in order that main permits might be based on actual sales, thus reclaiming any surplus and countering the inflation. With other rationed foods there was a gap between theory and practice; with meat, the remedy could not be applied at all. On the face of it, the butcher could be supervised more closely than other retailers because Food Offices had outside evidence of his purchases, as well as his sales—the expired permit endorsed with purchases. In practice, Food Offices could not count the coupons, the purchase figures on the permit did not relate solely to rationed meat, and the fortnightly return was as difficult for Offices to construe as it was for butchers to fill in.

One pitfall had already been encountered with bacon²—surplus rationed meat could be turned into unrationed cooked meat or meat products—but the main complication was the value ration. The return had originally been drafted in terms of weight, but after some hesitation³ had, like the other meat forms, been altered to value; with three different retail price scales a weight of meat sold could not be checked against a number of value coupons. The return therefore asked for *wholesale* value of stocks and purchases, corresponding to those on the permit, and the *retail* value of sales against coupons and to caterers; Food Offices could, it was thought, turn the sales figures into wholesale value and carry out a rough check against purchases. The butchers, however, raised numerous and conclusive objections to the return. They could not give the wholesale value of stocks if these should consist of carcasses that had already been cut up; purchases figures included unrationed offals and manufacturing meat; carcasses included unrationed suet and rough fat; the figures of sales to caterers would be misleading if, as was common, a discount had been given; above all, it was physically impossible for them to keep sales against coupons apart from sales of unrationed poultry.

The Commodity Division was more than ready, as early as 1940, to dispense with the return as a useless vexation of butchers; but the

¹ See pp. 428, 567 for a discussion of this problem in general.

² See p. 551 *seq.* above.

³ It was realised that if the butcher sold below maximum prices, his sales figures would be misleading.

rationing side insisted that for meat, as for other foods, the retailer ought to be made to account for his dealings. Various efforts were made to re-draft the form so as to segregate rationed from other meat; none was satisfactory. Eventually, in August 1942, the Ministry bowed to the inevitable and scrapped it. From the first, therefore, meat permits had to be based on the number of registered customers, with the inflation that this implied.

This excess in demand was not offset by Meat Division's policy of 'under-issue'. The Division was working on the same principle as the rationers: namely, that any surplus accumulated from under-consumption or non-purchase of rations ought to be used to raise the general ration level instead of going to waste, i.e., remaining with the retailer and being sold 'off ration'. This principle had been enunciated in 1917, and it had been adopted by the Food (Defence Plans) Department as the foundation of the rationing system; Meat Division, however, had arrived at it as a *post hoc* justification and applied it in a different way. The rationing system worked in arrears—it sought to reclaim any surplus; Meat Division, taking advantage of its position as wholesaler, strove to anticipate that same surplus. Had either method worked, there would have been no need for the other; as it happened, neither worked. The weakness of Meat Division's method was that it was arbitrary; and when, in 1941, meat became scarce, it caused local shortages.¹

There was, however, no doubt that in 1940 the inflation in meat permits was greater than it need have been. On 2nd September, the Minister wrote that 'meat is the only rationed article in which the rationing rules are being persistently evaded';² on 6th September, the trade was warned that the Ministry was 'aware of considerable abuse of the meat rationing regulations' and that those who drew more than 80 per cent. of their permits would be suspect; at the end of the month, one of the arguments for raising the ration to 2s. 2d.

¹ Yet another expedient was suggested by Food Offices; that the percentage of the permit bought should be assumed to represent actual requirements and the permit then reduced to this figure. Meat Division opposed this, partly because a butcher's legitimate requirements might vary from week to week (perhaps because of the weather) but mainly because the butcher's allocations of pork, manufacturing meat, and offals, bore a proportionate relationship to the size of his permit. It would therefore be unfair on the butcher who really bought only what he needed.

² The dissatisfaction with the system of meat rationing that was widely current at this time was not due solely to the difficulties of enforcement. It was felt that rationing by value encouraged prosperous people to take the cheaper cuts that should have been reserved for the poor. A system of 'taximeter' rationing, that would enable such people to buy by weight and spend more without getting a larger amount, was being much discussed. This, it was argued, would also make possible a wider 'spread' of meat prices, i.e., the price of the dearer cuts might be increased relatively to the cheaper ones without diverting demand to the latter. Little evidence was adduced that the better-off preferred quantity to quality; but the weakness of the 'taximeter' scheme was that it was incapable of forming the basis of controlled allocation. The number of rations a butcher could cut out of a given supply of meat would vary according to the whim of his customers.

was that this might extend legal cover to the existing evasion. Disquieting though this situation was to officials, the consumer was suffering no hardship. Meat was plentiful, it was fairly distributed as between butchers, and no one went without because some could obtain virtually as much meat as they wanted. It was not until 1941 that Meat Division's forebodings about the defects of the rationing machinery were realised.

III

The control of the butcher was closely linked with that of catering establishments, which, it was suspected, were getting the bulk of the excess supplies. They were even more difficult than butchers to supervise. The decision not to ration meat meals in restaurants swept away the basis—coupons—upon which allocations to caterers were to have been made; doubt about its permanence prevented an effective alternative from being devised. Until July 1940, allocations continued to be based on estimates of requirements hastily collected from establishments in January; from then until June 1941, allocations were on a datum basis. This meant that meat rationing fell into two parts; the flexible system used for the domestic ration, and the inflexible datum system for catering allowances. The combining of these in the permit of the retail butcher was to cause Meat, Rationing, and Catering Divisions intense difficulty in December 1940.

The machinery of catering authorisation used from March to July 1940 satisfied no one. It was extremely complicated, partly because requirements had to be converted from weight to value, partly because caterers received only 60 per cent. of their estimates. (A cut had been agreed on as a matter of principle, and the amount that Meat Division had proposed to set aside for caterers¹ happened to be roughly 60 per cent. of what they had asked for.) Forms had to be devised to tell caterers buying retail (as 90 per cent. to 95 per cent. of them did), and their butchers, that only 60 per cent. of the amount on the preliminary demand note might be bought.² The caterers were dissatisfied because they claimed that to convert weight

¹ 24,000 tons a quarter.

² The caterer buying wholesale was treated like a retailer, i.e., he received a preliminary authority from the Food Office, and a buying permit from the Area Meat Agent. Food Offices had first to reduce the quantity by 40 per cent. and then convert it to retail value.

The caterer buying retail bought from his butcher by means of an Official Order Book, and his 'ceiling' was to have been the amount stated on the part of the demand note lodged with his butcher.

The name 'preliminary demand note' derived from the fact that it was intended to be a 'once only' form by which caterers could be supplied for the first four weeks of rationing, after which allocations would have been based on coupons.

to value at an arbitrary average of 1s. a lb. was to make an additional cut in their supplies. (It obviously affected the 'high-class' trade the most.) As for Headquarters officials, all their efforts to explain the arrangements to Food Offices—especially the conversion factor—had not resulted in understanding, and they were, moreover, suspicious of the January estimates, many of which, according to one Divisional Food Officer, were 'fantastic and misleading'. In July 1940 a fresh start was made. Caterers were asked to submit a new set of preliminary demand notes, showing 60 per cent. of their expenditure during the four weeks ended 28th January 1940, together with any permanent increase allowed since then.

The new arrangements saved Food Offices a good deal of work—they no longer had to carry out the conversion operation or apply the 40 per cent. cut—and removed the caterers' grievance about the conversion factor; but they did not constitute a tighter control. By August, Meat Division was worrying about rising demand from caterers; the amount originally set aside for them was being considerably exceeded. This was inevitable; partly because of the datum basis, partly because control was not, and to some extent could not be, strictly enforced.

Although Food Offices soon had to be allowed to increase authorisations (first for Easter 1940, then to meet more permanent increased demand)¹ there might be no corresponding decreases in areas where demand had fallen. Food Offices could cut a datum quota if, in their opinion, it had come to exceed an establishment's current requirements; but even had they the will, they lacked the means. They had at their disposal the establishment's return of meals served and consumption of rationed foods; its official Order Book forms, forwarded by the butcher; the quantity authorised on the preliminary demand note, and, finally, the butcher's return of how much he had sold to caterers. Any check between these was later described by Catering Division as 'spasmodic'; in any case, it could not have been very rewarding. All the figures, except those on the butcher's return, were furnished by the establishments themselves, and the Order Book form was ill-adapted for its purpose. (It was re-drafted

¹ Food Offices, when considering applications for increased quotas, were to take into account:

- (i) Whether the caterer had suffered hardship through the 40 per cent. cut;
- (ii) whether he catered for functions of a kind that should not be discouraged;
- (iii) whether the population of his district had increased, e.g., through the removal of businesses to safe areas.

What was not to weigh with Food Offices was an 'increased appetite for meat among the population of an area'.

No general formula for the basis of additional supplies was laid down, but in August Catering Division suggested that the one used in some areas might be generally adopted (1s. 10d. worth of meat, retail value, for every 7 meals served). New establishments were supposed to get their estimated requirements less 40 per cent. The circular added that Food Offices should 'take steps to see that no establishment bought more than it needed'.

in 1942.) Its chief defects were, first, that it did not specifically exclude unrationed meat; secondly, that it might be in terms of actual selling price, not maximum retail price; thirdly, that what a caterer ordered and what he actually got might be very different things. In short, Food Offices could not readily relate an establishment's authorisation to its real requirements, or its purchases to its authorisation. Conditions varied from area to area; from extreme examples of resorts assessing catering requirements in the light of local patriotism¹ to an area that had anticipated the ultimate solution of the problem of ascertaining requirements by bringing its caterers on to a meals basis.

The control of catering establishments, like that of the butcher, had been rendered unexpectedly difficult by the fact that the assumptions on which the rationing machinery had been planned had been destroyed before it came into use, by the adoption of differential retail prices and the decision to leave cooked meat and meat meals in restaurants coupon-free. This argument must not be pushed too far; there is no indication that the control of the butcher had been any more stringent in 1918 than it was in, say 1941, and the rationing of meat meals in restaurants would certainly have brought its own problems of enforcement and allocation. The most that can be said is that, but for these last minute changes, the machinery would have been more (though still not fully) appropriate to the purposes for which officials were trying to use it.

IV

The first year of rationing did, however, see the end of one particular problem—that of fitting the *pork butcher* into the rationing system. There were only some two or three thousand;² but they were geographically concentrated³ and, as it turned out, eloquent. Moreover, there was a principle at stake; meat rationing could hardly be founded upon trade goodwill if it began by wiping out the pork

¹ For instance, one resort, taking advantage of permission given for the 1940 holiday season to add a margin to butchers' permits, chose the generous one of 20 per cent. and was still adding it a year later, long after the concession had been cancelled.

² In 1920, pork butchers had constituted about 9 per cent. of the total number of butchers, but the Food (Defence Plans) Department suspected that this percentage had since fallen to 5. The 1920 figures were:

35,140 general butchers
3,458 pork butchers

A count taken in March 1940 showed: 57,580 general butchers
2,553 pork butchers

The two sets of figures cannot be compared too closely; first because pork butchers were hard to define, secondly because the second count was taken after pork butchers had been encouraged to become general butchers.

³ They constituted only $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. of the number of butchers in London, 12 per cent. to 14 per cent. in the North and Midlands, and 23 per cent. in the Eastern Counties.

butchers. They themselves claimed to have an economic, as well as moral, right to survival. They were primarily not retailers of fresh pork, but extensive manufacturers of 'small goods'—sausages, pies, polonies, and the like—which, they said, constituted not only a popular, cheap, and nutritious food, but a far more complete and economical use of the pig than bacon factories or general butchers could show.

Before the war the Food (Defence Plans) Department had seen the problem mainly in terms of fresh pork; the prospect of bacon shortages meant that all home-produced pigs must be used by the curers, and the specialist pork butcher must therefore disappear. If there did happen to be pork, it must be part of the meat ration and must therefore be distributed through the general butcher. The pork butchers' case was that some pigs should be set aside for pork, which they alone should handle; it should be left unrationed (as in 1919) or sold on coupon without registration (as in 1918). They could understand being sacrificed to bacon, but not to the general butcher. Yet this, on general grounds of policy, could readily be justified. To deny pork to the general butcher would, because of the maldistribution of pork butchers, cut some areas off from pork altogether; there were large general butchers who handled more pork than an average-sized pork butcher; and, it would be extremely difficult to break up meat rationing between two sets of traders.

The last point carried the most weight. Pork, held the Department, ought not to be left unrationed; it should be used to raise or maintain the level of the general meat ration, not to provide extras for a few.¹ It could not be rationed through registration, for no one would register with a shop that sold pork alone; yet to ration it without registration might be the most dangerous course of all, for the unpredictable diversion of meat coupons to pork would leave the general butcher with a surplus that he might dispose of to favoured customers. In other words, to put pork on coupon might indirectly take some beef and mutton off it. A more satisfactory, if more arbitrary, method of bringing pork into the meat ration would be to assume that a certain percentage of a general butcher's customers would, in any one week, spend their coupons on pork, and reduce his allocation in advance. This would not only call for some nice calculation of percentages for different districts but (the Department was assured) it had been tried in 1918 and had failed.² The Department, after extensive discussion with the trade, therefore decided

¹ In 1919 there had been complaints in the South that the North had an unfair advantage because it had more pork butchers.

² It is not clear why these arguments carried so much weight *vis-à-vis* the pork butcher at a time when it was assumed that meat meals in restaurants would be rationed—so giving rise to exactly the same problem of coupons unspent in butchers' shops.

that the only way out would be for pork butchers to become general butchers.¹

When this decision was announced in September 1939 there was an immediate outcry. Pork butchers did not want to become general butchers;² they could not suddenly become skilled in a new trade; they could not see much hope of attracting registrations away from established general butchers; above all, they claimed that their manufacturing trade had been overlooked, and was being unfairly and unwisely sacrificed for the sake of a slightly larger bacon ration. The cries of calamity that reached the Minister were irresistible; the more so because the bacon scheme itself was meeting with criticism.

The first concession was that small pigs, i.e., pigs up to 100 lb. deadweight, could go for pork. As prices were deliberately set to encourage the heavier bacon pig, pork butchers regarded this concession as frivolous; in any case, they thought little of the fivescore pig. By December, the weight distinction had been removed; all pigs not required for bacon might be used for pork. As, for the moment, bacon supplies were ample, this concession was more real than it looked. The pork butcher's position was still precarious; enough had been done to encourage him to hope to survive as a specialist, but—as no continued supply of pork had been guaranteed to him—not to flourish; though it was proposed to compensate him through the other side of his business and treat him generously over allocations for manufacturing. In the event, unexpectedly large supplies of imported bacon,³ the warnings that pigs and poultry would be at the end of the queue for feeding-stuffs, and a hasty marketing of large pigs before the introduction, in May 1940, of prices designed to discourage them, together produced a glut of pork that gave the pork butcher an Indian summer.

The modified rationing arrangements for pork were that a pork butcher could, if he wished, become a general butcher; if not, he could sell pork on coupon without registering customers. He received a buying permit representing the wholesale value of 80 per cent.⁴ of

¹ This involved negotiating a right of entry into the general trade for pork butchers.

² One pork butcher could not become a general butcher. His landlord was a nearby general butcher who, not unnaturally, refused to waive the clause in the lease forbidding the premises to be used for a general butcher's.

³ See p. 551 *seq.*, above.

⁴ Pork butchers were allowed only 80 per cent. of their datum in order to bring them into line with general butchers, caterers, and manufacturers, whose trade would, it was thought, be constricted by rationing. (It turned out that general butchers' turnover under rationing had been underestimated.) The 'adjusted wholesale value' was arrived at by assuming, for administrative purposes, that half the January 1939 sales represented fresh pork, the other half, manufactured products. No reduction was made in the first half (this was reduced in any case by the rise in prices since January 1939); but the manufacturing half was reduced by 40 per cent. Thus, 100 per cent. of half the datum, plus 60 per cent. of the manufacturing half, equalled 80 per cent. of the whole. This was then reduced by another 25 per cent. to wholesale value and the resulting permit was for 60 per cent. of the sales figures for January 1939.

his sales of fresh and manufactured¹ pork in January 1939. The fact that his buying permit did not represent 100 per cent. of his peacetime sales was to be both a grievance and a source of confusion. Subsequently, half his supplies were to be based on the number of coupons he collected; the other half was to be regarded as being for manufacturing² and was to remain constant. This second stage was never reached; on 9th April, pork was de-rationed. Apart from the glut, the habit of depositing meat coupons with the 'registered' butcher effectively prevented them from being spent with a rival pork butcher; consequently so much pork had to be sold off coupon by special permission that meat rationing was being undermined. The glut did not persist but, as the problem of deposited pages did, pork was left unrationed, even when datum supplies to pork butchers had to be reduced.

Up till then pork butchers had received their full permit quantity, that is 80 per cent. of datum, or more;³ the rest was distributed among general butchers in proportion to the size of their buying permits. Meat and Livestock Division had decided in April that, when the number of pigs for the retail market should fall below 30,000 a week, pork butchers would have to suffer a cut. This happened for the week beginning 8th July, and they received only 75 per cent. of their buying permits (60 per cent. of datum). On 19th August, their supplies were cut again—to 60 per cent. of their buying permits. This naturally led pork butchers to urge strongly that they should have first claim on pork up to the limit of their peacetime sales. This was out of the question; to give them even their full permit quantities would take all the pork available and so denude some areas, e.g., London, while giving others nearly a peacetime supply.⁴ The scarcity of pork did, however, impel Meat and Livestock Division to tackle a problem that had been giving a good deal of trouble, and was to give a good deal more—that of dual businesses.

A 'dual butcher' was one who had both a pork and a general

This calculation caused many pork butchers some anxiety. The Note of Requirements sent them by Food Offices (M.2) was for the *retail* value of their January 1939 sales; the buying permit (M.B.P.1) they received from Meat Agents, was for wholesale value, and it appeared that they had suffered a double cut.

¹ Excluding manufactured products bought as such.

² Therefore, pork butchers who received supplies as Group 1 manufacturers (i.e., manufacturers with a 1938 usage of more than $\frac{1}{4}$ ton of manufacturing meat a week) had their pork permits cut by 50 per cent.

³ Their permits were increased by one-third (i.e., to slightly more than 100 per cent. of datum) from 9th April to 22nd April 1940.

⁴ After August, only about 25,000 pigs a week were available, of which 15,000 were divided among pork butchers and 10,000 among 50,000 general butchers. The maldistribution of pork butchers can be seen from a comparison between London and Birmingham. The former had 80 pork butchers, whose permits totalled £2,000 a week, and 5,000 general butchers with permits totalling £600,000. Birmingham had more than twice as many pork butchers with permits six times the value of the London ones, but the total of its general butchers' permits was less than one-fifth that for London.

butchery. He received supplies of pork for each; as a pork butcher he held a priority pork permit, as a general butcher he 'came again' for a share of what was left when the pork permits had been met. These 'double allocations' were liable, in a small town, to give the impression that one trader had cornered the supply; but the Ministry upheld them on the grounds that a man with two sets of overheads was entitled to two allocations. The argument was not altogether valid; it was, for example, unfair to the multiple, whose overheads were not so easily divisible, and by the autumn of 1940 there were traders receiving double allocations to whom it did not apply.

When Food Control Committees had been licensing butchers, they had been told that a 'dual butcher' could have both his general and his pork butchery licensed provided that they were in separate premises.¹ In April, to meet the protests of firms that had separate departments in the same premises,² 'separate shops' was re-defined as 'separate establishments', for which separate accounts had habitually been kept. This meant that *portions* of premises could be licensed and, as no hard and fast rules could be laid down, the interpretation of the instruction varied widely; there was no doubt that some Committees gave separate licences—and therefore priority pork permits—for what was only a general butcher's normal trade in pork. This was particularly common in the North and Midlands, where there were many general butchers with an unusually large pork trade. The number of 'dual butchers' was now inflated not only by these 'mixed butchers' but also by ex-pork butchers who had, in September 1939, taken the Ministry's advice and become general butchers. These could certainly show separate pork accounts for January 1939; they were naturally anxious to regain their standing in their old trade; it was difficult to refuse them when pork permits were being given to other general butchers with, so to speak, no pork tradition; nonetheless, it would seem that they were being given a privileged position. They were to keep the new trade they had won at the expense of neighbouring general butchers—one firm, on whose application the advice of Meat and Livestock Division was sought, had 1,000 registrations—and have their old trade back again. This was unfair to the less recently established general butcher with no pork permit, and even more unfair to the pork butcher who had only his old trade to depend on. To sum up: by August 1940, three classes of butcher had been officially recognised—the *general butcher*,

¹ The butcher's licence was to sell meat (unspecified) and so included the right to sell pork. A dual trader would therefore receive two general licences. The distinction was made through the permit. A pork butcher was not a butcher with a pork licence but one with a pork permit. The pork permit was given to a trader with a meat licence *who did not register customers*.

² It was known that some butchers in the North were hastily erecting partitions down the middle of their shops.

whose meat buying permit brought him supplies for his registered customers, an allowance for manufacturing, and a small share of pork; the *pork butcher*, receiving priority pork supplies to the extent of 60 per cent. of his buying permit; and the *dual butcher*, who had both a general and a pork permit, and who might be a genuine 'dual butcher' with a separate shop, department, or counter, a 'mixed' butcher with a large pork trade, or an ex-pork butcher turned general butcher.

The scarcity of pork brought this problem to a head, for it led those still without a pork permit to apply for one. Food Control Committees sought to bring more pork into their districts simply by giving more pork permits (in September 1940 one Committee turned all its thirty-seven general butchers into dual butchers); in October, therefore, Meat and Livestock Division, faced with more and more priority demands upon less and less pork, by-passed the Committees by decreeing, as a stop-gap measure, that double allocations were to go only to businesses in separate premises, and then only if the Area Meat and Livestock Officer was satisfied that the pork branch had had a 'separate, substantial and regular retail trade in pork since January 1939'. At the same time a 'purge' of dual businesses was begun. Food Control Committees were to re-examine the alleged separate accounts relating to pork businesses, and Area Meat Agents were asked to report whether the Committees were carrying out the 'spirit of the instructions'. As a result, many 'dual businesses' lost their pork permits except, for various reasons,¹ in some towns in the North-East. As the meat officers there mended the situation by simply not honouring the pork permits that the general butchers should not have had, Meat and Livestock Division decided, on several occasions, to let sleeping dogs lie. (In 1944, however, some of the permit holders incautiously suggested that the permits might be honoured and, after strenuous negotiations, this situation was cleared up.)

Pork butchers naturally welcomed the weeding of dual businesses, but, by the time it was well under way, the fate they had escaped in October 1939 overtook them again, and this time there could be no appeal. The blow fell very swiftly. In the middle of December, they were still pressing for pork to be withheld from general butchers; on 1st January they learned that, instead, it was to be withheld from them. The reason was not the shortage of pork, but a sudden shortage of other meat that made it necessary for pork and offals to be scooped into the meat ration. The Ministry, mindful of the difficulties of the

¹ The main one seems to have been opposition from the local Co-operative. The situation became very tangled because in a later 'purge' some of the firms were denied 'manufacturing' meat permits on the grounds that they had pork permits, and had to be reinstated when they pointed out that the pork permits were, so to speak, dormant.

previous spring, was determined that, this time, pork must be distributed through the general butcher. The Pork Section of the National Federation of Meat Traders' Associations fought hard, at a meeting with officials on 9th January 1941, to restore the previous arrangement by which pork had been sold on coupon without registration; but all their suggestions, including one that a spare page of coupons might be used for pork—thus overcoming the old difficulty of deposited pages and the new one that coupons were now cancelled and not cut out—were rejected as being too elaborate for so little pork. Meat rationing, pronounced officials, could only be divided between two sets of shops if there were two registrations; as, however, registration implied a guarantee of supply, and there was only enough pork to provide each consumer with $\frac{1}{4}$ d.-worth a week, this was hardly worth while. After 6th January 1941, therefore, pork butchers received manufacturing meat only. Their later history belongs elsewhere.¹

¹ A concluding summary of the relation between permits, datum, and allocations to pork butchers may be useful.

	A. DATUM	= sales in January 1939	= £100 retail value
	B. PERMIT	= wholesale value of 80% of A	= £60 wholesale value
1940 March	C. ALLOCATION	= 100% of B.	= 80% of A = £60 " "
July	D. ALLOCATION	= 75% of B.	= 80% of A = £45 " "
August	E. ALLOCATION	= 60% of B.	= 48% of A = £36 " "
1941 Jan.	F. ALLOCATION	= 75% of E.	= 45% of B. = 36% of A. = £27 wholesale

CHAPTER XXXIX

Crisis and Reform, 1941-2

I

THE SUPPLY CRISIS that broke on Christmas Eve 1940 was something for which the meat-rationing system was completely unprepared. The system had an inherent tendency to inflate demand, and it was incomplete at a vital point, the control of the caterer; but its fatal weakness was the fictitious value of the ration and hence of the butcher's permit. Because people, taken as a whole, did not buy 1s. 10d., still less 2s. 2d., worth of meat a head a week, the Ministry had been able to combine under-issue of the ration with slackness in its administration, i.e., to put out more meat than ought, strictly speaking, to have been necessary to meet the real ration of 1s. 6d. a head. The supply crisis put an end to the fiction and exposed the slackness; a process made more painful by political difficulties. Not unnaturally, Ministers were upset by an apparent halving of the ration within a matter of months, and needed persuading that the change was inevitable. Nor, for that matter, did officials themselves at once grasp the realities of the situation.

On 16th December, a few days before the crisis, new permits had come into force that were written in terms of the 2s. 2d. ration that had been maintained until that very day, when it was reduced to 1s. 10d. They were due to run till early February, and as Food Offices would be fully taken up with the issue of new ration books, there was no prospect of replacing them by new, more realistic permits. All that could be done was arbitrarily to reduce the amount of meat issued against them. There was enough for roughly half the permit quantities and so, from 1st January 1941, that much was issued to butchers. It remained to adjust the nominal ration, and here there was for some time misunderstanding. The 1s. 6d. ration introduced on 6th January did not long survive the Minister's realisation that only three-quarters of the meat required to honour it was being issued; 'we must', he wrote on the 8th, 'bring our ration down to the amount that we can honour.' But the ration was allowed until 31st March to remain at 1s. 2d., although only 1s. 1d. worth was issued against it.

The reason was that Meat Division was kicking against the pricks. It had become an article of faith with the Division that permits were inflated and that, therefore, it ought not to be necessary to issue the

full amount of the ration. The 50 per cent. of permit quantities being issued in January 1941 was equivalent, on a population basis, to a 1s. 4d. ration, and was admittedly insufficient to meet a 1s. 2d. ration in full, everywhere. Yet the Division had successfully met a 1s. 10d. ration on the basis of something over 1s. 6d. The answer was, of course, partly that the 1s. 2d. ration (including pork and, for a time, offals) was being fully taken up and the higher rations had not been; partly that there was slackness in the permit system. When these points had been allowed for, however, it remained true that, what with catering demand and the unavoidable double-counting of customers under the registration system, the control could not but expect to issue more meat than the nominal quantity. Hopes of finding the 'lost' meat from a drive against permit inflation were therefore set too high; none the less, the drive needed to be made.

It began with a reminder to Food Offices, on 31st January, that the butcher's main permit must be kept closely in line with their record of his registered customers, and that this must be kept up-to-date. A few days later, Offices were formally instructed to institute a four-weekly, i.e. mid-period, review of permits, and to re-issue these if the number of registered customers dropped by 10 per cent. Unfortunately, the time for any such tightening-up was not very opportune. In January, not only had coupon-cutting been abolished, but the general re-registration of consumers with retailers upon a ration book issue, which would have cleared the accumulated inflation of the last six months, had been dispensed with; its place had been taken by a fresh source of confusion, an optional re-registration between 20th January and 3rd February. The new permits that came into force on 10th February had of necessity been written before the re-registration, and so were out of date. Butchers who had gained customers promptly demanded supplementaries and so swelled the demand for meat;¹ there followed a series of instructions to Food Offices, designed to get rid of this inflation by the time the next permits came into force, on 1st April.

Supplementary permits were more difficult to cut down, for a Food Office had to be allowed some latitude with them. (Meat Division discovered one Food Executive Officer giving supplementaries for the difference between the allocation and the nominal ration.) Rationing Division did issue general directions: a supplementary

¹ This had begun to rise even before the ration first began to fall, on 16th December; after 16th December, demand rose by nearly 1,000 tons a week. Part of this increase was caused simply by new registrations; when the ration was ample and other foods plentiful, large families did not register all their ration books. (The same point applied to 'Forces' coupons. These were not dated, so butchers who had not bothered to claim replacement when the ration was 2s. 2d. presented accumulations of them later.)

On 20th January, a rise of £30,000 (750 tons) was reported and the following week, a further rise of 400 tons. From 3rd to 10th February, the rise was £6,000; from 10th to 17th February £24,000; from 17th to 24th February, £19,000. Then the rate of increase slowed—£37,000 between 24th February and 17th March.

must not be given to meet new registrations without reference to the number of registrations lost; a supplementary to replace sales to non-registered customers must not exceed the value of the coupons returned; above all, supplementaries were on no account to be given in advance for an expected extra demand. These measures, however, did not remove one of the main sources of the demand for supplementaries—the Services Leave-or-Duty cards.¹

'We calculate', wrote the London Divisional Food Officer, 'that there are over 300,000 holders of R.B.8's wandering round the country, the majority of which are in London'.

The supply crisis naturally brought into prominence the constitutional position of the local meat officers, and, in March, the Area Meat Agent's authority over permit quantities was restored to some extent. (Meat Division asked that he be given a veto on the issue of supplementaries, but this was refused by Rationing Division.) The schedules sent by Food Offices to Area Meat Agents were re-drafted so as to show catering demand separately from registered customer demand; permits were not to be sent to butchers until a week after the schedules had been sent to the Area Meat Agents; copies of the schedules were also to go to Deputy Meat Agents. Meat Division, however, could not wait for the screwing-up process in Food Offices to take effect. As early as 20th February, Deputy Meat Agents were told to visit every butcher under their care to inspect his records and to find out, among other things, how much he was really selling to caterers. Although some notable examples of fraud through over-charging to canteens and institutions were uncovered, the campaign did not fulfil all the hopes placed in it, partly because a Deputy Meat Agent might be embarrassed if he had to recommend a reduction in the permit of a competitor, partly because, as it was impossible for each to visit two or three hundred butchers in the month allowed, the visitation dwindled to a 10 per cent. sample. It was a reminder, however, that the Deputy Meat Agents, themselves retail butchers, could give invaluable help to Food Executive Officers if the latter

¹ On 16th January it was estimated that there were about 250,000 holders of these cards billeted with subsistence. They were certainly a considerable factor in many rural areas, as well as in places like Plymouth and Bristol.

Solutions discussed were:

- (i) that Service coupons should be available only at selected butchers (as for Weekly Seamen's supplies):
- (ii) that some form of registration should be devised (this was the solution later adopted):
- (iii) that Service rations should be reduced. On 6th January, the value of the R.B.8 card was reduced from 12 to 7 ounces a coupon, giving men 42 oz. a week, and women 28 oz. (Meat Division also asked that the Services should have two instead of one corned beef days a week, but did not get this until 10th January 1942):
- (iv) that the Service authorities should be more careful in issuing R.B.8's, i.e., not issue one valid for two weeks for one week's leave.

could be persuaded to avail themselves of it. The Headquarters Divisions were at one in promoting co-operation on these lines.

II

The reduction in the domestic ration on 16th December had been accompanied by spectacular cuts in catering allowances. On 6th December, Area Meat Agents were told to 'put a brake on issues of meat', and Meat Division asked that 500 tons a week or one-fifth should immediately be lopped off catering supplies. A cut of one-third in catering allowances, already projected for January, was hastily announced on 14th December, to come into force when the ration was reduced two days later; on 6th January catering supplies were cut by a further one-third. On paper the caterers were now down to one-fifth of their consumption in the period before rationing started; but to enforce such savage cuts was not so easy as to decree them. Caterers who bought wholesale, and so received buying permits, could easily be controlled by Meat Division's allocating officers; 90-95 per cent., however, bought retail and their supplies were securely embedded in the permits of their butchers.

The quantity on the butcher's permit was a total. He and his Food Office knew what part of it represented catering supplies; but the allocating officers did not. Permits could not be adjusted by a general formula because the ration and the catering allowances were not cut in the same proportion;¹ new permits had to wait until Food Offices had finished with the ration book issue, which was also a reason why Deputy Meat Agents could not be given access to the amended records on which they could have based a cut in allocations. In the short run, therefore, the butcher had to be allowed discretion in the way he distributed his allocation between caterer and private customer. He was enjoined to give the latter priority, but officials doubted whether he would be really hard on his biggest customers.

There followed an attempt to tighten up Food Office procedure, similar to that taking place at the same time over permits. Meat Division's request for a permit showing separately the supplies for registered customers and catering customers, was rejected;² in March, however, this distinction was introduced into the Food Office schedule for Area Meat Agents. Food Offices were also called upon

¹ The cuts of 16th December were of the order of one-third in catering allowances and two-thirteenths in the ration. This introduced great complication into the permits of institutions, for these were supplied partly on the domestic ration (for inmates and residents) and partly on a catering allowance (for non-residents).

² It was adopted in August 1941.

to furnish regular returns of catering authorisations and consumption. This was a restraint on Food Offices rather than on caterers; it did not touch the main problem—to see, first that authorisations were related to requirements, and then that they were not exceeded. The visitation of Deputy Meat Agents was therefore made to include catering establishments; they were to be investigated directly, as well as outflanked through their butchers. The campaign met with a good deal of success.¹ Yet catering demand continued to rise because, as fast as the efforts of local officials pared supplies to existing establishments, new ones were being set up.

Critics of catering supplies² were apt to forget that they went to industrial and school canteens, communal feeding centres, and workmen's cafés as well as to more spectacular establishments. The meat crisis coincided with an expansion of communal feeding, fostered by the Government. Feeding centres for the general public were too few to constitute a serious inroad into supplies; but factory and school canteens were another matter, and the former in particular were multiplying fast at this time.³ These expanding demands had to be satisfied within the framework of a declaration by Meat Division that there could be no net increase in catering supplies. The only course left was to re-distribute them; so began the policy of robbing Peter to pay Paul which, after driving Food Executive and Divisional Food Officers near distraction, was to take with it, when it disintegrated, the whole system of datum distribution to caterers.

On 14th December 1940, Food Offices had been told that no catering authorisations were to be increased and no new ones issued, unless they were for establishments connected with work of national importance. On 9th January 1941 it was laid down that these priority establishments could only be supplied at the expense of 'non-essential' caterers. Their butcher was to cut supplies to other catering customers in order to give them 1½d. worth of meat (retail value)⁴ for each employee for whom a meat meal had to be served. If he could not do this, the Food Executive Officer would call in the Deputy Meat Agent who, if he could not wring the extra amount out of the butcher's

¹ The weekly authorisation of one well-known London restaurant was reduced from over £140 to £43. On 10th March, the Permanent Secretary congratulated Catering Division on his failure to obtain meat for lunch (and his great difficulty in obtaining any lunch at all) when driving back from Colwyn Bay with a colleague.

² In June 1941, it was estimated that not more than 6 per cent. of meat supplies went to catering establishments.

³ Between February and July 1941, 608 new canteens were set up by factories subject to the Factories (Canteens) Order of November 1940. The importance of this figure is that, before the Canteens Order, factory canteens had been very unevenly distributed. A survey had shown that 80 per cent. of the factories in the South already had canteens serving hot meals, 50-60 per cent. in the North, 40 per cent. in the North-East, and only 35 per cent. in Scotland.

⁴ This was a reduction from the allowance specified in the December instruction, which had been 2d. a meal.

Buying Committee, would pass the problem to the Area Meat Agent. The search might extend even higher—to the Area Meat and Live-stock Officer:

‘The essential consideration is that, in the present supply position, no additional meat can be issued to a Meat Area as a whole and any supplementary supplies to one category of catering establishments must be obtained by reducing the issues to other establishments serving needs of less priority.’

Inevitably, the priority class had to be extended. There were added to it on 22nd January Fire Brigade messes, civilian canteens at R.A.F. Maintenance Depots, and public-houses with catering licences in dock areas; in February, community kitchens.¹

The butcher had by now a complicated schedule of priorities to observe: household customers, institutions, residential establishments, catering establishments with residents,² and ordinary caterers; school canteens enjoyed a neutral position midway between national importance and non-essentiality. By the end of February, with the domestic ration in the process of falling to 1s., the ‘non-essential’ caterer’s prospect of legitimately obtaining even his normal allowance was dim.³

The instructions of 22nd January also changed the machinery for applying the compensatory cuts. The main responsibility was now placed on the Divisional Food Officer; he was to satisfy himself that an establishment came within the priority class and that the number of ‘qualified persons’ for whom it claimed to provide meat meals was correct. The Food Executive Officer might then increase its permit,

¹ This was a delicate matter because there was no restriction on the class of person using them, and commercial caterers might resent their priority; also, they could provide meals for ‘taking away’, although there was some doubt whether meals consumed off the premises ought to be coupon-free. On the other hand, the Minister was personally associated with their foundation and, as they had been set up against a time when it might be necessary to distribute much of the country’s food through them, it would be unwise to destroy public confidence in them at the outset. Meat, Rationing, and Catering Divisions therefore decided to allow them priority status, to re-consider this when their consumption of meat had doubled (they were only taking some 50 tons a week) and not to emphasize their ‘cash-and-carry’ facilities.

See above, pp. 387-8.

² Meals supplied to residents were, of course, on the ration.

³ This scale of priorities caused some confusion in permit machinery. The permits of 16th December had been written on a ration basis, i.e., 2s. 2d., and allocations were for half permit quantities. The new permits of 10th February were, because of the likelihood of frequent variation in the ration, written on a ‘notional’ basis, i.e., for a 1s. 6d. ration; allocations were therefore for 75 per cent. of permit quantities. If a butcher received a supplementary permit in order to supply a priority canteen, this permit represented a ‘real’, not a ‘notional’ amount and should be met in full. Yet this permit, too, would be honoured for only 75 per cent. of its value. Food Offices were supposed to ‘write up’ such permits to allow for this. They did not always do so and Area Meat Agents could never be quite certain whether a supplementary should be honoured in full or whether it had been ‘written up’ so that a 75 per cent. allocation would be in order.

and look through his area for a victim or victims to suffer corresponding decreases; if a balance could not be struck within the area, it would be for the Divisional Food Officer to look elsewhere in the Division. This procedure, as one Divisional Food Officer protested to Headquarters, was 'an invitation to abandon all principle'; moreover, as he also pointed out, the Divisional Food Officer had not the detailed knowledge to apply it. Even as a policy of expediency, it could not last long; as early as the end of February, there were areas in which there were no more non-essential caterers left to cut. The worst sufferers were those in large towns ringed by war factories set up in rural areas. In Manchester, for example, caterers had had their already reduced allowances halved, i.e., to 10 per cent. of rationing usage and, said the Divisional Food Officer, short of extinguishing them altogether, he could cut them no more. Yet the tide was still rising. 'This meat business', wrote the London Divisional Food Officer, who was under constant pressure from the Ministries of Labour and Aircraft Production for more and more canteens, 'is causing more work, trouble and frayed tempers than anything else I know'.

By the end of March the policy had foundered. Food Offices had to be authorised to increase supplies without compensatory cuts, and the definition of a priority class was abandoned. There ensued an interregnum of two months during which it is difficult to say on what basis caterers were supplied, for the successive cuts, followed by the 'Peter and Paul' policy, had played havoc with the datum system.¹

By June, however, the worst of the supply crisis was over. On the 9th, the rationing of offals (which had not been a success)² was ended, on 7th July the ration was raised to 1s. 2d.; on 2nd June, it had been possible to abolish the datum system and put into effect a new scheme for supplying catering establishments.

¹ In April, an Area Meat and Livestock Officer asked a conference of Food Executive Officers in his area what formula they were using to calculate the fragment of datum left to caterers. He found four in use, while some Food Offices had no longer any idea at all on what principles catering allowances should be based. The correct formula, as set out by him, was that

'... [the preliminary demand note] should show 30 per cent. of the datum usage, but that [the schedule] should show 40 per cent., thus, on our allocation of 66½ of 40 per cent., the butcher would receive 26½ and, if he supplies 8/9ths of 30 per cent. on the [demand note] that is also 26½.'

² The de-rationing of offals entailed finding an extra 700 tons of meat a week. As early as 30th April, Meat Division was prepared to do this, but there was some diffidence about announcing a measure of de-control just then. In June, de-rationing was described as temporary, for the summer only. But offals were not put on the ration again although there were times, e.g., June 1943 and February 1944, when they seemed likely to be. (It was then proposed to ration only the 'meaty offals', i.e., kidney, liver, etc.)

One of Meat Division's arguments against rationing offals was that it must first gain control of bacon factory offals. But the main argument was really the reaction of the consumer of 1941, 'when offered one-third of an oxtail as the week's ration'.

III

The Ministry had been working on the new catering scheme since the end of December 1940. It was based on a return to equal treatment for all caterers, coupled with parity between catering and domestic allocations. All establishments, whether teashops, works canteens, or restaurants, were to receive an identical allowance for meals served, that would rise and fall with the domestic ration.

The first difficulty was to define a meal. The original intention had been to give an allowance for each meat meal served. It proved impossible to define a meat meal ('which might be anything from a small sandwich upwards'); instead, recourse was had to the criterion used in the sumptuary restriction of February 1941;¹ a 'main meal', i.e., including meat, game, poultry, or fish. This could be adopted as the basis of supply only if all establishments could keep separate records of such meals; but the largest teashop firm said that its shops could not. The Ministry then suggested that the number of main meals should be taken at one-fourth of all meals. At this point, an advantage of the outmoded datum system became apparent; it had at least related an establishment's meat allowance to its type of trade. The new proposals, on the other hand, would enable teashops to qualify for a 'ridiculously high' meat allowance, while penalising the luncheon-type restaurant that had always specialised in one good meat meal a day. This was not a class matter, for the public house at the dock gates (which was being officially encouraged) and the transport café would suffer equally with the City chop-house—and more than the luxury hotel.

It was proposed to get over this difficulty by imposing a ceiling (the current datum quota) on teashops, and giving luncheon-type restaurants the option of an allowance on main meals. The Hotels and Restaurants Association, however, claimed that teashops could keep accurate records of main meals served if they chose, that one-quarter of their meals would still give them too high a meat allocation, and that the scheme would disturb the pattern of trade. It added that the scheme committed officials to defining a 'teashop'. The recording of main meals was therefore made the normal procedure and the division by four method the abnormal. The problem of definition was avoided by dividing establishments into those that could record, or closely estimate, their main meals, and those that could not. These negotiations account, in part, for the delay in introducing the scheme; but had it been ready earlier, it might not have been opportune, for it did not lend itself to raids on catering supplies on behalf of the domestic

¹ The Food (Restrictions on Meals in Establishments) Order (S.R. & O. (1941) No. 229) which limited the number of courses that might be served.

ration. Meat Division, during the crisis months, was more concerned with keeping catering supplies down than with distributing them equitably, and would not support any scheme that might lead to a rise in catering demand. The supply situation also led to a continuing discrimination between types of caterer. The allowance of meat per meal was to have been 2d.; a figure got by assuming that seven main meals a week had to be extracted from the domestic ration of 1s. 2d. Meat Division, however, could not find more than 1d. worth, and on this basis the scheme was introduced. Meanwhile, the domestic ration had gone down to 1s.; when it returned to 1s. 2d. on 7th July, a convenient ratio between the two was established. So small an allowance could not be sustained uniformly; the Ministry of Labour and the T.U.C. promptly protested at works' canteens being deprived of one-third of their meat allowance in the name of equality. The prospect of defining privileged establishments was not alluring, but something had to be done about heavy workers, if only on political grounds, and the alternative of a differential domestic ration was worse:

'I hope' (wrote a high official on 19th August) 'that we shall adhere to our policy of works' canteens and resist supplementary domestic rations. Cheese, we have given way on. It is a pity, but we can prevent that going too far.'

If, however, canteens were to get extra meat, it must be distributed in accordance with an established body of principles, not by 'throwing a bone to the dog that made most noise'. A committee was therefore set up to consider catering establishments, with special reference to the 'practicability of dividing them into categories for special treatment'. In November, as a result of its report, three categories of caterers were established. Category A industrial canteens, catering for heavy workers in specified industries, were to receive a meat allowance of 2d. a main meal; Category B, comprising other works' canteens, and privately-owned establishments catering mainly¹ for workers, 1½d. a main meal; the remainder, 1d. School canteens² were to be regarded as Category A. The task of classification was placed upon the Ministry's divisional and local officers.

IV

The vicissitudes of meat rationing during 1941 provoked fresh

¹ i.e., to the extent of 60 per cent. or more of their customers.

² This marked the end of an unhappy period for school canteens, the innocent and unintended victims of the meat crisis and the disorganisation of catering allocation procedure. There was a good deal of feeling on this issue in the Education Departments, and unjustified suspicion that the Ministry of Food's attitude was due to policy. Hence the mixed feelings with which Lord Woolton's approach to Mr. Butler was received (above, pp. 421-2) in July 1941.

proposals for improving its machinery; proposals aimed at increasing the influence of the Commodity Division over allocations. Numerous changes, both in the domestic ration and in the manufacturing allowance, had generated the 'notional' permit (written for a basic ration of 1s.) which had to be manipulated as necessary by the Area Meat Agent. This split of duties lent itself to error, and in December 1941, Meat Division suggested that the Area Meat Agent should take over also the task of working out the wholesale equivalents. More important, the Division suggested that the permit (which, after all, was only for the butcher's information) and the return be dispensed with, and that the schedule, sent by the Food Office to the Area Meat Agent, be redrafted¹ so as to show the eight different types of requirement a butcher might have to meet. This proposal represented the culmination of a process that had been spasmodically taking place during 1941; it was prized by the Commodity Division as a means whereby it might vary each allowance at will without affecting the others. Such an analysis of requirements would also enable Area Meat Agents to exercise more fully their 'intelligent scrutiny' of permit quantities; 'global figures' masked both deliberate inflation by Food Offices² and errors of principle and calculation. Food Offices, in short, were to retreat from their untenable position. That the task of supervising a butcher's performance rightly fell to them was indisputable, but they were not equipped to carry it out. Their armoury, copied from that of 1918, had been from the first unsuitable; the big guns—the permit telling the butcher how much he might buy, the certificate on it of how much he had bought, his own return of stocks and purchases—were trained, not on the butcher, but on another section of the Ministry. If a butcher were convicted of exceeding his permit quantity, his supplier was as culpable as he, and his supplier was a depot run by a Ministry agent. Where the guns were not pointing inwards, they were spiked. The value ration, the wide variation of cut and quality, and differential retail prices, made it

¹ The left-hand side of the new form, to be completed by the Food Office, would show the amounts required for

- (a) weekly seamen
- (b) catering establishments at 1d. a meal
- (c) category A establishments
- (d) category B establishments
- (e) school canteens and feeding centres
- (f) retailer-caterers and Group III manufacturers
- (g) TOTAL a-f
- (h) adult registrations
- (i) half the number of child registrations
- (j) TOTAL h-i

On the right-hand side of the form, the Area Meat Agent, wielding three different ready-reckoners, would convert to wholesale value and add any allowances. With the prudent addition of two spare columns, Meat Division would have had a form it could play on like an organ.

² Meat Division had not forgotten the Food Executive Officer, discovered during the crisis, adding 10 per cent. or more 'just whenever he felt that this was necessary'.

impossible to supervise the butcher with the general machinery applied to other commodities.

Rationing officials at first accepted this plan—rather uncharacteristically, for it was not like them to admit that any task was beyond their capacity to devise new machinery. By June 1942, however, their attitude changed, and just as the plan, after six months of discussion and revision, was about to be announced, they reopened the question of principle. The reason lay in a new development on the catering front. Although they now recognised that to lay hands on the unbought ration of the registered customer was beyond them, they did not wish to accept the same position for caterers; those who habitually underbought ought to have their authorisations reduced, so as not to create a surplus in the hands of the butcher. By March 1942, however, it had become clear that the most consistent under-purchasers were those very establishments whose activities the Ministry wished to expand, not contract—school canteens, British Restaurants, and Category A canteens. The problem was to relieve the butcher of these windfalls without denying them permanently to the establishments. Catering Division was pondering the problem, Birmingham had already put into operation a plan for dealing with it when, in April, Internal Audit Division uncovered some particularly glaring examples in Bootle.¹

The 'Midland plan' (begun in Birmingham in March and extended to the whole Midland Division in July) was to require from each butcher a weekly return, showing how much each catering customer was entitled to buy and how much he had bought. The Deputy Meat Agents then withheld any surplus from the butcher's next weekly allocation. This, it was claimed, saved considerable quantities of meat;² and rationing headquarters were much impressed at the sight of Midland butchers making such returns and, apparently, making them accurately. The Commodity Division, however, explained this by reference to the personality of the Birmingham Area Meat Agent, and doubted whether such a scheme would work elsewhere; all that the Birmingham results proved, in its opinion, was that catering authorisations there must be far too high and ought to be reduced. (This was also Catering Division's view; it had already obtained the Board of Education's consent on behalf of school canteens.) An attack on authorisations did not, however, strike at the root problem, as did the Midland scheme, and it was contemplation of the latter that caused rationing officials to go back on their 'agreement to abdicate'.

¹ They found a British Restaurant taking only half its authorisation while its butcher continued to draw full permit quantities. Further investigation found that catering customers of other butchers were also buying well below their authorisations.

² £31,529 8s. 4d. worth between March and September 1942. (Excluding permanent reductions in authorisations.)

The elaborate schedule propounded by Meat Division seemed all wrong, now that the principle of parity between the domestic consumer and other users was fully established:

'I cannot see (the Director of Meat and Livestock was told on 27th June) that it is a matter of any importance to your folk whether a slice of meat is eaten by a child of under 5 or a nonagenarian. . . . I suggest, therefore, that we look after the categories . . . and you take our bulk figures as handed across and keep only your records of what meat goes out.'

This, of course, was exactly what Meat Division did not want—a return to the position that it had been in before the supply crisis, without even the escape route of under-issue that had been used in 1940. Although the Division no longer needed to discriminate quantitatively between different classes of user, it still wished to be able to issue different kinds of meat, i.e., corned beef and, perhaps, what was being much discussed at this time, dried meat powder.¹ More generally, the Division thought that the national interest required that its expert local officers should continue to assist local rationing officials in their tricky task.

These differences could not be settled before August 1942, when the new scheme had been timed to start; stop-gap proposals were therefore put into operation. The permit and the butcher's return were abolished; as for catering under-consumption, it was to be balanced against casual sales. Each week, the butcher was to send to the Food Office the temporary coupons he had collected together with the Order Forms from caterers. The Order Forms of priority establishments were to be compared with their authorisations, and any surplus left with the butchers deducted from replacement for temporary coupons. If there were still a surplus, the main permit would be cut and the Area Meat Agent informed by telephone in time for the next week's allocations. The stop-gap scheme did not work very well because the Order Forms might not supply the right kind of information—Food Offices might find themselves confronted with Forms that said simply 'Meat as before'; in any case, what a caterer had ordered was not necessarily what he got. The scheme did, however, foreshadow the two main principles that were finally established; the weekly adjustment of the butcher's authorisation, and the balancing of 'non-take-up' against uncovenanted demand. It marks the end of the attempt to apply the meat-rationing devices of the first war to the different conditions of the second.

¹ This, although intended mainly for the Services, was being tried out on selected caterers, free of charge and free of ration. They were said to be delighted with it and anxious for more—on the same terms.

CHAPTER XL

The Achievement of Stability, 1943-45

I

AFTER a winter of negotiation, a completely renewed apparatus for meat rationing was ready in April 1943. Its keystone was the *weekly statement* that the butcher must in future make to the Food Office. He was required to state the number of new consumer registrations,¹ and the total value² of rationed meat sold (*a*) to caterers and small manufacturers registered with him (*b*) to unregistered customers (along with the amount of meat he claimed in replacement). The statement had to be accompanied by evidence under each head, viz., counterfoils, coupons from temporary cards, and caterer's Order Forms. The last had now been re-drafted to include a certificate by the butcher of the amount of rationed meat he had sold to the establishment.

From the weekly statement and from its own record of registered customers, the Food Office compiled the butcher's *weekly assessment sheet*. This, an elaborate serial form current for eight weeks, showed every item from which the butcher's weekly authorisation was built up (including the manufacturing allowance). A *summary of authorisations* listing the amount of meat due to each member of a group of retailers in the first week of each eight-week period, was sent to the Chairman of the Retail Buying Committee³ every eight weeks; *intermediate summaries* revising these figures were forwarded weekly for attachment to the main summary, providing a continuous record of authorisations for eight weeks. Copies of these documents were sent to *Deputy Meat Agents*. The *Area Meat Agent* received only a weekly advice, stating the total authorised to each committee.

¹ In five categories, three of them 'Services'.

² At maximum retail prices. This settled what had long been a vexed question; if a caterer received a discount, he might, under value rationing, receive more by weight than he ought to receive. It had been impressed upon Food Offices in June 1941 that whatever the purchase price, the amount must not exceed that represented by the authorisation, which was calculated at maximum retail price. (There had been recurrent doubts about the same point in relation to the domestic ration; at one time in 1940 when meat was plentiful, the Ministry had agreed that any quantity of meat might be sold against a coupon provided that its cash value was not exceeded.)

It will be noted that, unlike previous forms, the weekly statement asked only for rationed meat.

³ Or, where there were no Retail Buying Committees, to the managers of wholesale depots.

The first, and most important, feature of the scheme was the complete re-calculation of the butcher's authorisation every week. The eight-week period remained for statistical purposes only, and supplementary permits—the prime source of inflation—disappeared altogether.¹ All the material affecting a butcher's authorisation was collected on one sheet in one place—the Food Office. This was a great advance on the previous procedure, when, because of the prevalence of supplementaries and the split of duties between Food Office and Area Meat Agent, the state of a butcher's authorisation at any one time could not be discovered without considerable research. This weekly re-calculation had been rationing officials' strongest argument when pressing the scheme upon the Commodity Division. It would, they pointed out, make unnecessary the elaborate schedule that had at one time held the field; Area Meat Agents would scarcely need to hunt for inflation in weekly totals, nor was it likely that the ration or allowances would have to be changed in mid-week.

Inflation was guarded against in other ways. First, the all-important certificate of purchase on the caterer's order form enabled meat not taken up by priority establishments to be withheld from their butchers, and the authorisations of non-priority establishments to be reduced to what they actually bought. The statement of the number of main meals served could now become a ceiling in fact as well as in theory.² Secondly, it had now seemed possible to pursue under-consumption by registered customers. The new *weekly statement* openly postulated a difference between uncovenanted sales and the replacement the butcher claimed for them; and he was reminded on the form itself that he must take into account any unbought rations. The trade had, indeed, to be re-assured that the new statement was not a revival of the rejected return. It was, of course, intended for the same purpose—to achieve a replacement basis within the framework of registration; but it referred only to identifiable sales and demanded no stock figure. Beyond this, Food Offices had to rely on empirical methods; assume that a butcher would have some slack, and, if he consistently claimed full replacement, set technical experts to investigate.

The new system was, in fact, far closer to 1919 than to 1940. The rationing system had followed the same line of development in both wars. In 1918, as in 1940, a retailer was supposed to account in

¹ In December 1941 the North Eastern Area Meat and Livestock Officer had attacked the eight-week period and pleaded for a weekly adjustment of supplies. He compared the supplies authorised for coupon and registered customers for the first week of a period with those for the last week of the previous period, and found that 7,268 duplicate rations had been issued during the latter. He concluded that, by arithmetical progression, some 28,000 duplicate rations must have been issued to retailers in his area alone during the eight weeks.

² This did not make it easier, however, to verify; 'but that is another story'.

detail for *all* his supplies; by 1919, they had been divided into two parts, his basic supply for his registered customers and his replacement for uncovenanted sales. It was only the latter (which was given in advance) that had to be strictly accounted for. The principle of the 1943 meat system was the same, although somewhat tighter in that under-disposals from the basic supply were supposed to be balanced against uncovenanted demand. But the onus of balancing was now put upon the retailer, whereas in 1940 Food Offices were supposed to be able to do it for themselves by means of coupons and the random estimates on the M.3 return.

It was not to be expected that Meat Division would view the scheme with the same enthusiasm as its begetters. Local meat officers doubted, in particular, the value of the butcher's weekly statement; the scheme, they said, was a fine one except that it depended upon all butchers being both truthful and punctual. This defect was not fatal; a butcher had to tell some of the truth all the time, or all the truth some of the time, if he were to remain above suspicion, and collaboration between Food Offices and meat officers soon cured him of unpunctuality. The most serious objection to the scheme from the 'commodity' angle was the part it assigned to Food Offices. The Area Meat Agent was to lose touch completely with the authorisation of the individual butcher; he was to be told only of the amount authorised to each committee. As for the Deputy Meat Agent, he was originally to have been told nothing at all. Last minute pressure from Meat Division obtained copies of the summaries for Deputy Meat Agents,¹ but the Area Meat Agent was by-passed.

Rationing officials took the long-standing view that the natural division of responsibility was to assign all the clerical work of compiling the butcher's authorisation to Food Offices. Admittedly, mistakes had been made in the past; now, however, the Offices should be capable of assuming full responsibility for the butcher's authorisation, especially as an inspectorate (the Food Office Visitors) had been set up to supervise them and enforce uniformity of procedures. This argument was reasonable, for the constitutional difficulties between the two local organisations had arisen mainly because the rationing machinery had not been adequate to the demands, first of acute shortage, then of increasing refinements in distribution. Meat officials were willing to be convinced, for they had long felt that Deputy Meat Agents in particular had stepped out of the rôle originally assigned to them and were spending too much time in office work, instead of being out at wholesale depots and in the butcher's shops using their technical knowledge. But they were not

¹ Meat Division felt that it would be unpractical, as well as undignified, for Deputy Meat Agents to have to obtain their knowledge of authorisations from the butchers' copy of the summaries. In a rural area one might not be able to get round all his Buying Committees before allocations should have taken place.

sure that Food Offices could assume full responsibility; local meat officers—who could readily furnish up-to-date examples of errors of principle as well as of calculation—believed that meat rationing, with its pork butchers, manufacturers, pie schemes, and the like, had grown so complicated that to handle it unaided might well be beyond the strength of the smaller Food Offices.

Furthermore, Meat Division doubted whether the work could be got through in time. Food Offices, it argued, were still sometimes late with the old eight-weekly schedules; how could they be expected to complete a similar operation every week? The butchers' statements were to reach Food Offices by noon on a Monday; the summaries should be dispatched to Buying Committees on Wednesday. Allocations, however, were often completed on Thursday (for the week-end trade) and therefore wholesale depots should be told of the week's requirements on Tuesday. It followed that one week's supplies could not be made in replacement of the previous week's performance. (Under the old system, most areas had worked out arrangements by which butchers could present their temporary coupons at a Food Office on a Monday, and receive supplies under the resulting supplementary permit at the end of the same week. Their main supplies, of course, were known in advance for eight weeks.) Rationing officials, however, argued that the procedure could be speeded up as Food Offices became used to it, and, that as supplies were to be on a replacement basis, the lengthening of the time lag by one week did not matter; and Meat Division allowed itself to be convinced.

II

For the first two or three months, the new arrangements appeared to be working smoothly. Then, however, Food Offices fell behind with their removals work, overwhelmed as they were by the massive operation for the reissue of identity cards along with ration books, and the subsequent optional re-registration. Uncleared cancelled registrations piled up; increased authorisations were given to butchers who had gained customers without corresponding decreases where customers had been lost. There had been, said the Director of Meat and Livestock early in September 1943, a rise of some three per cent. in authorisations between April, when the scheme had been introduced, and the end of August. Clearly, it had not succeeded in checking inflation; nor (he claimed) was negligence by Food Offices solely or even mainly responsible. The prime causes were long standing and familiar—catering establishments and temporary coupons.

The system for supplying catering establishments was, in Meat Division's opinion, both wrong in principle and too loosely enforced. Catering supplies for the week ended 29th May 1943 had represented 12.6 per cent. of the total civilian meat supplies. This was too much; if coupons for meals were still out of the question, then a datum ceiling should be imposed on establishments other than canteens. It was unreasonable that their supplies should automatically increase with demand.¹ As for the efficacy of the control, there was 'virtually no attempt to check the statements of meals submitted by establishments in justification of their demands for meat'. Moreover, a stipulation, made by the Division when accepting the new scheme, that Food Offices should consult Area Meat Agents before increasing authorisations or granting new ones had not been fulfilled. The duplication of rations inseparable from the temporary ration card system should (it was once more suggested) be avoided by noting, when a temporary card was issued, the name of the recipient's butcher.

Finally, a more general claim to influence Food Offices was renewed:

'In our mutual interest I think we would be well-advised to bring the Deputy and Area Meat Agents more closely in to the Food Office work on butchers' authorisations than they are at present. I should like to see them consulted regularly by the Food Offices as a matter of routine and regarded as arbiters to whom the Food Offices should turn on all matters connected with meat authorisations whether for butchers or caterers.'

This was something that rationing officials could not concede. There had, in fact, been a misunderstanding between them and the commodity side, which had led to conflicting instructions being sent by each to its representatives 'in the field'; Area Meat Agents had been told that Food Offices would consult them in advance, Food Offices, that they should inform Agents afterwards. Meat Division had been trying for some time to get the latter instruction brought into line with their own, and it was only now that it received a decisive answer: 'the allowances to caterers, just as for retailers, depend entirely upon figures and facts which are only at the disposal of the F.E.O. in the course of his business and nobody else'. Moreover, rationing officials denied that the increase was merely inflation in the system. The use of the Weekly Seamen's Ration Book (R.B.6) which carried heavier rations, had been extended;² expectant

¹ It should be remembered that there was great anxiety over imported meat supplies at this time, owing to the hitches over procurement in the United States (Vol. I, pp. 243-245).

² A modified R.B.6 had been given, after much pressure, to 'estuarial' seamen and others (see Chapter XXXV).

mothers had been given extra meat; 'on the eating-out front, the boost has gone on and, in fact, intensified, for Canteens A and B, school canteens, pie schemes and, till recently, British Restaurants'. The commercial caterer provided for workers as well as those who ate out 'for fun', and 'luxury establishments' could not be singled out for special treatment. As for temporary coupons, Meat Division's suggestion was impossible; it had been tried for National Milk Scheme beneficiaries at one time, but had had to be abandoned because of the work entailed.

These periodical exchanges over caterers—there was to be another in 1945—derived from a radical difference of attitude. Rationing officials always took their stand upon (or, from Meat Division's point of view, sheltered behind) policy; 'we must assume . . . that the caterers are there to serve a public need, and the public need is measured by the meals people take'. To Meat Division, the 'feeding-out' policy was altogether too lavish with the country's meat; catering whether for canteens or not, were extra rations, and should be set not by demand, but by the amount that could be spared for them. The 'main-meals' system, which enabled businesses to expand and, worse still, draw in meat by obtaining fish and poultry,¹ was not to the Division's liking; indeed, it appears to have been accepted originally in the belief that it was no more than a new way of dividing an agreed and fixed percentage of total meat supplies among caterers. Short of this, and of coupons for meals (of which both Divisions spoke wistfully when times were hard) the least that Food Offices could do was to supervise caterers strictly. Yet, admittedly, there was no special check a Food Office could make when an establishment applied for an increased authorisation; the chief safeguard was that a decrease in the number of meals served automatically brought a decrease in the authorisation, whereas an increase was not effective unless special application were made.

The result of this particular episode was not very conclusive, for neither side wished to press its argument to the point of endangering good relations. Meat Division forebore to point out that the rationers had promised a *decrease* in authorisations; they, for their part, could not press constitutional propriety too far against the common-sense argument that the Ministry ought to make the best use of its 'squad of trained men'. A fresh circular to Food Offices, issued in December 1943, called for greater care in operating the removals procedure and in supervising establishments; for butchers who, on their weekly statements, consistently claimed full replacement (especially during holiday periods) to be questioned, and for replacement of meat, sold to school and other canteens just before they closed for holidays, to be withheld from their butchers until they reopened. 'Consultation'

¹ See pp. 49-52 for a discussion of fish supplies to catering establishments.

over new or increased authorisations to caterers was not conceded; it 'presupposes that the Area Meat Agent is in a position to say "no" and that really is not proper'. But it was implied that Food Offices should let the Area Meat Agent know of such authorisations in time to enable him 'to make such checks as may be required'.

III

For the rest of the war, there was no major change¹ in meat rationing procedure. It worked well; an enquiry in December 1944 revealed that butchers were punctual with their returns,² and that Food Office work had been speeded up so that allocations in most areas were taking place smoothly on the current week's figures. This was fortunate, for the system had to meet the strain of the exceptional population movements caused by the flying bomb attacks and the preparations for invading Europe. The procedure was, however, cushioned by Meat Division's system of advance allocations.

This system had grown up naturally. Meat was perishable and, in addition, either frozen or, if home-produced, liable to seasonal glut. It therefore became the custom for regular advance allocation to be made of imported meat so that it could be properly de-frosted for the Monday trade,³ and for occasional advance allocations of home-produced meat to be made when depots found that more or heavier beasts had come forward than had been expected. The latter would gradually be re-claimed by under-issues when times became leaner. Later on, advance allocations began to be made for different reasons. After May 1944, when butchers asserted that, because of the preponderance of American pork in their allocations, they could not, in spite of the margin allowed on it, meet the requirements of their

¹ In March 1944, Food Offices 'lost' the manufacturing allowance again. (Food Offices first began to add the manufacturing allowance in July 1940, ceased to do so in April 1941 when it began to vary, then got it back again in April 1943.) There was some alarm in Organisation and Methods Division over this; but the reason was that Meat Division was putting into operation a scheme aimed at supervising the butcher's use of his manufacturing allowance. The scheme was abandoned in 1946, and the manufacturing allowance was handed back to Food Offices.

² This punctuality was not always innate. The enquiry of December was prompted by the case of a very small London butcher who could never manage to get his weekly statement in until Wednesday. Area Meat Agents were asked if they had similar cases and, if so, what they did. Most of them replied that all their butchers were now cured of unpunctuality by, in the last resort, inserting no quantity for a defaulter on the summary for his Buying Committee. The butcher then hurried to the Food Office with his returns, an emergency requisition would be put through, the Meat Agent would take care to inconvenience the Buying Committee as much as possible, and the butcher, 'having run foul of all his contacts in one week', would not default again.

³ These allocations were not to be made until the end of the week. Any butcher receiving allocations was supposed to have his stock inspected by his Deputy Meat Agent once a month.

registered customers, the problem was met by forward issues. Food Offices were warned, in March 1945, to steer clear of this fat pork controversy, which was being conducted on a high technical plane, and on no account to allow themselves to be persuaded into giving any butcher a margin on his authorisation.¹ In 1945, advance allocations were also being made to meet sudden increases in population caused by returning refugees, the holiday season, and demobilisation. They had, in fact, become endemic, and looked suspiciously like the old supplementary permits under new management. It was natural that more than one Divisional Food Officer, experiencing a pleasing reversal of his usual role, should refer to the amount outstanding at the local depot as advance allocations and wonder if the situation were not getting out of hand. Once it was accepted, however, that the butcher could not be squeezed too hard—because, if he were, he might refuse to serve temporary customers—the question was simply who was to administer the ‘slack’. The answer given in 1940 was—the Food Office, by means of supplementary permits; after 1943 it was—‘the trade expert, who has control of the meat and can withhold it’. Food Offices were to confine themselves strictly to calculating authorisations according to the letter of the rationing rules, leaving the tempering of them to Meat Division.

Meat Division, however, had not lost interest in the rationing rules themselves and, in 1944 and 1945, continued to pursue what it considered to be the two remaining leakages; catering establishments, and the overlap caused by the issue of temporary ration cards.²

The difference of opinion over catering establishments was again brought to a head early in 1945 by the Government’s desire that people should be encouraged to take normal holidays that year. The problem was to secure to resorts, especially those on the South and South East coast where the holiday catering trade had been in abeyance for some years, adequate supplies of meat in *advance* of known demand. Meat Division was horrified by instructions that

¹ It was not very easy for Food Offices to stand aside, because consumers insisted on bringing them joints of fat pork for inspection.

² Another source of leakage that had given a good deal of trouble was the butcher’s sale of unrationed meat. This arose from the decision not to require coupons for cooked meat. When rationing began, many butchers applied for registration as caterers in order to obtain supplies of meat expressly for cooking, and nominated themselves as their suppliers. In March 1940 it was first decided to cancel these registrations but, a week later, the decision was reversed because it might interfere with the butcher’s sale of cooked ham. In June 1941, however, these registrations were cancelled. Cooked meat shops and butchers selling cooked ham could be licensed as ‘retailer-caterers’ but the latter were not to receive meat for cooking.

The problem then became one of cooked meat licences. Butchers began to apply for these in large numbers and they, too, had to be withdrawn from general butchers (in February 1943). After this, general butchers could sell only ‘meat products’, i.e., meat that had been processed, not just cooked. This decision was part of Meat Division’s efforts to supervise the butcher’s use of his manufacturing meat allowance. The danger was, of course, that surplus rationed meat might be turned into unrationed cooked meat (cf. bacon, *see* p. 551, above. *seq.*)

Food Offices should grant authorisations based on an establishment's own estimate of expected demand. The Division claimed that the domestic ration, already in jeopardy, would be further imperilled if, for a whole summer, anticipated and not ascertained demand was to be the basis of catering authorisations; that Food Offices 'were not experts at assessing caterers' anticipated needs' (its distrust of Food Offices in holiday resorts dated from the supply crisis); and that unless establishments were told firmly that there would be some penalty for over-stating requirements, it could not undertake to guarantee supplies. The rationing side of the Ministry replied that the problem was being exaggerated; only one-fifth of catering supplies went to hotels, cafés, and the like, and not all of these were in resorts. Rationing officials could not agree that an establishment's authorisation should be pared immediately, should its returns for the first month of the season prove that its original estimate of requirements had been too big; if an establishment were to be left without meat in a peak month, 'we should never hear the last of it'. A compromise was reached; Food Offices were warned that they were on no account to add a margin to any butcher's authorisation for 'anticipated demand' whether from individuals or establishments (this would be taken care of by advance allocations), and the need to check estimates against subsequent returns was at least referred to.

This particular problem was closely linked with the general one of the overlap in supplies caused by the issue of temporary ration cards. The problem was not, as might be thought, taken care of by the requirement that, in claiming replacement for temporary sales, the butcher should 'have regard to' any 'non-take-up' by his registered customers; this did not provide for a temporary reduction in his *basic* supply in a holiday season when many of his registered customers might be presumed to be away from home. Meat Division soon pressed for the form to be amended, and it was re-drafted so that the butcher could, if he wished, declare the amount of any temporary surplus. In April 1945, pressure was put on butchers to comply with this suggestion; Food Offices were told that, if butchers were 'found to be disinclined to make any allowance on their M.10 statements where a summer exodus would normally affect their trade', a suitable (e.g., 5 per cent.) reduction in the *total* authorisation should be made. In August, a test recording in Wolverhampton for two weeks of the names of butchers for whose customers temporary ration cards were issued, produced results very disconcerting for the butchers, most of whom had claimed full replacement. An investigation in Birmingham, balancing issues of temporary cards against replacement claims, had similar results. In June 1946, therefore, the procedure was made a regular routine. Any butcher who had made no allowance for three successive weeks was to have his authorisation

reviewed; if the Food Office, with its knowledge of local population movements derived from the issue of temporary ration cards, considered that such an allowance should have been made, a 5 per cent. reduction should be imposed. The first £6 (wholesale value) was to be exempt, so as to spare the small butcher.

These developments completed a circle. In 1940, Food Offices had tried to analyse the butcher's use of all his supplies from details given by him, and themselves to detect any surplus. In 1943, they required strict accounting only for the part of his supplies that was readily identifiable—that for unregistered customers and caterers. By 1945 they were again encroaching upon his basic supply; not, however, by means of devices like the stock return, but by using outside evidence to induce him to declare any surplus himself. After the war, 'sample non-take-up' became one of the items on the Weekly Assessment Sheet and, in 1951, when the statement was turned into a four-weekly one, the 'estimated value of meat not taken up' became an integral part of it.

It was, of course, more important to achieve exact allocation with meat than with any other commodity. A surplus of, say sugar, could, in theory at any rate, be reclaimed; but any surplus meat issued would soon be eaten. Meat, however, because of its variety of cut, quality, and price, and the value ration, was also more difficult to supervise than any other commodity. (Its other disadvantages of perishability and the illegal outlet afforded by cooking and manufacture, were shared by bacon.) The Ministry's command of distribution and the weekly allocation were counter-vailing advantages; it was not until a technique specifically designed for meat and using these advantages, was adopted, that meat rationing began to function smoothly. The 1943 system enjoyed comparatively settled conditions and did not, during the war, have to face a supply crisis like that of 1941; on the other hand, it did not experience a time like the 'halcyon days of 1940', when almost any meat rationing system could have functioned simply because there was plenty of meat.

C:
Rationing as an
Administrative Problem

Part V: The Rationing of Tea

CHAPTER XLI

Towards Rationing, 1937-40

I

THE TEA TRADE was the only trade that was never called upon to submit to restrictions as severe as those it had planned for itself before the war; in fact, the restrictions on it in the Second World War were, in some respects, less drastic than those accepted by it in the first. Other commodities—far more important from the nutritional point of view—were pooled, concentrated, and zoned, but, though the axe was often poised over tea, it rarely fell. Indeed, it was usually stayed by the Minister¹ himself. The rationing of tea, too, pursued unorthodox ways long after other major commodities were being filtered to the consumer through coupons, registration, and permits. These paradoxes may be explained by the part that tea was considered to play in sustaining the nation's *morale*. It might be argued that the needs of the nation's *morale* must surely have been as exigent in 1918 as in 1940. In 1940, however, the nation apparently needed not merely tea, but particular brands of tea.

These brands were of comparatively recent origin. The main feature of the tea trade between the wars was the growth of the large national packers at the expense of the older system of 'grocers' teas'. At the beginning of the century, the bulk of the tea was handled by *dealers*, who distributed chests of 'original' (i.e., unblended) tea to retailers as well as wholesalers. By 1939, however, tea had become mainly a proprietary, packeted article; over half the country's tea was handled by the 'Big Four'², who blended and packed their own teas in $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. packets for their own retail shops, and for distribution to other retailers by van for cash. There was also a considerable trade in loose blended tea, which retailers either packed for themselves or had packed under their own label by a large firm; the rest of the trade was conducted by dealers distributing original teas, old-established firms carrying on extensive postal business, firms who did a door-to-door trade with consumers mainly in 'bonus' teas, and firms who supplied customers in remote areas directly by van, delivering perhaps three months' supplies at a time. The pace in the tea trade was set by the national packers, who kept

¹ Lord Woolton.

² The Allied Suppliers group of multiple shops; the English and Scottish Joint Co-operative Society; Brooke Bond and Co. Ltd.; and J. Lyons and Co. Ltd.

not only their own prices and qualities competitive but, indirectly, those of the remaining 'grocers' teas' as well.

This change in the channels of distribution complicated further what was already an intricate trade. Tea is not a standard article; it comes in many varieties that depend on such factors as the country of origin, altitude, soil, seasonal variations of climate, and the methods of manufacture used by the tea garden. The standard grades produced by one garden may differ not only from the same grades from other gardens, but from its own at other seasons. The sampling and valuing of these varieties is the task of highly skilled brokers' experts, who habitually deal with the same gardens and know their standards. Blending is also a personal art. Before the war, the expert blender of a large firm might have to use as many as thirty different varieties when preparing one blend. No ready-made formula could be used to maintain the uniform quality of a standard blend; nor was it possible to assess with certainty the constituent values of a blended tea—a point that was to be of some importance by 1943. Tea, therefore, could never be handled in bulk; the identity of each variety had to be preserved from garden to factory.

To the complications caused by blending had now been added those of packing. At first sight this might appear to be a simplification, but from the point of view of planning for war it was the reverse. First, another link had been inserted in the chain of distribution; tea had to be drawn from the port warehouse into the packing plant before it was distributed. Secondly, a highly competitive system had developed by which every retailer in the country might draw his supplies direct from the packers' own motor-vans.¹ This change in trade channels might not have been so serious had not two-thirds of the country's packing capacity been concentrated in or around London. This was a natural enough development, for the bulk of the tea arrived in the Port of London and 90 per cent. of it was warehoused there.² It meant that if, in war-time, ships were diverted to outports, and tea stocks—'our worst example of a centralised stock in a danger area'—were dispersed, tea would still have to travel to London for packing, perhaps to return whence it had come. By war-time standards, packing plants were bottlenecks, encouraging dangerous concentration of stocks, wasteful cross-hauls, and intersecting lines of distribution. The change in trade channels had not only made them more vulnerable, it had also made them more difficult to disturb. Both retailers and consumers were thoroughly accustomed to the new order; many of the former no longer had facilities for handling any but packeted tea, and the latter had become used to a supply of cheap fresh tea, in their 'favourite

¹ Wholesalers might have up to twenty suppliers, retailers eight or nine.

² This represented also a large proportion of world tea stocks.

blends'. Both the packing of tea and the individual brands were to survive all attacks; throughout the war, the tea trade presented the paradox that, though its distribution methods were held to infringe the canons of war-time transport economy more than those of any other major commodity, they were the ones that were interfered with least.

From the point of view of rationing technique, this paradox was to have curious results. Years were spent in a vain effort to enclose tea in the strait-jacket of rationing orthodoxy, as laid down in 1918 and revived in 1940. In the end officials were constrained, by the Minister's refusal to accept National Control Tea, to accept a system of rationing that completely broke with tradition, just as did the points-rationing scheme. Tea rationing is thus more than a study in commodity problems; it is a *locus classicus* for students of rationing in general, for it triumphantly refutes the dogma that a rigorous rationing scheme demands a consumer-retailer tie.

In the first World War, control of tea distribution was preceded by experiments in the control of prices, and full Government control by a period of voluntary trade control. By April 1917 the supply was badly affected by lack of shipping; a scheme was introduced by which 40 per cent. of the tea up for auction was sold at a fixed price, the rest going free of control. In July, the percentage under control was raised to 90, divided into three grades at fixed prices. This scheme was undermined by the fabulous prices fetched by the uncontrolled tea, and by a catastrophic fall in stocks.¹ In November, Government control of supply began, and from February 1918 all tea was sold as a single Government blend at a maximum price of 2s. 8d. a lb. By March 1918 severe local shortages brought about the introduction of a distribution scheme. Tea was allocated to dealers in ratio (varying with the supply situation) to their purchases during a datum period—the year ended 30th June 1916. It was classified into three grades of which dealers received equal proportions, their actual lots of tea being determined by ballot. Finally, both retailers and wholesalers were tied to their suppliers in the datum period.

This scheme was unable to provide for population movements, more especially as the datum period was so remote. The datum principle was rigidly enforced; if a wholesaler were unable to meet a retailer's requirements out of his quota, the consumer might have to go without tea. There were also complaints from small retailers that they were not protected against neglect by their suppliers. In July 1918, therefore, a final and successful scheme was introduced in which consumers were tied to retailers. Tea was never

¹ Stocks in December 1917 were 37.4 million lb. compared with 129.8 a year before. (Monthly requirements were about 26 million lb.)

rationed¹ (except perhaps in local schemes). The retailer was allowed 2 oz. a week for each customer, but if he had tea to spare, he could sell it to those registered with him. The maximum price of 2s. 8d. a lb. now became a fixed price, to discourage competition for registrations.

The retailer drew his supplies from his wholesaler by means of an 'indent' or permit; but the datum method survived for supplying wholesalers, being adapted to the system of indents by transferring these, through the Ministry of Food, to wholesalers with a surplus. In addition, special issues in excess of datum quotas were sometimes made to meet specific shortages.²

II

The Food (Defence Plans) Department turned its attention to tea early in 1937 and, in view of the technical problems, invited the Tea Buyers' Association to appoint a committee to draw up a draft control scheme.

The Committee assumed that control would again be left as far as possible in the hands of the trade. Its distribution scheme was substantially that of July 1918, including National Control Tea, consumer rationing, and registration with retailers, but until a shortage of tea should make rationing necessary, a 'datum period' allocation would operate, as in March 1918. This time, however, the datum period would be less remote, and the system be rendered less rigid by requiring wholesalers to take population movements into account when passing allocations down to retailers. (Exactly how wholesalers were to be informed of these population movements was a matter left for decision later.) Nor would the 'datum' principle necessarily be discarded when rationing began. The trade—except for the Co-operative Movement—cherished the principle as the means of preserving existing trade channels; of ensuring that each wholesaler should end the war with the same turnover, relative to other traders, with which he began it. A wholesaler who lost orders would, of course, have to transfer his surplus to one who had gained, but he would have received and handled his full quota, preserved

¹ Beveridge, *op. cit.* pp. 126-7, also gives an account of how the Food Controller had to declare tea to be a food before he could control it. The same point arose in the Second World War but in a different context. Certain workers in the food trade were 'reserved' under the Schedule of Essential Occupations, and the question occurred whether the tea trade was a food trade.

² There were those, in consequence, who maintained to the Food (Defence Plans) Department that the datum system had been scrapped entirely in 1918.

goodwill, and shared the margins.¹ What was not clear was whether it could be reconciled with consumer rationing based on registration. Investigation of the practice of July 1918 appeared to show that it could; but the Food (Defence Plans) Department consented to its embodiment in the full scheme of tea control with significant reservations:

'If circumstances permitted tea would continue to be issued to licensed traders in quantities based upon their datum period quota, and any trader receiving indents from retailers or secondary wholesalers in . . . excess of his quota would be required to transfer the excess under arrangements approved by the Food Controller to traders whose quotas were not filled. . . .²

'The object of the retention of the datum period principle after the introduction of rationing would be to keep intact, so far as practicable, the existing trade connections. This principle might, however, have to be abandoned if the system should at any time fail to ensure the equitable distribution of tea throughout the country and amongst all classes of the population.

'The Food Controller would reserve the right to distribute tea at any time through any channel which might seem to him to be best according to the exigencies of the situation.'

Three phases of controlled tea distribution were thus envisaged; an interim period between the outbreak of war and the beginning of rationing, during which 'datum' allocation would prevail, a period in which this would be combined with consumer rationing, and a final stage in which the permit system would be extended right up to primary suppliers. In the event, though tea distribution did go through approximately these three stages, the full tea scheme was never put into effect. The two features most taken for granted before the war were dropped—National Control Tea and the registration of consumers with retailers.

The supposedly indissoluble link between these two was the main reason why the tie to the retailer was never applied to tea. Yet it had been agreed that 'a full scheme of control involving the dropping of existing blends and labels, and the packing of tea under a Government label, would be brought into operation at the earliest possible moment after the outbreak of war'. Pooling of tea was to be the

¹ It was feared that disturbance of trade channels in the case of tea might be more than for other commodities, because of a swing from the specialist merchant to the general grocer with whom the housewife was registered for other foods. Hence the desire of the trade that tea should not be rationed in the general ration book. The same point was to arise when sweets were rationed.

² This was to be done through a Tea Wholesale Distributors Association; a war-time association set up on the lines of those for other commodities, to enable problems resulting from the disturbance or breaking of trade channels to be settled within the trade concerned, with the Food Controller remaining in the background. This device was accepted with some reluctance by the Committee and was later dropped.

subject of lively debate as late as 1943 and it will be well, at this point, to set out the issues.

National Control Tea would enable the nearest possible approach to be made to handling tea in bulk. If tea were dealt with in broad grades rather than varieties, warehousing, allocation, and delivery would be greatly simplified; it could be moved in bulk from warehouses to the nearest packing plants, their output could be 'zoned', and the final overlapping distribution to the retailer eliminated. The National Control Tea envisaged before the war represented, however, no more than a 'one brand per packer' scheme, put forward as a solution for one short-term problem; the dispersal of London tea stocks. Dispersal would mean that the daily withdrawals from bond, necessary to maintain the numerous blends, would have to cease; moreover, the dispersed tea could not be allocated selectively, but would be roughly blended at its destination—'a reasonable mixture' was all the Department hoped for—and packed at the nearest plant. Traders were agreed, therefore, that once duty-paid stocks were exhausted the only fair step would be to abandon the pretence of individual blends.¹

It was acknowledged that either the destruction of packing plant, or the need to economise in transport, might entail the abandonment of trade connections and the complete anonymity of National Control Tea; but 'there should be no alteration of the existing arrangements for distribution', resolved the Central Tea Distribution (Defence) Committee in 1938, 'unless this becomes imperative either through force of circumstances or by Government decision'. This resolution might serve as text for this history, much of which is concerned with the various attempts to secure just such a Government decision. Pre-war plans were therefore based on the principle that the existing organisation of the trade should be used as long as possible; packing must continue, as 'the packet trade was now firmly established, and it would be extremely difficult to go back to the old method of local blending and weighing'; dispersal of plant was rejected because '. . . the delicate machinery used in the packing trade could only be moved with difficulty and . . . it was unlikely that new machinery could be obtained in war-time . . .';² the pooling of deliveries to retailers was suggested but the Department held that 'such a scheme of rationalised transport could only be introduced if it was agreed that trade should also be pooled and normal trade

¹ The standard label was designed and traders warned in June 1939 to lay in stocks of them.

² One firm sought, in 1938, to build a factory in a 'safe' area (Basingstoke), but the local residents appealed against it under the Town and Country Planning Act, and won. The Department gave what support it could but had not the overriding authority to sponsor the project as fully as the firm would have liked.

connections abandoned' (an opinion that was justified in 1942). If the London packing plants were put out of action, London and the Home Counties might be supplied from Greenford (eight miles out), and some London plants might be closed to provide staff there; Manchester would become the tea centre for the rest of the country; provincial firms would be advised to form groups to pack for each other if plant were destroyed; as a last resort, retailers might have to be given loose blended or even original tea during temporary breakdowns. It was thought, and this proved correct, that a complete breakdown of packing was unlikely. But neither the Department nor the trade expected the 'existing arrangements for distribution' to survive as successfully as they did.

The draft distribution scheme was accepted by the Tea Buyers' Association in November 1937; the next step was to secure similar plans from the Growers' and Brokers' Associations for their sections of the trade and to combine them in one comprehensive control scheme. This process was still going on when war broke out but, on the whole, tea control was ready. A good deal of detailed work had been done, mainly by the trade itself under the aegis of the Central Tea Distribution (Defence) Committee, a body that had succeeded the Tea Buyers' drafting committee in September 1938 and acted as a shadow tea control. Two sets of datum returns had been collected (for 1938 and the first half of 1939); voluntary Port Tea Officers had earmarked provincial storage accommodation; information about storage and packing capacity had been obtained from firms; lists of wholesalers had been prepared; the trade forms necessary for control drafted, and the intricate arrangements for the dispersal of tea stocks from London worked out with the wharfingers, the Port of London Authority, and the Customs.¹

III

Tea control organisation consisted of Headquarters—at Colwyn Bay after July 1940—and the trade, organised into 'Selling Section' and 'Distribution Section' operating from London. The first, composed of traders and civil servants, was responsible for procurement,

¹ It was necessarily a complicated scheme, partly because of the Customs formalities connected with tea, partly because tea had to be sent off in grades that could be blended at the arrival end, partly because it had to be sent to areas where it could be packed.

shipping, and warehousing; the second, which consisted of brokers,¹ valued, graded, and allocated the tea, and was responsible for all the transactions necessary for transferring it from the Ministry to traders; the third was a committee of primary wholesalers which had no executive functions but acted as a liaison between the distributive trade and tea control. Roughly, therefore, Headquarters was responsible for tea before it entered the market (and, of course, for policy); Selling Section put it into the market, and Distribution Section advised on problems that arose when it was there. After July 1940, when tea was rationed, the Ministry's Rationing Division also became concerned with tea distribution.

Control began on 5th September 1939; auctions were abandoned, and the interim scheme, with tea distributed on the datum principle, came into force. The first allocations were made on 12th September.² Under the datum system tea was controlled at one point only, its entry into the chain of distribution via the *primary wholesalers*. These, about 280 in number,³ drew their tea in peace-time direct from bond, in war-time direct from Selling Section. Their tea was allocated in proportion to the amount on which they had paid duty during the datum period (1st January 1938 to 30th June 1939). Each received an equal proportion of three grades of tea, high, medium, and low, the particular lots assigned being determined by a draw.⁴ Distribution below the primaries was left in their hands and not controlled by Order. They supplied their customers, wholesale and retail, on the basis of usual purchases, subject to the obligation

¹ This is an over-simplified description of the work of the two Sections, but this account is concerned only with the last stage of distribution—the transfer of tea to the final consumer. The brokers of Selling Section operated from their own offices, dealing with the gardens they dealt with in peace-time; each broker was responsible for the tea in one warehouse or a group of warehouses. As stock recording, allocation, and finance were necessarily complicated, Selling Section had to maintain central offices and a considerable staff. One of the brokers' first tasks was to deal with the legacy of the dispersal scheme; requisitioned tea had to be paid for, and the duty-paid tea accidentally included in the dispersal traced and returned to its owners. The year 1940/41 was a particularly difficult one for Selling Section: warehouses were damaged and tea lost—which brought claims for replacement of stocks or damage; tea was dispersed to provincial warehouses; allocation and deliveries were interfered with by air-raids, and, on 10th/11th May 1941, half the brokers' offices, with their records, were destroyed.

² The proportion, frequency, and amounts, of the allocations varied in the early days. The first allocations were of four days' supplies but after April 1941 they were stabilised at 4 weeks' supplies. Deferring allocations was a rudimentary way of conserving stocks but sometimes they fell behind involuntarily.

The percentage of the datum issued was

1939 September	100
1940 May	90
July	70 (Rationing had begun)
September	75

It then varied between 70 and 100 until March 1941 when it was stabilised at 75.

³ They were later reduced to about 80. Small primaries formed groups and received allocations through a 'group leader'.

⁴ They might subsequently exchange lots among themselves.

to make reasonable provision for variations in demand caused by population movements.

It was clear that the datum system would stand or fall by the primaries' success in discharging this obligation. Their task was not so extensive as it might appear. First, a distinction was maintained between changes in local demand caused by altered shopping habits (themselves due to reduction of retail delivery services, lack of local transport, and, later, registration for other commodities) and those caused by an influx of population into a district. Only the latter were regarded as a valid reason for increasing a retailer's supplies. 'Provided', stated Distribution Section, 'there is sufficient tea in an area it does not seem reasonable to set up . . . complicated machinery . . . simply to enable one distributor in an area to obtain trade at the expense of another'. The tea need not, therefore, be in the shop at which the consumer expected or wished to buy it. Secondly, the population movements were thought of as one-way movements into reception areas—as at first they were. Later, however, corresponding movements into new or existing industrial areas developed and it was these, together with the pressure of changed shopping habits, that in 1941 brought the datum system to an end. Before the war, however the problem of equitable distribution under the datum system was considered mainly in terms of meeting increased demand from reception areas; a natural enough attitude when it is remembered that the datum system was intended to apply only to an interim period before tea became scarce enough to demand exact distribution based on rationing and registration.

Some attention had been given to ways of helping the primaries to identify and meet this 'genuine' increased demand. No trouble was expected in the initial evacuation period because the 'Big Four' had stocked up their retailers—tea was more widely dispersed in this way than any other commodity—and the primaries had been given the official evacuation figures. The problem was to meet continual changes in demand. In July 1939, a leading member of the trade suggested that retailers might be given certificates of increased population in their districts by Food Offices, and so elicit extra supplies from their wholesalers. In December, an official of the Tea Division suggested that the registration figures for other commodities might be used as a yardstick; primaries could be given figures for each area showing the necessary percentage adjustment—up or down. The first suggestion was turned down by the Food (Defence Plans) Department, on the grounds that it assumed that 'the retailer would want either his usual supply or more', and that such use of Food Offices was inappropriate to a scheme in which control was left to the trade. Distribution Section was equally averse to tampering with the datum principle, because the result would only be a crop of applica-

tions for permanently increased quotas. The Department set out clearly the lease to be given to the datum system:

'... the tea scheme without rationing is appropriate only to conditions in which there is nearly a full supply. We allocate a datum quota to primaries in the belief that if the supply is almost equal to a full peace-time demand, they will have little difficulty in distributing equitably. . . . If they cannot do this it will probably be because the total supply is getting a bit tight and when this happens, instead of setting up an *ad hoc* piece of machinery based upon the Food Offices, I think we must use one of the spare pages in the Ration Book.'

There proved, however, to be one flaw in this reasoning; the assumption that the datum system could operate in war-time on *nearly* a peace-time supply. From September 1939 to May 1940, 100 per cent. of the datum was being released—a full peace-time supply; yet local shortages undoubtedly existed.

Complaints of shortages came from retailers, not consumers, and there was no evidence that the latter actually had to go without tea. The shortages could be ascribed at first to the inevitable dislocation caused by the dispersal of tea from London, the diversion of shipping, and interference with transport. That they persisted was due partly to over-purchase and hoarding, partly to rising consumption under war-time conditions, especially in industrial areas. Such of these as were evacuation areas were expected to provide a 'natural' surplus over peace-time consumption, but even if this existed, there was no machinery for getting hold of it. If a retailer's trade had increased, he called for extra supplies; if it had decreased, he took his 'usual purchases'.

Distribution Section, anxious that shortages should be met, investigated complaints, saw that the retailer was receiving his full entitlement, and then, if necessary, made special allocations in excess of datum quotas from an emergency pool. This machinery could not anticipate a shortage, or prevent the semblance of one to consumers who had to go from shop to shop, and to retailers who had to turn away custom. It could get the tea to the right area, given time, just because there was enough tea to enable increased local demand to be satisfied by special allocations without 'gathering up the minus demand' elsewhere.

In December 1939 there was some alarm at the amount of tea being released¹ and ways were considered of reducing consumption. The price might be raised; however, it had already gone up by from 2d. to 4d. a lb.,² and any further increase was ruled out on Cost-

¹ Some 40,000,000 lb. a month, as against a monthly consumption in 1938 of 35,000,000 lb.

² There was a surcharge to cover expenses incurred by the Ministry while the tea was in its possession, but the rise was due mainly to the high proportion of fine teas in the early allocations which raised the average price of tea.

of-Living Index grounds. The alternative, rationing, was also rejected; first, on general grounds of public morale, secondly, because there was, as yet, no 'real' shortage of tea and the trade's view was that 'the only reason that should weigh for rationing . . . should be a definite shortage of supplies', thirdly, because it was, at that time, assumed to mean registration, and registration, 'pool' tea.

By rights, National Control Tea should, of course, already have been in existence; the signal for its introduction was to have been the dispersal of London tea stocks. This dispersal had duly begun, but it went more slowly than had been expected.¹ By 14th September 1939, some 30,000 tons had been sent out of London, but about 40,000 tons remained and more was on the way; ' . . . tea ships', wrote an official, 'continue to arrive in London . . . and we have the spectacle of tea being moved by us out of the back door whilst it is coming in through the front door from the ships'. Blenders' own duty-paid stocks were nearly exhausted and the alternatives were to decree the introduction of pool tea or to call off the dispersal. In the absence of air raids, the Ministry did the latter. Pool tea continued to be discussed that autumn but

'the determination of a margin for expenses and profits which would be acceptable to all sections of the retail trade proved . . . to be a matter of some difficulty, and discussions were still proceeding . . . when it was decided, as a result of the Press campaign against pooled commodities, to abandon the idea of National Control Tea for the time being'.

In December, the main argument against pool tea was that it could not be sold at less than 2s. 7d. a lb. If it were to be introduced at a time when tea was still to be had at 2s. 2d. a lb., half the nation would complain of the price and the other half of the quality; it would have the very effect on the Cost-of-Living Index that the Ministry was anxious to avoid, and it would destroy the trade competition that kept the price of tea low—and so, of course, encouraged consumption. (A compromise might have been two blends of pool tea, but as early as 1937 brokers had opposed this on the grounds that the cheaper tea would have to be controlled separately at all stages of distribution, partly to prevent it getting into the packets of the dearer tea, partly to prevent it going under the counter. Now, it was argued that the price would have to be raised to offset losses on the dearer tea and that the cheap blend would therefore disappear from natural causes.)

The result of rejecting any attempt to restrict consumption was, of course, to accept the obligation to provide more than a peace-time

¹ Customs and warehousing formalities, though simplified, still meant a great deal of paper work. Half-way through the operation they were simplified still further.

supply of tea. As with sugar in 1916-17, a 'datum' system of distribution could not operate equitably on *nearly* a peace-time supply, or even on a *full* peace-time supply, but only on *more than* a peace-time supply. The question was how long this lavish distribution of tea could continue.

IV

In May 1940 the 'real' shortage arrived. Shipping delays caused by the closing of the Mediterranean, combined with the usual low seasonal arrivals, threatened to reduce stocks to a bare six weeks' supplies by the beginning of August. Tea Division hoped that cutting allocations to 90 per cent. of datum, together with an appeal for economy, would see it through, but throughout May and June rationing was under discussion. The Division put forward a scheme under which tea would be rationed to consumers by means of coupons, but retailers would continue to receive their supplies as datum quotas. Any tighter system must, it argued, lead to National Control Tea; if individual blends were continued, retailers would have to carry very large stocks—thus defeating the purpose of rationing—and they might also disturb trade channels by transferring their custom to suppliers who gave them the largest profits. The Division did not want to dislocate the trade and jettison a system that was working fairly well, merely to deal with a temporary shortage.

Rationing Division sincerely hoped that Tea Division's economy appeal would tide over the impending crisis, for it held strongly that tea, because of individual preferences and its importance as a 'morale builder', was not suitable for rationing at all. If, however, tea did have to be rationed, the job should be done properly—with registration—otherwise the public might ask whether registration was really necessary. 'If we were forced into the loose coupon system for other commodities as the result of allowing it in the case of tea, we might find ourselves in serious difficulty.' The only method of enforcing such a scheme would be *agent provocateur* action which was extremely unpopular; 'the morale of the observance of the Rationing Orders did not stand high at present', and widespread evasion of tea rationing would weaken it still further. Rationing Division suggested that there should be registration for tea, but no buying permits. The system would look the same as that for other commodities but the datum method of allocation would continue inside it; the primaries would have the registration figures to help them. Because tea, being eminently hoardable, had to be rationed without warning, it was proposed to introduce rationing first and require consumers to register later.

By the beginning of July, however, there was no time for further debate; arrivals during that month would not cover consumption, and the threat of invasion demanded that allocations should at once be cut from 90 to 70 per cent. of the datum to conserve stocks.¹ It was decided to introduce 'loose coupon rationing' as a merely temporary measure. Rationing Division's qualms were thus overcome; rationing was not expected to last beyond the end of August, and it was only last-minute caution that led to the omission of the word 'temporary' from public announcements (it was not omitted from those to the trade and to Food Offices). The beginning of rationing did not, therefore, bring about any change in the system of distribution; this was merely fitted with a valve each end so as to carry it through a temporary shortage. Yet the rationing of tea without registration proved to be as final as the decision, in September 1939, not to introduce National Control Tea for the moment, and the datum system was used for over a year in a way that had never been intended—first as the sole, and then as the main, basis of distribution at a time when tea was scarce enough to require rationing.

¹ Stock figures for July throughout the war. (July was the month when stocks were lowest.)

1939	.	.	.	158.7 (million lb.)
1940	.	.	.	67.3
1941	.	.	.	122.0
1942	.	.	.	139.3
1943	.	.	.	162.2
1944	.	.	.	200.4
1945	.	.	.	196.3

In 1917, stocks fell to 37 million lb.

CHAPTER XLII

The Drive for Conformity, 1940-42

I

TEA RATIONING began on 9th July 1940.¹ The weekly domestic ration was 2 oz. a head; catering establishments were not restricted because this would have hit industrial canteens, but they were expected to confine themselves to their normal purchases.² The domestic ration could be covered by two-thirds of the datum,³ but allocations were kept at 70 per cent. to cover catering requirements.

Even such a loose form of rationing caused some dislocation in the trade, and threw up administrative problems that 'inundated the Rationing Division with tea troubles' in the first few weeks.⁴ The Division had to create a precedent by allowing two weeks' tea coupons (because tea packets are 4 oz. or multiples thereof) to be used at once; this had to be extended to four weeks' coupons in the case of the postal trade which, threatened with extinction, protested strenuously. Proviso was made that no parcel under 3 lb. in weight should be sent, but when postal firms pointed out that this would limit their trade to households of six or more, the minimum was reduced to 2 lb. Firms with a van trade who visited customers in remote areas two or three times a year sought concession vainly; it was going too far to allow three months' coupons to be used at once.⁵

Rationing officials continued to hope that tea rationing would shortly end. They disliked it in general, as inequitable—the normal consumption of tea varying widely between different social classes and occupations—and, in its then form, in particular, as unenforceable. To some extent the trappings of control were there. The retailer

¹ S.R. & O. 1940, No. 1181. The Order was accompanied by a Standstill Prices Order pegging prices to those prevailing on 1st July. In addition, three of the 'Big Four' entered into a gentlemen's agreement to continue to provide tea at 2s. 4d. a lb.

² An effort was made to ascertain these normal purchases by requiring a return from establishments of their consumption during the month preceding rationing. The response was poor.

³ Weekly consumption in peace-time was 2.9 oz. a head; the datum represented about 8,000,000 lb. a week.

⁴ The arrangements had necessarily to be drawn up hurriedly; in addition, the introduction of tea rationing coincided with the move to Colwyn Bay.

⁵ An interesting point arose when herbal teas and tea mixtures came up for consideration. The former were not affected, but any mixture containing dutiable tea was regarded as tea for rationing purposes. This produced the effect of applying a legal Order to mixtures that might themselves be illegal, since the adulteration of tea was, apparently, still forbidden under three 18th-century Acts that had never been repealed.

sent the Food Office the coupons he collected, the Order Book forms he received from establishments, and his usual monthly '3' form—a statement of stocks at the beginning and end of the period, and sales and purchases during it.¹ If the figures on this form were accurate, sales off-coupon could be detected. But there was no evidence against which it could be checked—not even a permit 'ceiling'; the retailer's supplies were datum quotas entirely outside the province of the Food Office, which learned of them only through the purchases figure on his own statement. Catering establishments were even more difficult to supervise. Those buying retail had to use official Order Books, as for other rationed commodities; no permits, however, were needed by those buying wholesale. Both classes of establishments made a monthly statement of their consumption of rationed foods, but Food Executive Officers who tried to treat tea like any other rationed commodity and impose a quota on establishments had little material to go upon. A comparison of the Order Book forms sent in by retailers with the consumption returns of the establishments buying from them, might reveal 'unreasonable figures'; but for establishments buying wholesale the only evidence was their invoices. Further up the chain of distribution, the absence of permits was even more keenly felt. 'Wholesaler-retailers' made returns to cover the retail side of their businesses, but could hardly be expected to give a stock figure, as stocks for the retail and wholesale sides were not handled separately. It was feared that these mixed firms, half in and half out of the system, might prove to be a formidable loophole if rationing were to continue for any length of time.

As early as August 1940 Divisional Food Officers were asked for a report on the 'loose coupon' system. The majority replied that from the consumers' point of view it seemed to be working well; they were getting their ration without difficulty and appreciated the freedom to choose retailers and brands. From the Food Office point of view, however, the system could not be taken seriously; lack of evidence of abuse did not necessarily mean that there was none. Moreover, distribution was obviously being 'cushioned' from extensive trade stocks. This was the crux of the matter. Just as, before rationing began, a loose distribution system could be afforded because there was plenty of tea, so now, a loose rationing system could be afforded because apparently there was still plenty of tea. At any rate, it was not yet scarce enough to demand that only the minimum requirements should be released.

Rationing had been introduced to save tea; but legitimate demand within the system was increasing. Allocations, though raised in

¹ At this time, there was a '3' form for each commodity. Later they were combined into one return—G.C.3. See p. 569, above.

September 1940 to 75 per cent. of the datum, were not covering consumption. Although bulk stocks were being protected, trade stocks were being exhausted. Moreover, bulk stocks did not escape unscathed. Distribution Section still had to maintain a pool, from which, after adjusting 'pluses and minuses' among wholesalers, it made extra grants. New large catering businesses such as the canteens run by the Y.M.C.A., the Red Cross, the Port of London Authority, and the like, drew their supplies, through their wholesalers, largely from this pool,¹ that is, over and above 'datum' supplies. The rising demand was due partly to 'the mushroom growths of canteens, etc., which have sprung up during the last few months'; partly to a variety of concessions that had been made.

They had had to be made because, to take only a few examples adduced, people could not run a village dance, raise money for Spitfire funds, get married, make steel, or maintain *morale* in air-raids, without tea.² The first concession (to Civil Defence workers) came a week after rationing began; it was soon followed by the most important of all—to 'industrial, clerical and business workers, who had no access to canteens registered as catering establishments'. Other concessions made in 1940 covered First Aid posts, maternity and child welfare centres, railway breakdown gangs, railwaymen on lodging turns, 'charitable functions organised by reputable bodies for the entertainment of the sick, wounded (including those who had suffered in earlier wars), the aged, the poor, the blind, and children under 14'; special functions, 'not more than once a week, organised for clubs of boys and girls (predominantly under 19) under the auspices of well-established and reputable bodies', weddings (because it was unfair to penalise families who could not afford the services of a caterer), and voluntary working parties. They were followed next year by concessions to coastguards, Port War and Signal stations, agricultural workers at the sheep-shearing, harvesting, threshing, and hay-making seasons, and of dry tea to certain railwaymen.³

The last represented also a concession of principle. Hitherto the Ministry had managed to keep its concessions communal and not individual. Tea for office workers' groups was really a supplementary ration, and it was natural that miners, steelworkers, quarrymen, railway workers, and others who took a flask of tea to work with

¹ So did some large municipal bodies like the London County Council.

² Concessions amounted to about 85,000 lb. a week in October 1940. By 1942 they had risen to 214,000 lb. a week. They were given by means of T/PT/2 permits issued by Food Offices, which were valid for eight weeks. In practice they were usually renewed automatically, and there was no review of them during the first year of tea rationing. They were calculated on the basis of 200 cups of tea to 1 lb. and could only be used for purchases from retailers (though the War Office secured an exception to this for permits issued to the Home Guard).

³ See p. 592, above.

them instead of sharing a communal brew, should press for similar treatment. The Ministry admitted that the distinction between two teaspoonfuls in a pot and 'two teaspoonfuls in a piece of paper' was indefensible, but, seeing itself being impelled towards a policy of differential rationing, fended off the representations of the Trades Union Congress with the assurance that tea rationing was temporary.

Instead, the autumn of 1940 found the rationing side of the Ministry, whose rôle hitherto had been merely to hold the ring so as to ease the trade's task of distribution, becoming more active. The trouble was again the 'reception areas', which were receiving a new influx of population.¹ The problems of datum distribution were revived:

'It is very difficult', wrote the Head of Distribution Section to the Director of Tea Supplies on 9th October, 'to deal with a whole district by means of Emergency allocations, such a district is served by a large number of shopkeepers, large and small, who draw their supplies from many different suppliers and not only would it be quite inequitable for a shopkeeper here and there to have extra supplies but it would not meet the position with a district where shortage may become widespread. . . . The solution of the whole business is clearly more Tea being available. . . . I do also sometimes wonder', he concluded, 'whether a lot of Tea is being sold away from the ration, as we find it so difficult to get evidence of any district . . . not requiring so much tea as they had before.'

A palliative was sought in the very piece of *ad hoc* machinery that had been rejected in July 1939.² Food Executive Officers were empowered by a circular of 20th November, to issue permits (valid for four weeks, but renewable if necessary) to a retailer who needed increased supplies because of new demands *caused by population movements*. No retailer was to have his supplies increased by a percentage greater than that by which the population of his district had grown, nor was a permit to be given merely to enable him to serve all his registered customers with tea. In other words, changed shopping habits were still not recognised as a reason for adjusting the datum system. Nevertheless the circular did represent a significant change. For the first time, the job of adjustment was handed to the rationing side, i.e., to Food Executive Officers; the principle of full control by the trade had been impaired. The system was still one-sided, for it had no means of 'gathering up the minus demand'. (It was also a much odder combination of datum with permit than that apparently used in July 1918, for the two were now combined

¹ Rationing had increased demand in some reception areas: they contained a large number of children who, though not great tea-drinkers, possessed a ration which was bought.

² See p. 707, above.

at the retail level, instead of the former being used for wholesalers, the latter for retailers.)

Meanwhile, the hope that tea could be shortly derationed had dwindled into a Christmas present of a double ration for one week, and by the New Year, had gone altogether; the final blow had been the shipping allocation for 1941. The stock position was satisfactory compared with that of the summer of 1940,¹ but it had not improved as much as the more stringent conditions of the winter of 1940-41 demanded. The difficulty now was transport; there had been heavy shipping losses—and four to five months' supply was still afloat—and internal transport was being badly affected by the heavy air-raids.

II

The news that tea rationing must be considered permanent immediately led the rationing side of the Ministry to ask whether the time had not come to base it on principles rather than expedients; in other words, to introduce registration, buying permits, and tighter control of caterers. Its case was strengthened by the disappearance, in January 1941, of even the ostensible check on retailers; coupons for all commodities were now cancelled, and not cut out. Moreover, it argued that registration could be made compatible with branded tea, if retailers were allowed, say five suppliers, as they were for butter.² If at least one of these suppliers were a general wholesaler, the retailer could still carry a fair number of brands. Admittedly, there might ensue a margins war between suppliers to secure retailers' permits, with disastrous effect on the quality of the tea in the packet, but this might be prevented by 'freezing' retailers to their present suppliers, and to the quantities they were buying from each—a prophetic suggestion that was to be put into force in 1944.

For the moment, the Director of Tea was persuaded; the detailed preparations were started for registration to begin in March 1941. But the Director had agreed to registration only because it seemed the

¹ At the end of December 1940, bulk stocks were 150,000,000 lb. (14 weeks' supply). 183,000,000 lb. were still afloat, and 116,000,000 still unshipped. The minimum safe stock for smooth working was held to be 110-120,000,000 lb. These figures did not include stocks held by secondary wholesalers, which were difficult to compute. It had been hoped, when rationing was imposed, to build stocks up to 200,000,000 lb. by October.

Tea in warehouses was not necessarily tea ready for allocation. For example, with a bulk stock of 80,000,000 lb., the Tea Division had found difficulty in scraping together the first allocation under rationing. Tea needed much handling, and though the Division was working to speed up these processes, interference with transport, lack of skilled warehousing in the provinces, and damage to warehouses, slowed up the speed at which tea could be made ready for allocation.

² This, however, as butter was pooled, was difficult to justify; from 1942 retailers were to be confined to one supplier. See p. 627 *seq.*, above.

best way out of an inflationary situation; he soon became convinced that registration without pool tea would not work. 'The sudden marriage of retailers to their wholesalers' would not control the quality of tea; sooner or later detailed control of prices and margins would be called for, and this would be impossible as long as brands survived. His remedy would have been the abolition of the new emergency permits, and a return to the old system of full control by the primary wholesalers. In April 1941, registration for the sake of 'mere tidiness' was therefore rejected.

It was agreed, however, that the time had come to impose a permit system on catering establishments; but what should be the basis of the permits? An allowance of tea for each customer served was no restriction at all; establishments must be given a fixed quantity and left to make it 'go round' by serving fewer or weaker cups. One yardstick already existed; the special permits for concessions were calculated at 1 lb. of tea to 200 cups served (the ratio adopted by many establishments on their Order Book forms to retailers). It would be difficult to apply a different measure of a 'reasonable brew' to caterers. But their methods of brewing tea varied widely, from establishments that served individual pots and produced 4 gallons of tea from a pound, through those that used large pots and produced 10 gallons from a pound, those that used bags in urns and produced 30 gallons, up to industrial canteens using strong-liquoring tea and steam-brewing urns that extracted 64 gallons from a pound—a figure received incredulously by the Ministry's Catering Adviser. To apply the same scale of allowance to all would not only be inequitable, it would also produce a scramble for the strong-liquoring teas. It was finally agreed that the best basis would be 100 per cent. of datum usage over a long period. In May 1941, however, the discussion was overtaken by a revival of the general discussion on registration for domestic consumers, and when catering establishments again came up for review, changed policy had made this decision obsolete.

Meanwhile, more radical proposals were being pressed in another quarter. At the beginning of January 1941, those responsible for safeguarding supplies in emergency had been shocked to learn, as a result of an appeal from a tea firm that wished to transfer its packing plant, but had lost its chosen premises to the Ministry of Aircraft Production,¹ that three-fifths of the total packing plant was still in or around London. This meant that more than half the country's tea stocks were there as well,² and that tea was being imported into

¹ The same firm that had tried, before the war, to move to Basingstoke.

² The figures given were; total stocks 120,000,000 lb. of which 40,000,000 Ministry, and 37,000,000 trade, stocks were in London.

London for packing, and then re-distributed. The result was a demand, on grounds of safety, that packing should either be decentralised or cease altogether.

Tea Division had been working towards such decentralisation since the beginning of the war. Stocks were being dispersed and by 1942 were to be stored in nearly 500 warehouses scattered over the country, as compared with 30, mainly in London, before the war. This feat called for a considerable change in the methods of shipping and storing, for tea requires skilled sorting, and such skill was normally concentrated in the Port and warehouses of London. Roughly speaking, the Division's policy was to simplify warehousing by handling tea in larger units. The normal unit was the 'grade'; each garden mark (or invoice)¹ contained four to five grades. The new unit, the 'block', consisting of about 2,000 chests, comprised about 15 garden marks and up to 80 different grades of tea. Each chest of tea was marked with the block number, and the block was stowed and unloaded as a unit. The Division, which received a copy of the ship's stowage plan at the port of entry, could thus disperse blocks to their destinations without first sorting to marks or grades at the port. This process was complemented by piling in warehouses in larger units—normally each chest was numbered individually, handled separately, and so stacked that delivery of any particular chest could be made.²

At some point, skilled sorting became necessary, and even at the height of the dispersal, only about 150 warehouses were 'working' warehouses, with the space and skill necessary to bring tea to account; the remainder might be described as 'holding' warehouses. Nevertheless, the simplified system met the problems of cargoes diverted to ports unaccustomed to handling tea, congestion at smaller ports, quick discharge of ships, the need to avoid dock transit sheds, and the use of semi-skilled warehousing. These problems had a bearing on tea distribution in general; if a time should come when tea could no longer be sorted to grades, it would not be possible to maintain numerous brands. Conversely, the abolition of brands might be urged as a means of saving manpower and warehouse space. This

¹ 'Garden' and 'mark' are usually the same, but sometimes a 'mark' is different from the name of the garden. 'Garden invoice' might be a better term than 'garden mark'.

² Chests were normally piled five high and two wide, back to back. A gangway was left between each double row so that particular chests could be identified when application for delivery was made. It will be understood why confusion arose in the initial dispersal in 1939 when tea was sent to some warehouses according to their cubic capacity only. Tea Division had, as part of its dispersal policy, to carry out a good deal of educational work, for it was using provincial and temporary warehouses that had never handled tea. It issued instructions and notes for guidance for all phases of the work, and maintained travelling inspectors to provide expert knowledge. Its first experience of this kind was when the responsibility for the tea dispersed in 1939 was handed over to it some six weeks after the dispersal. It sent inspectors and teams of skilled London warehousemen to the provinces to re-identify the tea, and deal with cargoes diverted to British ports—a job that took six months.

growing decentralisation of warehousing could not have its full effect unless there were a corresponding decentralisation of packing plant; and here Tea Division was having less success with the trade.

Considerations of safety demanded, in the conditions of January 1941, that only enough tea should be kept in London to feed the London area; not enough, that is, to feed London's packing plant. To accept this would be to accept National Control Tea; first, because a full supply of packed tea could only be maintained if the whole of London's packing capacity were used;¹ secondly, if the London firms were to be so restricted, the individual labels of the rest must disappear; thirdly, provincial warehouses could not bring tea to account in sufficient variety to enable all the individual blends to continue. On 4th February, the matter was put to the Minister:

'... The only present obstacle, as I understand, to the liquidation of this dangerous position is your disinclination to introduce a national controlled tea. I do not know how strongly you feel about this, or how long ago your view about it was formed. I submit, however, that the time has come when we must be prepared to face the consequences... of discontinuing the supply of packeted teas. It is packeting which necessitates the transport to London of two-thirds of all the tea imported (mainly through Liverpool) and if packeting were dispensed with it would be possible to distribute directly from the port of entry to the various provincial depots. Not only would this avoid the dangerous position in which we are in regard to tea stocks by having so large a proportion of the total stocks in a narrow and extremely vulnerable area in London, but it would obviate a great deal of unnecessary transport—a consideration which in existing conditions of internal transport is of some moment.'

This proposal was very drastic. Tea Division's own plan, put forward on 20th February, was for one brand of *packeted* tea (at 2s. 8d. a lb., the price of 55 per cent. of the tea bought). The country could then be divided into regions round the packing plant, and tea could be allocated from premises within those regions. The Minister's views on National Control Tea, however, were both strong and old-established. 'I hope', he had written in mid-November, 'that we shall not adopt bulk tea as a solution of our tea problems without giving it the gravest consideration'. Now he objected that it would penalise the poor, and suggested that there might at least be two blends, as with margarine. On 3rd March, he took another way out. He asked the Director of Tea to place three requirements before the trade: there must continue to be a good supply of cheap tea for

¹ National packing capacity was 9.4 million lb. a week. Plants in or near London accounted for 6 million lb. To maintain the existing blends and channels of trade, 4.4 million lb. had to be packed in London (2/3rds of the whole) and 40,000,000 lb. of Ministry and trade stocks kept there.

the poor; tea must travel less; tea stocks must be less vulnerable. If the trade could not give an undertaking that it could by its own arrangements fulfil these three conditions, then the Ministry must take over complete control of packing and introduce pool tea.

By the end of April the trade, with some prodding from critical officials, had submitted a detailed plan, which may be summed up as continuing competition tempered by more co-operation. Plant would be still more decentralised; reciprocal packing arrangements would be pushed forward as interim measures, and bilateral agreements for permanent co-operative packing already in existence would—it was hoped—be extended;¹ smaller wholesalers would be grouped, so as to avoid small allocations and deliveries. Finally, London tea stocks would be kept down to 40,000,000 lb., the minimum needed to maintain the present channels of distribution. The plan would admittedly take time to carry out; but in May it was considered an alternative to pool tea and the disruption of the trade promising enough to be given a trial run.

III

No sooner had pool tea been scotched than it revived, in its old context of registration. This question had been laid aside in April 1941 with the proviso that it would have to be reopened 'if the supply position became tight, so that we could release only the bare minimum required, or if there was evidence that consumers were experiencing difficulty on a considerable scale in getting their rations. . . .' By May, the second condition appeared to have been fulfilled; the opinion that consumers' difficulties now called for registration was expressed by an Assistant Divisional Food Officers' (Rationing) conference on 20th May, the consultative conference of the retail trade on 23rd May,² a conference of Divisional Food Officers on 27th May, and in the report of the Committee on the Distribution of Unrationed Foodstuffs on 4th June. What was unexpected was that the drive for registration was now led, not by the rationing side, but by Tea Division.

¹ For instance, Allied Suppliers were to pack the Nottingham requirements of the C.W.S.; the C.W.S. would pack Allied Suppliers' northern requirements in Manchester.

² In order to keep tea distribution in its proper perspective it should be remembered that at this time there were many complaints about the distribution of unrationed foods, and that these led to the introduction of the points scheme. Registration was so much 'in the air' at this time, that at the conference of 23rd May, retailers accepted what they had hitherto violently opposed—registration without rationing (to be tried, for instance, on eggs). Similarly, the very heavy raids in May led the Ministry to take up the question of London wholesale stocks, and the organisation of London wholesalers. Dispersal of stocks, decentralisation, and mutual assistance pacts were not being pressed on the tea trade alone.

The reasons for consumers' difficulty in getting their ration—changed shopping habits, and population movements—were not new. But the former, which seems to have been resolved into a desire to buy as many rationed foods as possible in one shop, was stronger as people's daily lives became more affected by air-raids, shrinking transport facilities, and the impelling of women towards factories; and the latter were no longer one-way movements into reception areas. Food Executive Officers of industrial towns that were receiving an influx of population held strongly that consumers should no longer have to go from shop to shop before they could find tea. In the van of the agitation were, of course, those retailers who, thanks to registration, had increased their trade in other foods, but were restricted to a pre-war datum for tea. Tea Division pointed out that retailers' complaints were usually accompanied by a rider against pool tea and might well be due to a desire to force higher margins out of suppliers. Nevertheless the clamour was too strong to be ignored, and the Division was now prepared to re-distribute tea supplies so that retailers could serve all their registered customers. What it was no longer prepared to do, however, was to give them their 'usual supplies or more'. In other words, there must now be machinery for decreasing, as well as increasing, allocations, and the only possible machinery seemed to be registration.

This did not mean that the other condition had been fulfilled. The stock position did not yet demand the release of only the bare minimum. Although 200,000 lb. of tea a week in excess of estimated requirements was being released, stocks could hold out a good deal longer. The Division feared, however, that some of this excess was finding its way to the 'free tea market', and ending up in Eire at 7s. 6d. to 10s. a lb.; looking ahead to a winter of air-raids and transport troubles, in which it might at last be necessary to issue only the minimum requirements, it wished to be armed in advance with an exact and equitable distribution system. At the moment, there was no way of conserving stocks hurriedly, save by an indiscriminate cut in allocations that would only add to the difficulties of the household consumer. Tea Division was in a difficult position. The rationing side was pressing for exact and guaranteed distribution (i.e., registration) in the interests of the consumer; the trade had recently given the Minister an undertaking that was going to cause it trouble and expense, on the tacit understanding that brands would be spared. Yet registration was bound to point towards their abolition. The Division sought to avoid these dangers by insisting that retailers must be allowed four suppliers under registration, and it claimed that, after some persuasion, a majority of the tea firms were at any rate resigned to it.

At a meeting on 30th June, Rationing, Retail Distribution, and

Tea Divisions '...decided to go for registration'. Once again, Rationing Division began to fill in the details; it collected statistics of the number of retailers' suppliers—a majority appeared to be content with two, though some went up to eight—and prepared the announcements and permit forms. Tea Division was 'in a hurry', but rationing officials prudently insisted on a decent interval between the general re-registration, that followed the issue of the new ration books, and the tea announcements—otherwise the public would not fail to infer that someone had simply forgotten about tea. The date set was 22nd September 1941; but at this point 'higher authority', prompted by the protest of one of the two leading tea firms, which pointed out that it was difficult for the tea trade to fulfil its undertaking to the Minister under the constant threat of registration, called a halt, and demanded 'very convincing reasons' for the change.

The firm argued, first, that the cry for registration was stimulated by retailers who hoped thereby to be freed of control by suppliers, and, secondly, that in maintaining the quality of the tea in the packet, there was no half-way house between full competition that left the consumer free to go elsewhere, and pool tea. Tea Division admitted that the second argument had considerable force; but went on to emphasise the need to stop the flow of tea to the 'free market', the desire of consumers to buy tea in the shop where they were registered, and the need for a distribution system that would make a discriminating cut in releases possible. Finally, it pointed out that the firm leading the opposition was itself receiving 20,000 lb. of tea a week in special allocations to enable it to cope with population changes. Rationing officials, on the other hand, had lost some of their enthusiasm for registration, now that it was to provide for four wholesale suppliers; it was, in fact, beginning to seem pointless unless accompanied by pool tea. In consequence, perhaps, the ultimate recommendation to the Minister that it be adopted was a little half-hearted, and he had little difficulty in demolishing it:

'... I find myself', he wrote on 6th September, 'unable to accept the Departmental advice. I am quite certain that, if I were to do so, we should produce... a technically cleaner job, and that... our administration would be more efficient as administration, and it would be easier to remove (what so rightly troubles the Division) the sources from which black markets, etc., spring—but it would not be to the interest of the consumer. As a nation we have had very good tea, and very cheap tea, and the forces of competition have maintained both the quality and the cheapness... I am quite certain that if we were to tie... for tea it would not be very long before the grocer would be selling the tea that was most profitable to him, not the tea that gave the public the best value. On these grounds, therefore, I should find myself reluctant to agree to the proposition put forward by the Tea Division.'

‘But there are other grounds. . . . We started a system of rationing tea by means of coupons. The purpose of the coupon was that it should flow from the customer, through the retailer, down to the supplier, in order to secure that there should be equitable distribution of the tea. The Tea Division now propose a new system, *but they are not working the old one*¹. . . surely the thing to do is to tell the trade . . . that in future all tea traders will be required to present their coupons in order to obtain a replenishment of their stocks. This may be a great nuisance . . . but it is the way in which the clothing trade is now operating. . . . If at some future time we were to adopt the Points scheme . . . it would be the way that this scheme would operate. By a proper use of the coupons a complete redistribution of supplies in accordance with the scheme might be secured without any inconvenience to the public. . . . The inconvenience to the tea trade is one that they have merited. I should be glad if the Division would consider this proposition, and also consider whether they are justified in continuing to allow the evasions, to which they refer, to take place when they seem to have in their hands the machinery for dealing with it’.

This was a very embarrassing rejoinder. Tea had never at any time been distributed by means of a ‘flowback’ of coupons; moreover, such a system was against the whole trend of British food rationing theory and practice. Registration, and permits based on it, was the rationing dogma; an historical accident that might perhaps have been reversed, had the discussions of late 1917 on the relative merits of a points system and the tie to the retailer gone the other way. In 1936 the Beveridge Committee had pointed out that distribution could be based *either* on registration *or* on coupons; nevertheless, when rationing began in January 1940 it did appear to use both. The coupon, however, was little more than a fifth wheel to the chariot, and once coupon-cutting was abandoned in January 1941, lost even the appearance of playing any part in distribution. It was beside the mark for officials to argue, as a reason for not following the line indicated by the Minister, that ‘this method (i.e., the surrender of coupons) for rationed foodstuffs generally was abandoned in January 1941. . . .’ What had been abandoned then was a system that merely involved coupons; what the Minister had suggested was a system that depended on them.

When the Minister’s suggestion was first discussed, Rationing Division considered that it could be carried out:

‘Cutting out and passing up is certainly logical and theoretically perfectly sound and foolproof. . . the amount of work involved with coupons is not more than we can tackle and we could not object. The fact that our present pages are printed on the back is certainly a snag but one which we must and can get over. I might go further, that it

¹ Writer’s italics.

involves our Food Offices in less work than orthodox permit procedure'.

But—'. . . it is the retailers who will jib . . .', especially as the point scheme was going to demand coupon-cutting on a large scale. This view was strongly supported by Retail Distribution Division, and a meeting of the three Divisions on 11th September decided against coupon-cutting. Instead, an effort was made to assimilate tea rationing to the main rationing system by using permits. The result was the form of the permit system without the content, for it was based not on consumer registration, but simply on the retailer's statement of how much tea he required. The scheme was, noted the Director of Tea, little more than a 'form of moral pressure on retailers'. However, the Minister accepted it, and the first of several resourceful attempts to avoid 'a proper use of the coupons' began on 24th November 1941.

IV

Until November 1940, a retailer's supplies were under the control of his wholesalers (tempered by intercession on his behalf from Distribution Section); after November 1940, he might seek the aid of the Food Office and supplement his datum quota with a special permit. In November 1941 he was emancipated; henceforth the quantity—though not the quality—of tea he could obtain was set entirely by permit. Since the amount on the permit was put there by the retailer himself and—as will be seen—the Food Office could not check his statement, the principle of self-government by the trade had been extended to the retailer (at a time when it was being withdrawn from his wholesalers). Freed from the control of his supplier, not yet delivered into the power of the Food Office, he existed for a year in a happy no-man's land.

With the tea trade as a whole, the permit system was unpopular. It denoted the end of the datum principle, and of a fixed chain of distribution; trade was thrown into the melting pot at the end of each permit period, and allocations had to be fitted to the new sixteen week permit-cycle. The steady flow of supplies on which the economic working of packing plant depended was now to be influenced by permits, which might on occasion be issued late, might be sent in late by retailers, and might vary in numbers and quantities every sixteen weeks.

The initial permits were based either on the number of a retailer's sugar registrations, or on his sales over the three months up to July 1941, whichever figure was the greater—the object being to start

the scheme off on a generous footing. Retailers who had a large number of 'special authorities'¹ (for concessions) lodged with them might receive an extra amount at the discretion of the Food Office. Special permits might still be given if there were a sudden influx of population into an area, but in December these were abolished. In future, a retailer would receive only his main permit, and if necessary a supplementary permit, which would not normally be given until the last two weeks of a permit period, and then only if he could prove need. Supplementaries could, however, be given at any time to meet a sudden increase in population. The retailer was tied to his datum-period suppliers, but might only use four² of them during one period; in the next period he might re-distribute his permit quantity among them, or if he wished nominate another four. Tea permits, it should be noted, ran for 16 weeks, although for other foods Food Offices worked in an 8-week cycle. This tempering of the permit system to the tea trade represented a considerable victory for Tea Division (whose chief argument had been the need to avoid splitting chests of tea); in deference to the established rationing practice the permits specified, not a 16-week total, but an 8-week quantity to be doubled.

Catering establishments buying wholesale were given permits for 100 per cent. of their consumption over the three months up to July 1941, and like retailers were confined to four suppliers. Those buying retail were not affected by the new system.

Wholesalers summarised the permits they received from retailers and passed the summaries to their own suppliers; the 'primaries' summarised both the permits they received direct from retailers and the summaries they received from secondary wholesalers, and indented upon Selling Section for the total. All permits and summaries had to be kept for six months. In August 1941 wholesalers had been licensed; by the Tea (Restriction on Dealings) Order of February 1942, they were forbidden to supply or obtain tea without permits,³ and at the same time inspectors were appointed to examine

¹ At this time, the meaning of the word 'permit' had fallen into some confusion. Permits were originally documents used in wholesale transactions, i.e., between a retailer and his supplier. But the word was then used for the documents authorising concessions, e.g., office teas. These '*special permits*' were used for retail purchases; but there were others, e.g., those given to a retailer to replace stock lost in disasters. In December 1941, it was decided that all special permits given to retailers must be on the same kind of slip used for his main permit. In July 1942, the permits given to consumers were clarified. 'Special permits' became '*special authorities*' (either 'Short'—for the occasion only, or 'continuing'—e.g., those for office teas). The word 'permit' thus regained its original meaning. For the sake of clarity, 'special authority' will be used throughout this account when referring to documents given to consumers.

² Only 2 if his needs were less than 6 lb. per week.

³ Lateral transactions between two primaries or two secondaries were exempted so that tea received in allocations could still be 'swapped'. (It will be remembered that all primaries received equal proportions of the three grades of tea, and that no effort could be made to satisfy the individual quality requirements of particular firms.) S.R. & O. (1942) No. 175.

permit summaries—though in practice only a sample check was possible. The licensing of wholesalers (which had been introduced to keep a tighter hold over trade in Northern Ireland)¹ proved useful in enforcing the new trade rules for regional allocation. Firms were not allowed to accept permits that entailed a movement of tea across the line fixed between North and South; a London firm, for example, might not accept permits from Yorkshire unless it could take delivery of, and pack, the tea there.

The new system was intended first to re-distribute tea supplies, then to reduce them. The initial permits, which ran for seven weeks only, were intended to achieve only the first objective. They were bound to be inexact, whether they were based on the sales statement—which could not be verified—or on the number of the retailer's sugar registrations—which would not necessarily correspond to the number of people or establishments who wished to buy tea from him.² The result was that the initial permits called for 10 per cent. more than had been needed to keep the datum system going.

The subsequent permits (11th January—3rd May 1942) were intended to bring a retailer's supplies down to his real requirements by replacing his actual sales during a test period, the four weeks ended 14th December 1941. The retailer stated, on form *T.3A*, his purchases and sales during the test period, and his stock at the end of it. The lower half of this form, *T.3B*, was the actual permit. It was divided into four slips, on each of which the retailer entered the name of a supplier and the quantity required from him. The Food Office, after making sure that the total represented by the permit slips did not exceed the sales figures on the application above, turned the slips into permits by rubber-stamping. Three points should be noted about this system. First, it was simple; the retailer made out the permit, and Food Offices had only to carry out one internal check and wield a stamp. Secondly, although a stock figure was given on the application, Food Offices were not instructed to use it in any way to vary the quantities a retailer asked for. Thirdly, the major part of the retailer's statement—his sales against the ordinary ration book—could not be checked.³ Subsequent analysis of these permit applications showed that these sales had apparently amounted to 18 per

¹ For the same reason, coupons were cut out there when the permit system was introduced. The Belfast Food Control Committee protested against coupon-cutting, and asked in vain for registration instead. See p. 642, (footnote)

² For instance, it was often estimated that only half the consumers registered with a Co-operative store for sugar bought their tea there.

³ Sales were divided into (a) those to establishments (b) those against special authorities, (c) those against emergency documents, service leave cards, and seamen's ration books, (d) those against ordinary ration books. The first three classes could be checked against (a) Order Book forms, (b) the special authorities themselves (the amount authorised being regarded as the amount sold), (c) the coupons taken from emergency documents, etc.

cent. more than the 'theoretical maximum' computed from the number of the ordinary ration book holders registered for sugar. At worst, retailers had sold a good deal of tea 'off ration'; at best, they had overstated their sales in order to secure inflated permits. The new system had, therefore, achieved its first objective only at the cost of its second.

Food Offices would, it was thought, be in a stronger position to deal with the applications for the third permit period, beginning in May 1942. Another set of returns would be available, for in January 1942 tea was included in the retailer's general monthly statement of his transactions in rationed foods (G.C.3). In future, a retailer would give his tea *stocks and purchases* (from which, of course, sales could be deduced) on this form, and tea *sales* on his permit application.¹ When, therefore, he made his sales statement at the end of sixteen weeks, Food Offices would already be primed with what he had been saying every four weeks. Nevertheless, both sets of figures still derived from the retailer himself.

The part played by the G.C.3 return in the rationing system has been discussed elsewhere.² It was much prized as evidence of 'non-take-up'. Permits, based on registrations, represented possible demand, the monthly return, actual demand; any difference should appear in its statement of stock. For no commodity could the return, in the absence of outside evidence on sales and purchases, be checked except for internal consistency; for tea, even the yard-stick of registration was missing, the 'permit ceiling' being set by the retailer's own sales statement on his permit application. Consequently, a rising stock figure for tea would indicate, not a difference between authorised demand and actual 'take-up' by customers, but loss of trade or else overstated sales on the permit application. To compare the record of stocks and purchases on the monthly return of transactions with the sales figure on the permit application was, therefore, to attempt to confute the retailer out of his own mouth. For all that, this *ad terrorem* system might have been surprisingly successful in practice, for (as it turned out) many retailers did not correlate their two sets of figures. A great deal was to happen, however, before the third permit was prepared.

V

Early in 1942, the incompleteness of the permit system was thrown

¹ For other commodities, the application for supplies (the '1' form) had been discontinued; the permit was a '2' form. The new tea form was a combination of these two types of form with the original 'T.3' form. Its coding, '3a.3b', did not, therefore, express its function very adequately, especially after stocks and purchases had been transferred to G.C.3.

² See Chapter XXXVI.

sharply into relief against the development of the war in the East. 'I do not want to cut the tea ration if I can help it', the Minister was to say in July, '—but look at the map'. Tea Division, as in July 1940, was thinking of conserving stocks against an uncertain future, and by February 1942, it was clear that the 'moral pressure' on the retailer had failed. About one million pounds—eight million rations—of excess tea a week were being released. The Division called for an arbitrary cut of 10 per cent. in allocations to the trade, and the immediate re-introduction of coupon-cutting so that retailers' sales statements could be checked. The rationers, though they agreed that a change was necessary, could not move as fast as the Commodity Division wished, because coupon-cutting could not be introduced without first consulting the retail trade. Could not savings be made in other directions? By rationing catering establishments? Or by pruning 'special authorities'? Catering Division, however, objected that catering consumption, though high, was not extravagant, and that 'special authorities' represented an infinitesimal proportion of the excess releases of tea; it directed attention firmly back to the point at which most tea could be saved—the retailer.¹

For this purpose, registration still seemed the preferable course: 'Let us prepare for action violently, if we want to withstand cutting and prove that control is even better through registration', wrote a rationing official in February 1942. Tea Division was therefore told that coupon-cutting would be opposed by the retail trade—and it was, at a consultative conference on 6th March; that the retailer must be spared further additions to the trials that were already in store for him—further economies in retail deliveries and the addition of more foods to the points scheme; that cutting coupons would be of little use unless Food Offices could count more than 5 per cent.—and they could not. The permits would (it was alleged) still have to be based on the retailers' statements of past sales. By the beginning of March, Tea Division was won over, and once again a submission went forward to the Minister.

This time it was accompanied by several addenda, carefully drafted to meet his earlier objections. If retailers were found to be abusing their power over their tied customers, coupon-cutting could be rapidly substituted for registration; Food Offices would be instructed to regard dissatisfaction with the quality of a retailer's tea, or with the range of brands he provided, as a valid reason for changing registrations; a retailer's licence could be made dependent

¹ According to Catering Division total home consumption in the summer of 1941 was 6,700,000 lb. a week. 10.4 per cent. went to catering establishments (the figure for other rationed foods was 5.7 per cent.), 2.2 per cent. to institutions, 2.7 per cent. to special authorities for concessions (of which 2.3 per cent. was office teas). Assuming 200 cups to a lb., catering consumption represented about 140,000,000 cups of tea a week, which, said the Division, was not an unreasonable total.

on his continuing to sell tea at the same range of prices as those he sold during the second half of 1941; Food Offices would be empowered to submit samples of tea to a Valuation Board at Headquarters, and if these were found to be inferior to other teas at the same price, the offending firms could be prosecuted under the 1941 Current Prices Order. These suggestions expose the pitfalls presented by registration without pool tea. The root problem was that of price control of *brands*. The price of the packet could be prescribed, but not the quality of the tea inside it. Even if quality standards could be defined, they would be difficult to enforce because not even experts could value blended tea save within very general limits.

The Minister was not convinced by the proposed safeguards:

'I understand', he replied, 'that it is the almost unanimous desire of the trade that there should be a close tie-up between retailer and consumer by means of registration. We must remember, however, that our responsibility and concern are for the consumer. It is my opinion that we should retain as long as possible the freedom of the consumer to trade with the establishment she considers gives the best value and consideration. I am bound to say that I am alarmed to hear that there is an apparent leakage of a million pounds of tea a week. I believe that the way to stop this is to go back to the original basis on which tea rationing was planned. . . . It is my desire that we should adopt the principle of the surrender of coupons for tea'.

'The Minister does not quite understand', the Divisions were told, 'why we do not cut out coupons'.

CHAPTER XLIII

The Acceptance of Non-conformity

I

ON 1ST MAY 1942, Distribution Section expressed some alarm at the atmosphere of 'tightening up' that followed the March discussions with the Minister. 'It seemed . . . as if the whole trend of the Ministry's policy was to put more and more restrictions on tea distribution and . . . the Committee was anxious that . . . the present system should not be changed by small alterations.' On 6th April coupon-cutting was re-introduced for tea, and the allowance for office teas was halved; on 27th July the tea ration was taken away from children under 5 (holders of the R.B.2); in September, the rationing of catering establishments began. In the background loomed proposals for a combined tea and coffee ration or the placing of coffee and coffee essence on points, the application of the Sector Scheme to tea, and another high-level drive for National Control Tea.

When coupon-cutting was restored, customers were obliged to buy four weeks' supplies at a time, so that retailers would have fewer coupons to handle.¹ The children's ration was withdrawn at the urgent request of Tea Division, which hoped thereby to save 450,000 lb. of tea a week and, at the same time, be in a better position to resist the pressure for an extra allowance to old people—a request that was difficult to refuse as long as tea was allowed to infants.² This step, however, had to be delayed until the new ration book came into force in July, because the tea coupons in the current child's ration book were indistinguishable from those in the adult's.³ The main problem, however, was to get the new system into operation at all; the cutting of coupons could begin overnight, but to base supplies on them was another matter. Coupons were cut out for

¹ Four-weeks purchase had been allowed since the previous October, the object being to bring tea into line with the four-week periods for other commodities. When it was made compulsory, four exceptions had to be allowed: old age pensioners, who might not be able to afford a month's ration at a time; residential establishments, whose clients might not stay for a month; persons who had had coupons removed by such establishments, or by Food Offices when emergency cards were issued (and who had to use all the remaining coupons at one purchase), and holders of seamen's ration books, emergency and service leave cards, etc.

² The request, first made in July 1940 (as a Parliamentary Question), was granted in December 1944.

³ The tea coupons in the new R.B.2 (which were over-printed 'C') proved useful for oranges. See p. 583, above.

eight months before they were actually used as the basis of retailers' supplies.

Tea permits ran for sixteen weeks and had to be prepared well in advance. The permit current in April, when coupon-cutting was re-introduced, was the second; it was based on sales during the four weeks ended 17th December 1941, had come into force on 11th January 1942, and would run until 3rd May. There was no time between 6th April and 3rd May to fit in a test period, prepare new permits, and pass them up the chain of distribution. The third permit would therefore have to be based as usual on the retailer's statement of sales; the earliest permit that could be based on coupons would be the fourth, which was due in August. The situation was complicated by the imminence of the Sector Scheme, which was due to begin on 29th June. As the purpose of this scheme was that suppliers should be both nearer and fewer, it was clear that, if a new permit came into operation in May, retailers (and establishments buying wholesale) might have to nominate new suppliers in the middle of the permit period. It was decided, therefore, to extend the current permit for eight weeks; on 29th June, the Sector Scheme, new permits complying with sector restrictions, and the rationing of catering establishments, could all come into force together. However, the Sector Scheme was postponed until August as a result of trade protests. If new permits were to be hurriedly prepared for 29th June, this would have to be done in the middle of a ration book reissue that was to be a particularly arduous operation that year.¹ Rationing Division therefore appealed to all Commodity Divisions to dispense with new permits until August.

Tea Division was particularly affected by these postponements because tea permits were not protected by registration. Retailers were to be left in possession of already grossly inflated permits, based on sales made four months before coupon-cutting was re-introduced, at a time when legitimate calls on them were being lessened—by the halving of the workers' tea allowance and the withdrawal of the children's ration. Rationing Division offered, in lieu of new permits, to discourage the full use of the old ones through the retailer's return of his transactions (G.C.3). This return (now eight-weekly) could now be fully checked; 'with cut coupons', Tea Division was told, 'we have complete control the other end. The retailer has no method of pretending to us that he has got rid of more tea than the coupons and caterers' statements presented'. If, therefore, the retailer were buying more tea than he needed, the excess should distend his stock figure (unless he understated purchases). 'While we cannot, of course, undertake a comprehensive check of coupons, the material is there and an onslaught could be made upon any retailer at any time'. In

¹ See p. 493 *seq.* It comprised a check of identity cards and the issue of clothing books.

addition, retailers would be warned that all sales should be accounted for by coupons, and that they were not expected to order the full amount authorised by their permits. Tea Division had no option but to agree, but pointed out that 'unless the retailers respond . . . and keep strictly to coupon sales, we incur the risk of continuing to lose 1,000,000 lb. a week for the extended period'.

The issue of new permits in August would not remove this problem of the time-lag completely, for they were necessarily to be based on coupons collected in a test period before the withdrawal of the child's ration in July. Again recourse was had to the G.C.3 return. Food Offices were instructed to examine the return for the first half of the new permit period (August to mid-October); should a retailer's sales have been considerably less than those during the tea period on which his permit was based, they were to warn him to reduce his orders and if necessary, prescribe the amount he could order for the rest of the period.

As it turned out, the new permits were inflated by considerably more than the children's ration. The more elaborate system of checks that had been devised for their issue¹ had been rendered out-of-date by the restoration of the cut coupon and the extension of the current permits, first till June and then till August. It would have been desirable to base the new permits directly on coupons; but in July, when they had to be written, Food Offices were overwhelmed with work on the new ration-book issue, the Sector Scheme, and a general reform of permit procedure. Tea permits were almost *perforce*, therefore, based as before on the retailer's bare statement of sales on his form of application; the statement was checked against his eight-weekly return of transactions, and against coupons, only *after* the permits had been issued. By then retailers were securely in possession of permits that, as the rationing statisticians revealed in September, represented sales to ordinary ration book holders during the test period that were 15 per cent. above the 'theoretical maximum' (compared with an estimated 18 per cent. before coupon-cutting was restored). The result of one Food Executive Officer's post-permit check was even more instructive. Comparison between his retailers' applications and their eight-weekly returns showed that, taken as a whole, they claimed to have sold during the test period 1,000 lb. more than they bought, and yet to have increased their stocks by 2,000 lb. Moreover, a count of coupons revealed that these were 5,000 lb. short of the admitted sales during the same period. The statisticians had finally discredited the T.3A sales statement; the Food Executive Officer had shown that it was not possible to derive much benefit from cutting coupons without actually using them as a basis of supply.

¹ See p. 726 *seq.*

The mere act of returning them had not been enough to paralyse retailers into accuracy.

The statisticians pressed for a post-mortem on the tea represented by the 15 per cent. excess sales, but administrators considered the present and the future more important than the past. The excess was, so to speak, still active; it was embodied in the current permits. Various plans for stemming the flow of tea on these permits were discussed; finally it was decided that the machine could not be tampered with in mid-passage; the third permit was 'written off' and efforts were concentrated on the fourth. 'The important thing is to be sure that the next permit does actually depend on *collected* coupons and not on a statement'. The fourth permit was preceded by an intensive check of the eight-weekly return; it was then based on the coupons returned for the test period, and the retailer's statement of sales was not even asked for.¹

The coupons were not actually counted; the figures given by the retailer on the outside of the envelope in which he returned them were taken at face value. Even so, the results were remarkable; the new permits of December 1942 represented sales of 1 per cent. *below* the 'theoretical maximum' and tea releases at last fell substantially below the average for the last six months of the datum system. Even allowing for the effect of the economies of 1942 (including the rationing of catering establishments) there still remained a decrease of some 1,000,000 lb. *a week* in retailers' demands; clearly they were less likely to mis-state the number of coupons in an envelope than their sales on a form.² The fifth permit (April 1943), calculated in the

¹ As quantities were calculated in advance from the coupons sent in, the permits, once prepared, had to be sent to the retailer for apportioning among his suppliers, returned to the Food Office, and then sent back to him when they had been authenticated.

² *Statistics of sales as computed from the T.3A applications.*

Sales to caterers and institutions are omitted.

A. *Applications for the second permit* (January to August 1942), based on sales during the 4 weeks to 14th December 1941.

(a) Sales against special authorities	62 Tons a week
(b) Sales against ration books	2,832 Tons a week
Theoretical maximum for (b)	2,412 Tons a week

6th April 1942—the re-introduction of coupon-cutting, the halving of the office tea allowance.

B. *Application for the third permit* (August to December, 1942) based on sales during 8 weeks to 28th June 1942.

(a) Sales against special authorities	96 Tons a week
(b) Sales against ration books	2,793 Tons a week
Theoretical maximum for (b)	2,429 Tons a week

27th July 1942—withdrawal of the children's tea ration.

C. *Application for the fourth permit* (December 1942) to April 1943) based on coupons collected during the 8 weeks ended 17th October 1942).

(a) Sales against special authorities	64 Tons a week
(b) Sales against ration books	2,234 Tons a week
Theoretical maximum for (b)	2,260 Tons a week

20th September 1942—rationing of catering establishments (half way through the test period for the fourth permit).

same way, was equally satisfactory. The longevity of this permit exceeded that of the second, for it ran 48 weeks, and then formed the basis of its successors, which were permits that ran indefinitely.

The delay in putting tea rationing on a sound footing, if it is not to be construed as obscurantism, must be considered against the background of official thinking on rationing in general. For the first two years of the war, rationing moved steadily away from the coupon. The prevailing dogma was consumer registration, and the other major rationed commodities bowed down docilely before it. Rationing officials could talk, in June 1940, of being '*forced into a loose coupon system for other commodities*' and, in November 1941, of comparing '*coupon cutting with orthodox permit procedure*'.¹ Their efforts to improve tea rationing were therefore in the direction of making tea conform—as, in 1918, it had; these were defeated, at first by the 'temporary' character of tea rationing and thereafter by the need to maintain brands. The most that they achieved (in November 1941) was the transformation of tea rationing from one mock system to another; from coupons-without-'flowback' into permits-without-registration. By then the coupon was in course of rehabilitation; clothes rationing and points rationing were based on it, and sweets rationing was to follow. Even so, when coupon-cutting for tea was re-introduced in April 1942, this was looked on at first as a buttress to the existing system rather than as the mainspring of a new one, and it was not until December that tea rationing at last ceased to be a changeling, and took its place alongside the main rationing system as a respectable coupon replacement system in its own right.

II

A favourite suggestion for reducing the consumption of tea was to make coffee an alternative on the tea ration. This proposal was first put forward in May 1942, and it, or variants of it, reappeared at intervals for a year. Rationing officials disapproved; the difficulties of administering a combined ration were great, the estimated savings small. 'After all the bother and irksomeness to everybody concerned the utmost we can hope to achieve... is the saving of... the equivalent of 1½ weeks' ration per year. Though I agree that we should husband our resources with the greatest care, this strikes me as overdoing it'. Higher authority agreed; the Minister, moreover, disliked the corollary proposal that the 'working-class drinks', coffee essence and cocoa, be placed 'on points'. Nevertheless, the

¹ Writer's italics.

plan was extensively canvassed; it was apt to reappear and create uncertainty at times when Rationing Division was engaged with delicate developments in tea rationing—the restriction of catering establishments, for instance. Caterers' supplies had survived, though more and more precariously, through the introduction of rationing, the introduction of permits, the re-introduction of coupon-cutting, and the beginning of the Sector Scheme; it was to a fleeting re-appearance of the plan to ration coffee that they at last fell.

All through the summer of 1942, Tea Division waited expectantly for the rationing of establishments to begin, just as it waited for permits to be based on coupons. Once again, discussions were opened about the basis on which establishments should receive supplies. Policy had changed since the earlier discussions of May and September 1941,¹ when they were to have had 100 per cent. of consumption over a datum period. The principle now governing catering allowances was that they should be equated with the domestic ration. Sugar and milk allowances to establishments were based on the calculation that the housewife prepared 35 hot beverages a week. Assuming, therefore, that the housewife's 2 oz. of tea had to be stretched to cover 35 hot beverages, the catering allowance should be 1 lb. for every 280 hot beverages served. Unfortunately, a more generous measure was already in use; the 1 lb. for 200 cups adopted for the 'special authorities', and applied, when permits for tea were introduced, to supplies for new establishments. Caterers considered even this inadequate; the urn *v.* pot controversy was revived, together with the request that cups of tea should be separated from other hot beverages in the caterer's return of consumption—a demand that Rationing Division steadily refused on the ground that the returns were already quite complicated enough. In fact, the caterers' arguments cancelled out; the high-class establishment was worse off than the canteen in that it used pots instead of urns, but a canteen was worse off in that its hot beverages were nearly all teas. The caterers suggested a ratio of 160 cups to the pound—though industrial caterers were prepared to accept 200—but the Ministry was adamant that they, like the housewife, must serve either fewer teas or weaker ones. Unfortunately for the caterers, their chief line of defence—that the housewife was not really restricted to 2 oz. a week because she had her children's ration to draw on—was, unknown to them, about to be demolished by the withdrawal of the children's tea ration. The rationing of establishments, therefore, was all set to begin with the introduction of the Sector Scheme on 29th June.

In May, the retreat from the Sector Scheme threw the plans into disarray; then, they were momentarily complicated by the movement for the combined tea and coffee ration, and then postponed, because

¹ See p. 717, above.

of the ration book reissue, until the new permits should come into force on 23rd August. On 12th August, to an enquiry from Tea Division why rationing had not started at the end of *June*, as originally planned, Catering Division replied that it had been decided to wait until the next permits in December so as not to inconvenience the 'holidays at home' campaign. Five days later, however, the Director of Tea Supplies gave warning that the tea ration might have to be cut in the autumn, and on 22nd August the tea-coffee alternative again loomed up at a high level. 'This impels me to suggest', wrote a senior official to his colleague in charge of catering, 'that we get on with tea rationing [to caterers] quickly'. Coffee rationing would be 'a blow to some members of the general public, but it will be a much worse blow to the Caterers. If it should come before we have rationed tea to them, we should have an awfully stormy passage: If after, they can only accept the loathsome logic of events'. Tea supplies to caterers were, therefore, rationed from 20th September.¹ The basis of supplies was 1 lb. of tea to every 280 hot beverages served. As rationing had begun, after all, in the middle of a permit period, establishments buying wholesale had to be warned, as retailers had been earlier, that they must not order up to their permit figures if they did not need to.

Perhaps the most important development of the summer of 1942 was the application to tea of the Sector Scheme for wholesale distribution. The object of this scheme was to eliminate long journeys of small consignments, and to ensure that a commodity should be moved in bulk as near as possible to its final destination. The country was divided into nine 'sectors'; with the exception of some 'neutral' areas, and the concession that deliveries could be made across sector boundaries within a radius of 40 miles, deliveries to retailers might only be made from premises within a sector. In addition, it was intended (originally) to limit the total number of suppliers allowed to a retailer, including his suppliers for points goods. Tea distribution would be gravely affected. First, the sector boundaries cut across the trade's own organisation of regional allocation and decentralisation of plant. Allocations would not have to take cognizance of sector boundaries, and firms who had decentralised their plant might find themselves cut off from old customers in their former areas. Secondly, tea-packing firms would not be permitted to deliver direct from their plants everywhere, but would first have to consign tea to themselves at newly opened sector depots. Similarly, dealers accustomed to consign 'original' tea direct to retailers from Ministry warehouses would have to insert an extra stage of distribution.

¹ Rationing Division refused to enter into definitions of the *size* of a hot beverage, save that a 'pot of tea for one' counted as two cups. A $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint mug, somewhat to the dismay of canteens, only counted as one beverage. In 1944 it was allowed to count as two (S.R. & O. (1944) No. 202).

Thirdly, just as the introduction of permits ended datum quotas, so the sector scheme would play havoc with the tie to datum suppliers. A retailer might actually be required to nominate a supplier with whom he had not dealt in the datum period, because his old ones could not conform to Sector Scheme requirements. Finally, the restriction of the total number of suppliers would mean that four wholesalers for tea would be a luxury that few retailers could afford; there would be a swing to the general wholesaler who could supply several brands, that in turn might lead wholesalers who had not previously dealt in tea to apply for a licence to enter the trade.

However, the Sector Scheme was modified and the overall limitation of suppliers was withdrawn. For tea it was modified still further. Not only was the retailer allowed more suppliers (four) for tea than for any other commodity; they had to be datum period suppliers. Whether or not he could, as hitherto, change them from period to period was consciously left in obscurity. Rationing Division held that he could not, but Tea Division, though not anxious that such changes should be made, was reluctant to close the door completely. It was announced, therefore, that 'substitution of tea suppliers at a later date *may* not be permitted'. A few months later, this had to be elucidated for the benefit of Food Offices, and the trade was informed that a change of suppliers would be allowed only in very exceptional circumstances. 'To all intents and purposes, an embargo is on'. In practice, no change was allowed without reference to Tea Division.¹

Even as modified, the scheme represented a considerable interference with the tea trade. Firms had to comply with sector restrictions—though packing plants counted as depots—and when in October 1942 wholesalers were restricted to six suppliers, smaller firms protested that they were being repeatedly squeezed and penalised. (Distribution Section had advised them to form groups so as to rank as one wholesaler—as did its own Emergency Pool.) At the other end of the chain of distribution, the firms most hit were those doing a door-to-door van trade with consumers; they had either to obtain a wholesaler's licence, and distribute through such retailers as they could secure as agents—Rationing Division had to negotiate an exception to the datum rule for them—or open retail shops. Their troubles occupied a good deal of the attention of Rationing Division and of Divisional Food Officers during the next few months.

¹ A change was allowed when a business became openly a branch of a multiple. Similarly, no change was allowed when a catering business changed hands unless it had been taken over by a catering contractor. (The italics in the first quotation are the writer's.)

III

Though the Sector Scheme caused the tea trade some inconvenience, it might have caused a great deal more, for it served as the justification for another attempt to secure National Control Tea. In March 1942 when Tea Division had put forward to higher authority the plan for registration without pool tea, it had nevertheless broached the latter, with its eye, not on the immediate problem of over-issue of tea, but on more remote problems of supply. With the situation in the East deteriorating, the Division was envisaging a time when Ceylon might be lost, shipments from the east coast of India discontinued (as for a time they were), production threatened by labour shortage and military operations, and, in short, tea so scarce that it would be impossible to allocate it in sufficient variety to maintain the brands. The Minister's rejection of registration did not, therefore, invalidate the maturing case for pool tea, but the healthy state of stocks—eight months' supplies—did. The Minister 'could not see why National Control Tea was being pressed, but if things got worse we could go to him again'.

When, therefore, the case was reopened in mid-May, supply arguments were buttressed by the need for transport economy. The tea trade's use of transport was certainly not in accord with the spirit behind the impending Sector Scheme. That the Midland Food Division, which was self-supporting in packing plants, should import at least five brands that were not packed there seemed indefensible; so did the spectacle of four suppliers in four separate vehicles converging on the same retailer. 'It is impossible for the Ministry to persuade traders', wrote a high official, 'that we are serious in our various efforts to save manpower and transport when we allow all the gross extravagances to continue through the competition of various kinds of tea'. It seemed that the point envisaged by the pre-war planners, at which trade channels had to be sacrificed to transport economy, had at last been reached.

In the past, such considerations had been overlaid by the service performed by trade competition in ensuring a good supply of cheap tea. But people were now beginning to demand not cheap but dear tea. War-time prosperity, the belief that dear tea was better tea and that better tea went further, the tendency to take one's ration in the form of the best, had all done their work. Only 44 per cent. of consumers now bought tea at less than 2s. 8d. a lb., only 20 per cent. paid less than 2s. 6d., and these percentages were falling. The average price of tea sold was ¾d. a lb. less than that at which pool tea could sell. 'At present', stated the Director of Tea, 'we are subsidising the lowest priced teas to a price at which the public generally will not

buy'. Trade competition, if left unchecked, might henceforth operate in reverse and keep prices high.

This situation, as well as weakening the main argument against pool tea, fully exposed the impossibility of effectively controlling the price of brands. The only instrument of price control was the Tea (Current Prices) Order of 1941,¹ which had been designed to prevent a rise in prices and so preserve the cheaper ranges; tea had been subsidised to enable the trade to comply with it. It forbade sales at a price exceeding the 'current price' which it defined as 'the price at which tea of a substantially similar description, quality and quantity was sold . . . on substantially similar terms and conditions on 1st July 1940'. The admitted impossibility of prescribing, and the difficulty of testing, the quality of blended teas made this Order unenforceable and no one was ever prosecuted under it. It was, therefore, no weapon against the situation created by the demand for high-priced tea. The amount of high-grade tea available was limited, and the demand exposed the trade to the temptation to meet it by putting inferior tea into high-priced packets. Inevitably, under the war-time system of allocation, the housewife's 'favourite blend' had changed more than she realised, but the trade as a whole had maintained a comparable quality. It was growing more and more difficult to do so because of retailers' pressure upon their suppliers for more high-priced tea.

This pressure would have been easier to resist under the original datum system of fixed quotas; under permits, though retailers were tied to four suppliers, they could re-apportion their permits among them at the beginning of a new permit period. They could, therefore, seek to increase their proportion of high-priced tea—or of loose tea with which to make up their own 'special blends'—by 'demanding certain teas or withholding their orders'. The trade was as disturbed about the new development as officials, for each new permit period meant a flight to the suppliers who could provide high-priced tea—legitimately or otherwise. The remedy suggested by Distribution Section, when it discussed the problem of price control with the Director of Tea in January 1942, had been a return to the datum system once permits had re-distributed tea supplies, and it was along these lines that the solution was eventually found. In May the case of pool tea was put to the Minister partly on the ground that the public demand for high-priced tea called for a really effective price control, which could not be applied to brands.

On 29th May, the Minister called for more facts; for instance, exactly how much manpower and transport would pool tea save? 'I hope', he concluded, 'the Division will not think that I have anything but the highest appreciation of their efforts to be prepared with

¹ S.R. & O. (1941) No. 859.

“machinery” for facing the worst and for the fact that they are warning me in time; and I admire the persistence with which they have now annually returned to the charge. But the public *does* like the tea it likes and I want to preserve this amenity for as long as possible’.

Officials declined to be put off, and dutifully set out to submit a convincing case; in vain. On 20th July the Minister, apologising for his ‘persistent obstinacy’, shelved the convincing case. ‘Politically’, he wrote, ‘I am always warned against interfering with the people’s Tea—it remains too, one of the few things we haven’t interfered with’. However, steps were already being taken elsewhere that were to lead, a year later, to the most powerful case of all being put before him.

IV

In the summer of 1942, the Ministry of Food’s Transport Division and the Ministry of War Transport, while acknowledging the measures taken by the trade since 1941, tried to induce the packet firms to go further and set up a pooled delivery service to retailers. As long as the original Sector Scheme included the provision for limiting the total number of a retailer’s suppliers, it looked as if the two largest firms—who between them operated some 1,400 vans as against the 70 mustered by the rest of the packet trade—might agree to pool deliveries in self-defence. The proposed limitation, however, was dropped, and by September it was clear that the protracted negotiations between them were unlikely to succeed.

The chief obstacle was mutual suspicion. ‘In the fourth year of war’, pointed out Transport Division, ‘both these firms are still traversing the country, serving every town, village and hamlet in a spirit of implacable competition’. There were also considerable practical difficulties. The trouble was that van deliveries were really van sales for cash, thus introducing a fatal element of competition at the point of delivery. Nor were these sales confined to tea; the firms carried sidelines varying from coffee to custard powder. The driver of a ‘pooled’ van would, therefore, be faced with accounting that might well be beyond his powers, yet to change to a credit basis would call for an army of clerical workers behind the scenes. Such considerations, claimed the tea firms, invalidated the arguments drawn from the biscuit, chocolate and confectionery, and soft drinks industries, which were often held up to them as examples.¹

¹ The ‘national’ beers (which still travelled) were not. See Vol. 1, pp. 343-4.

Moreover, they pointed out that it would be impossible to arrange schedules for joint deliveries unless firms' commitments were stabilised. Retailers could no longer change suppliers, but they could still vary the quantities they ordered from each. Official suggestions about pooled deliveries were likely to be countered, therefore, by requests for a return to a fixed pattern of distribution, either by extending the permit period or by treating the first accurate permits as a datum for the future.

Behind these arguments, of course, lay the 'Minister's principle' that brands must continue; but the effect of the trade's recital of difficulties was to convince the transport authorities, by January 1943, that brands must be cleared out of the way, or at least drastically reduced in number, if transport economy were to get any further.¹

In February, these views were reinforced from two other directions. On the 25th, the Commons' Select Committee on National Expenditure expressed surprise at the methods of tea distribution which the Director of Food Transport neither could, nor would, justify to them. Nearer home, the problem of price control was once again engaging the attention of Tea Division and, this time, moreover, of the Ministry's Orders Committee:

'There has [resolved the Committee] been a radical change in conditions since the Minister last considered the matter in July 1942. The ineffective restriction on rising prices in face of the public demand for higher priced teas; the obstacle which branded teas present to the complete rationalisation of transport and the inability of the general public to relate quality to prices, are factors calling for urgent remedy'.

If consumers were content to pay a high price for an inferior article, it was not, perhaps, primarily the task of the Ministry to save them from themselves—especially as the cheaper teas were still available. What did concern it was that, while the average price paid by the public had steadily risen, that at which tea was released to the trade had been kept constant by Treasury subsidy.² The trade as a whole, therefore, was making excessive profits out of the national purse. The Current Prices Order was ineffective; short of posting inspectors in factories, and supervising every stage of the blending process, the only possible solution appeared to be pool tea. Some support for it could now be found in the trade itself, on account of the disturbance caused by the flight of custom to wholesalers that had always dealt in high-priced tea or that were prepared to satisfy

¹ There had been a cut of 25 per cent. in petrol for delivery vans in November.

² The recent decision to withdraw the subsidy of 3½d. a lb. and allow an increase in price of 4d. a lb. might hold the situation for a time but (pointed out the Orders Committee) the trade would then be making excessive profits out of the public instead of the Treasury.

the demand for it by breaking the Current Prices Order.¹ The national packers did not want pool tea but they did want effective price control; the Co-operative and several chain stores wanted pool tea—one of the latter claimed to have lost one-third of its tea sales since the demand for high-priced tea began; independent retailers certainly did not want pool tea—but the rest of the trade did not view ‘grocers’ teas’ with much favour; as for consumers, they wanted tea at 3s. a lb. or more.

The case for National Control Tea that went to the Minister in April 1943 appeared to be a very strong one; ‘if ever a standard brand will be justified’, wrote the Director of Tea, ‘it is under present conditions’. In contrast with previous submissions about National Control Tea, the tie to the retailer now appeared very inconspicuously: ‘The introduction of a standard tea would make it possible to reconsider the question of registration . . .’; once the camel was swallowed, there should be little trouble with the gnat.

Nevertheless, the Minister rejected the submission yet again. The element of competition was, he considered, still a valuable safeguard for the public’s protection; ‘this freedom to buy the tea of their taste and choice is one of the freedoms we should preserve as long as possible’.

In retrospect, it can be seen that National Control Tea was never introduced simply because tea was never scarce enough to demand it. In the first World War, the distribution of pool tea had on occasion been maintained on a stock of 40,000,000 lb.—the amount that, in the second World War, had to be kept in London alone. Had the very much larger stock needed to maintain brands not been available, there could have been no debate about whether pool tea should be introduced or not. Admittedly, the supply argument was the basis of most of the cases put forward for pool tea; but it was an argument drawn from forebodings about future supplies, not immediate stringency. In April 1943, for instance, stocks stood at 130,000,000 lb. The ‘subsidiary’ arguments—of administrative convenience or principle, of labour and transport economy, and of security of stocks—proved insufficient to outweigh the serious dislocation of the trade, and the hold that brands were believed to have over the public.²

¹ It should be noted that the complaints were always from retailers that they could not supply high-priced tea, not from consumers that they could not obtain it.

² This point can be expressed in another way by listing the consequence of adhering to brands: first, the maintenance of a larger stock than would be necessary to distribute pool tea; secondly, a limit to transport economies (unless plant is extensively dispersed and some trade habits altered); thirdly, that registration cannot be used, and that if rationing is to be effective the principle of coupon replacement must be accepted; fourthly, that as far as price control is concerned, it is difficult for tea to progress, like the other major commodities, beyond the unsatisfactory stage of Standstill Orders and Current Prices Orders.

V

Tea Division, forced by Lord Woolton's ruling to find some means of effective price control short of National Control Tea, worried away at the problem for the rest of 1943. It sought to fix maximum price schedules for each brand, but the lawyers advised that this would be unenforceable; it suggested a licensing system for packets selling at 3s. a lb. or more, but the Orders Committee rejected this, mainly on the grounds that the difficulties of valuing blended tea were such that the proposed system might inadvertently legalise existing abuse; 'one brand per packer', and a fixed margin of profit, were other devices extensively discussed; all that emerged was that National Control Tea was the only solution. The case for it was very nearly put to the new Minister (Col. Llewellyn); instead, its understandably reluctant advocates decided that, as the complaints had always come from the trade and not from consumers, and as they had been less frequent of recent months, the problem did not really justify the introduction of new restrictions at that stage of the war. Moreover, the steps taken by Tea Division to 'stop the rot' while a permanent solution was evolved proved so satisfactory that 'the introduction of a National brand does not come so readily into our thoughts'. What Tea Division had done was to freeze the chain of distribution as it stood in April 1943.

In September 1939 a retailer had been tied to his datum period suppliers; in November 1941, when permits were introduced, he had been restricted to the use of four of them at a time, i.e., during one permit period; in August 1942 (with the Sector Scheme) he had, in effect, been restricted to four suppliers all told, but he could still vary the proportion of his permit that he allotted to each from period to period. The process was now carried a stage further; he was tied to the proportion he was buying from each. Thus if, in April 1943, a retailer had been buying half his tea from a supplier who could give him high-priced tea, he was tied to that ratio until the end of the war. Two loopholes remained; first, a retailer could press a supplier who was a national packer or a general wholesaler for more high-priced (or loose) tea in his order, secondly, there was little—save the Current Prices Order—to prevent packers marketing a growing proportion of their tea at high prices. The first loophole was closed by tying wholesalers also to their present proportions; the second by an understanding with the large packers—who were responsible for 75 per cent. of the tea distributed—that they would not vary the proportions of the price ranges in their output. (They had, for some time, made confidential returns showing their output in each range.)

This fixing of the chain of distribution was, in effect, a return to the

datum principle, but a datum relating to quality, not quantity. The datum was fixed separately for the retailer and secondary wholesaler, and the ratio of turnover of one brand to another pegged at that of April 1943. The agreement with the packers stabilised the proportions of their output; the 'freezing' of permits then directed it into fixed channels. The new system also returned the retailer to the control of his supplier. Food Office permits prescribed quantities; but the decision as to the kind of tea to be supplied lay once more with the wholesaler. The grocer could no longer switch his orders from period to period between his four suppliers, and the only weapon left to him was the disposal of his supplementary permits. The new system was second best, in that it could not undo the damage already done; the gains of the traders who had broken the Current Prices Order were stabilised and legitimised. At least, by eliminating the scramble for the lion's share of the retailer's permit every sixteen weeks, it destroyed the incentive to debase quality still further.

The solution had been reached almost fortuitously; nor indeed could it ever have been reached, had not the permit system settled down just in time—for it was not until the fourth permit (December 1942) that tea supplies were put on a replacement basis by means of coupons.¹ The fifth permit followed in April 1943, and when due to expire, in July, was extended for a further sixteen weeks (until November) because Food Offices were facing the sixth issue of ration books and the reissue of identity cards.² The respite was welcomed by the trade as well as by Food Offices, and there was surprisingly little complaint that permits, based on sales made as far back as December 1942 to February 1943, should run for 32 weeks. Tea Division, perceiving that the device might be used to prevent the situation deteriorating further while the price control discussion was going on, suggested that the next permits might be divided up in the same proportions as the current ones. Its approach chimed with another development—the change to 'continuing permits' for other commodities.³ Rationing officials therefore suggested that continuing permits for tea, using the proportions of the present permits, might meet Tea Division's needs. The latter agreed, but was reluctant to freeze the channels of distribution permanently until the fate of its proposals for price control was known; if an effective system were achieved traders who had lost trade by observing the Current Prices Order might regain their position. It asked that, instead of beginning continuing permits in November when the next permit was due, the present permits should be extended indefinitely. Rationing Division would consent only to another

¹ See p. 733, above.

² See p. 505 *seq.*, above.

³ See p. 635, above.

sixteen-week extension, for it feared that retailers would profit overmuch from holding out-of-date permits, and still being able to apply for supplementaries. In October, however, the Orders Committee rejected the plan for a licensing system and the palliative thus became the only weapon remaining to Tea Division. In March 1944, when the 48-week fifth permit expired, continuing permits for tea were introduced.

The preparation of the continuing permits was a considerable operation; Food Offices did not, as a rule, have records of the way in which the old permits were divided up among suppliers. All main permits had, therefore, to be returned to Divisional Food Offices by the suppliers who held them¹ and re-distributed to Food Offices, who then worked out in advance the proportions to be applied to the new permits.² Tea Division did the same for secondary wholesalers. Quantities were assessed by reference to sales in a recent eight-week period, compared with the amount on the old permit. If there were a variation of more than 10 per cent. the new permits were based on the replacement figures; if not, the old quantities were used. This wide margin was adopted partly to lighten the work of Food Offices, partly so that the new permits should look as much like the old as possible and reduce argument and enquiry. Since 10 per cent. was a considerable variation in trade, the new permits were very much based on the old for quantities as well as proportions. Subsequent reviews of permits worked to a variation of 5 per cent., and took place every sixteen weeks (except that they were liable to be suspended when Food Offices were preoccupied with ration book reissues).³

It should be noted that supplementary permits were not taken into account when the first continuing permits were prepared. There had been some agitation on this point. A majority of the trade pressed for their inclusion on the grounds that the main permits did not represent current trade; if they did, there would be no need for supplementaries. But the trade was not unanimous, for the largest share of supplementaries was apt to go to the big firms who maintained close contact with the retailer through their travelling salesman. Rationing Division refused to include supplementaries; they represented only 2.5 per cent. of the total poundage of the main permits, and their inclusion would complicate the preliminary work of Food Offices out of all proportion to their significance. Neither were those issued under the new régime to be apportioned; retailers

¹ The total quantities represented by the permits returned had to be compared with the record of quantities kept in the Food Office to make sure that no supplementaries had been included—as they often were.

² By means of a most ingenious calculator that was really a circular slide rule.

³ They consisted of a check between the permit and R.G.24—the record of a retailer's registrations, or, in the case of tea, of the coupons he sent in. These were sample-checked. The R.G.24 was checked against the stock figure on the G.C.3 return; then the average sales over sixteen weeks were compared with the permit.

were left to give them, if they wished, to one supplier. The supplementaries remained, therefore, as the last vestige of the free market. Competition for them among firms was fierce; travelling salesmen pressed retailers to apply for them and watched Food Offices closely. The Ministry often received complaints from these firms that some deserving retailer had been refused a supplementary or that a Food Office had not allowed him to nominate one of them to receive it. A supplementary was, of course, non-recurring. It was given only towards the end of a sixteen-week period, and the retailer had to prove his need for one and to have exhausted all his main permit first, not just the part of it assigned to a particular supplier. The increased trade would be incorporated in the main permit at the next review, but would then be apportioned among all the suppliers. Thus, a retailer who, for a period, enjoyed an undue proportion of popular tea obtained on a supplementary, found himself left with only a fraction of it when his permit was revised.

VI

Beyond the retailer, the new system grew more complicated. The first document to be noted is the *main permit*, the C.P.2T. The initial preparation and method of reviewing this permit have already been described. A Food Office sent one copy to the retailer, another to each supplier named on it, and kept one for itself. This was much simpler than the previous system that had prevailed from December 1942, when the permit travelled to the retailer for apportioning, back to the Food Office for final authorisation, back to the retailer again and then from him to his supplier. The supplier received a second document, a summary, C.P.2C, of all the permits made out in his favour by a particular Food Office.¹ This C.P.2C was, therefore, a master permit.

To take the next stage in its simplest form, let it be assumed that the supplier was a secondary wholesaler. He would add up the amounts on his summaries, would double the total (so as to adjust the eight-week quantities on the permits to the sixteen-week cycle of tea allocations), apportion it among his suppliers as prescribed, and send each a *Declaration of Requirements* (D.R.2). At the same time, he sent Tea Division a statement (D.R.1) of the amount he had ordered, together with the evidence of his entitlement summaries. The D.R.1 statement was a summary of the summaries; the D.R.2's were proportional indents. A primary wholesaler would proceed similarly, except that he would not need to double the quantities on indents received from secondary wholesalers, and as he bought only from

¹ After a permit review, he received a fresh summary, and copies of all permits that had been altered.

the Ministry, the same form (D.R.1) served as indent and formal notice of requirements.

In this way Tea Division was presented with a complete chain of evidence, starting with the independent evidence of entitlement provided by the C.P.2C summaries prepared by Food Offices. The position in practice was complicated by the fact that firms fulfilled several functions. A primary wholesaler might be nominated as the direct supplier of a retailer, and so receive copies of permits and summaries direct from Food Offices. His final indent upon Selling Section would be compiled, therefore, from C.P.2C summaries that had to be doubled, and D.R.2s from secondary wholesalers—that were already doubled. This was only the beginning. A firm might be a wholesaler-retailer; or a primary-secondary drawing part of its supplies direct from the Ministry and part from other primaries; it might be a small primary receiving allocations through a 'group leader', or a retailer with a modified wholesale licence to cover sales to catering establishments at wholesale rates. To take an example, a single supplier might have to deal with the following documents; a permit (C.P.2T) from a Food Office for the retail side of the business; a copy of this permit and summary relating to it (C.P.2C) made out to the wholesale side; copies of permits and summaries made out to the wholesaler side in respect of other retail businesses; indents from other wholesalers.¹

The Tea (Restriction on Dealings) Order of 1942 had laid down the conditions² on which traders could obtain or supply tea; transactions were not allowed without permits or, rather, the summaries based on them. To these were now added an obligation to have recourse to the suppliers nominated in the proportions prescribed; both were set out in an *Authority to Obtain Tea* (A.O.T.) issued to every secondary wholesaler. 'Full primaries' received a corresponding *Authority to Supply Tea* (A.S.T.). A nice point was raised by the exemption from the Tea (Restriction on Dealings) Order of lateral transactions between two primaries or two secondaries.³ Had this exemption remained untouched, a firm that was both a primary and a secondary could have evaded the new system. The wording had to be amended to allow 'exchanges' rather than transactions, though even this was difficult to specify because chests of tea did not always correspond exactly in weight.⁴

The 'freezing' of proportions did deal satisfactorily with the problem of price control; but this could, of course, have been done

¹ Supplementaries travelled separately up the chain of distribution and were never summarised.

² Incorporated in the Fats, Cheese, Sugar and Tea (Rationing) Order of July 1943 (S.R. & O. 1943, No. 1003).

³ See p. 725, n.3. above.

⁴ The amending Order was S.R. & O. 1944, No. 202. The quantities exchanged had to be 'equal, or as nearly equal as is practicable having regard to the containers in which the tea is packed'.

without the introduction of continuing permits. The new system can, therefore, be considered purely from the point of view of rationing machinery. Was it more, or less, exact than the one it superseded?

Its enforcement was necessarily limited in practice by shortage of manpower.

'It seems an unnecessary refinement', wrote an official of Tea Division in November 1943, 'to require the wholesalers to lodge the C.P.2C forms with us when we know we have not the staff to check them. We should have to bluff them that they are being used and therefore we should at the minimum have to keep a check of those received and send reminders to those who have not forwarded them'.

The Division's permit department—always understaffed—checked the apportionments on the secondary wholesalers' statements received against those prescribed on their Authorities to Obtain, but was never able to deal with all the documents received in respect of each sixteen-week cycle.¹ Even had the Division been able to check quantities completely, this would not have had its full effect unless Food Offices at their end could have carried out a regular and thorough check of the permits themselves.

In theory, the continuing permits for tea should have been more exact than those for other commodities because they were based on coupons, not registration. There was, therefore, no question of 'non take-up', and retailers' supplies should have corresponded exactly to their sales. But this exactitude could never be achieved during the war. There was inevitably a time-lag between the sales on which the permit was based, and the date at which it came into force; the rule for all commodities was that the permit must be issued 23 days before it was due to operate, and the delay was greater with tea because of the sixteen-week cycle. This 'natural' time-lag was aggravated when a permit review was dispensed with because of Food Offices' heavy commitments. A review was based on coupons collected over two months, and there should have been three a year. If a review were missed, tea permits ran for thirty-two weeks unchecked and only four months sales in a year were surveyed. For the other eight months, permit values were unrelated to current sales. If, during this time, a retailer's sales increased, he could obtain a supplementary permit; if they decreased, he could take his full permit entitlement. Admittedly, a Food Office might take a retailer's stock into consideration when granting or withholding a supplementary, but few did so; it was extremely difficult to get reliable figures of a retailer's tea stock because monthly deliveries could not be related definitely to any particular four or eight weeks. Obviously, the longer

¹ Documents were received from about 3,000 suppliers, some of whom might send in up to 1,500.

a permit ran unchecked the more supplementaries had to be issued—especially when, towards the end of the war and during the year after it, people were on the move again—and the more supplementaries that were issued, the greater the gap between tea released and actual requirements. The new system was, therefore, in so far as permit reviews were missed and permits ran unchecked for thirty-two weeks, less exact than that arrived at in December 1942, when new permits based on coupons had to be issued every sixteen weeks. Even if reviews were not missed, they only worked to a variation of 5 per cent. The new system could not, in theory, be as exact as the one it had replaced unless this variation were reduced.¹

A movement for eight-week reviews, and for a 1 per cent. variation, gathered strength after the war—the latter was recommended by a rationing ‘working party’ in 1948. During the war, however, rationing accuracy had to compromise with other considerations. Continuing permits had been introduced to save paper and office work; eight-week reviews and a 1 per cent. variation would have destroyed their *raison d’être*. Even if Food Offices had worked to an eight-week cycle, the tea trade could not. Allocation operations, with the ensuing enquiries and adjustments, were liable to take eight weeks in themselves. Moreover, more frequent alterations of permits would have called for more frequent, and therefore smaller, allocations and deliveries, whereas the whole trend of measures designed to save manpower and transport was in the opposite direction. For instance, a discount was given for large deliveries, and retailers now received their supplies every month instead of every week. Perfection of rationing machinery can, in war-time, only be relative. Thus tea distribution had to be loosened from the point it had attained in December 1942; in theory only slightly, in practice quite considerably. The problem was, in fact, to find the degree of looseness that could be permitted in order to equate the saving of tea with the savings necessary in other directions. To adopt an obviously loose system might be bad for morale; the solution appeared to lie in having to hand an ostensibly tight and elaborate system that need not be used to the full, and that could be suspended in part when it was in danger of clogging the machinery simultaneously employed on other tasks.

After the war it was possible to take tea rationing much further, and in 1948, a system very similar to the continuous accounting method used for the centralised sugar scheme in 1918 was introduced. An account of this belongs to the general discussion on the control of the retailer.²

¹ It would have been more consistent with the principles of a coupon-flowback system to have scrapped permits altogether and started a coupon bank, like that for ‘pcints’ (and for soap after the war). This was actually being contemplated in 1943 when the Tea Division suggested ‘freezing’ the permit proportions (p. 743 above).

² pp 635–6, above.

C:
Rationing as an Administrative
Problem

Conclusion

CHAPTER XLIV

Conclusion: The Conditions of Success

I

THE SUCCESS of food rationing was something that the British people came to take for granted. Their satisfaction with control, speaking generally, varied directly with its completeness; it was the things amenable only partly, or not at all, to rationing techniques, like fish, oranges, or milk, that evoked complaint. There could be no more powerful tribute to rationing than the demands that, say, cake should be rationed. They acknowledged the fairness of the system; but they also showed how well its limitations had been concealed, not only from the public in general, but even from many in Whitehall and within the Ministry of Food itself. For it was from these latter enthusiasts—who would have rationed coffee and cocoa, for instance, in the name of equality—that those actually running the scheme had the hardest task to defend themselves.

There were during the war only three major occasions on which something went seriously wrong with the machinery. Least important was the occasion—the distribution of ration books and identity cards in 1943—on which the Ministry incurred most odium and was least, if at all, at fault. The second in order of importance was the breakdown of the meat-rationing arrangements in the early months of 1941 and their virtual replacement by arbitrary allocations; but this was put right without undue loss of face, perhaps because the general war situation seemed so desperate. Most important, but concealed from the public eye behind the hesitations of Ministers, was the inability of the machinery to comply with an essential item in the specification laid down for it—capacity for prompt introduction. Had the war been the sort of war all were expecting, that weakness might have been devastatingly exposed. Its importance for students of technique is that it appears inseparable from the consumer-retailer tie, and therefore provokes enquiry whether the tie itself is really necessary.

The account that has been given of the internal vicissitudes of the system, long though it may seem, has omitted much, confining itself to the more central problems. It leaves no doubt that rationing, as Beveridge pointed out long ago, is not to be lightly undertaken. The system was complex and exceedingly laborious; for all the efforts that

were made to simplify it, it taxed the Ministry of Food's administrative resources to the utmost, and even so fell short of the ideal in accuracy and rigour that officials set themselves. They had to be content, for instance, with making the retailer's rationing garment a loose reach-me-down instead of a piece of bespoke Food Office tailoring. (Meat, the exception to this rule, really proves it; Food Offices only had time for the elaborate meat procedures because those for other commodities had been so drastically simplified.)

This complexity was partly due to that of the society in which the system was operating. Rationing, because it touched everyone, had to adjust itself to innumerable individual needs, from major categories, such as expectant mothers and heavy workers, down to office teas and beekeepers. It could not turn aside from any *bona fide* food requirement, merely because the number of people concerned was small; in the last resort, for instance, invalids had to be treated as individual cases. In proportion as the control of supplies became more tight, complications of this kind increased; 'special cheese' affords a good example. There was, however, another contributory source of complexity, at the very root of the system; its rejection of a ration currency in favour of a method of accountancy based on the consumer-retailer tie.

The tie had originally been put forward in 1917 as a loose substitute for rationing; analysis confirms that this was, in fact, a true expression of its function. When the Beveridge Committee, in 1936, declared that, with the tie, it was possible to dispense with coupons—'experience showed that the essential part is the counterfoil'—what it was really saying was that given statutory rationing, and some sort of device, like the Purchaser's Shopping Card of 1919, to ensure fair play between retailer and consumer, a sufficiently accurate basis of distribution would be the retailer's list of customers. What it was implying was that some tolerance, like the 10 per cent. allowed on sugar in 1918, would take care of those demands extra to registration. In other words, rationing would consist of a distribution scheme to which had been added a statutory provision limiting the share each customer might buy; the *quid pro quo* for which was an undertaking by the Ministry of Food to make that share available at the retailer of his choice. It is this suggestion of a contract between retailer and consumer, underwritten by the Ministry, that lies behind the oft-repeated assertion that the tie to the retailer enabled the ration to be guaranteed.

The retailer was certainly put under an obligation to give preference to his registered customers. However, as *ex hypothesi* there were some customers who could not become registered, and others whose registration became effective, legally, before it could influence what reached the retailer, his supplies had at all times to exceed what would

correspond to the number of his current registered customers. It is this excess issue, not the fact of registration, that (it might be argued) really constitutes the effective guarantee; from the point of view of distribution, it would make no odds if consumers, having indicated a preference for one retailer, were subsequently free to shop anywhere in the district. Other things being equal, there would be no reason to suspect that the total customers at any given shop would fluctuate sensibly from week to week. In short, allocation on the basis of registered customers is neither more nor less than allocation on the basis of average performance, and registration is only significant as measuring that performance.

Had the Food (Defence Plans) Department been content to accept these implications of registration, as was the Beveridge Committee, the history of rationing machinery in the Second World War would have borne a very different aspect. One must remember, of course, that the simplifying process was assisted, in 1918-19, by the fact that an armistice was signed four months after National Rationing came into force; it was wholly natural that, looking ahead to another war, officials should have been reluctant to propose a system that appeared so loose. The second Ministry of Food's pursuit of something tighter was lengthy and determined; lack of resources alone forced it to desist. Nevertheless, one cannot but feel that the effort was in principle misconceived, inasmuch as it endeavoured to impose accuracy on a system whose principal merit was in being rough-and-ready. The case for registration, that is to say, rests on the assertion that it is a simple and sufficiently accurate basis for distribution; if this is denied, the obvious solution is to fall back on the coupon—on a genuine ration currency—and this makes registration unnecessary.

At this point, one enters upon a nice balancing of advantages. With the successful example of tea rationing to hand, it cannot be denied that the coupon-flowback system is simple, elegant, and accurate. The objection to coupons is, of course, that they make work in the shops; since they also tighten up supplies, this may not be altogether disinterested. Moreover, against it has to be set a saving of work in Food Offices, for the abolition of the consumer-retailer tie would unburden them of the cumbersome removals procedure. It would also weaken the sanction for compliance with National Registration, but that is hardly a food point. What is, however, material to food is that dispensing with the tie would increase the incentive to steal ration books; it was frequent for lost ration books to be returned *minus* the non-tied points and sweet coupons. In other words, registration is both directly and indirectly a safeguard against fraud and duplication. Moreover, there are some foods—milk and eggs, for instance—for which strict coupon rationing is impracticable and registration the only alternative. If the removals procedure has to be

gone through for one commodity it may as well be gone through for six or seven.

Catering establishments add a further complication. The particular difficulties that beset meat rationing over caterers' supplies arose from the last-minute decision not to put meat meals on coupon. Nevertheless, meals rationing is in principle unsatisfactory because of the impossibility of providing a definite coupon's worth, and to put on coupon all meals employing rationed food is impracticable. Some sort of basis whereby coupons can be issued to establishments, as were points coupons, is therefore the only alternative to a permit system, and might well be less simple. Moreover, the objection to a consumer-retailer tie—removals—does not apply to a caterer-retailer tie.

II

This exploration of the pros and cons of coupon and counterfoil has so far neglected a capital point: the character of the war. The British rationing system—dogged, painstaking, a trifle slow in its movements—was eminently suited to a war of attrition. The continuous refashioning it underwent, from 1941 onwards, was untroubled by massive air attacks, heavy movements of population, or frequent and violent changes of ration levels. To all these it was vulnerable; the first two might have put an impossible strain on the consumer-retailer tie and the removals procedure, and the third especially was (except for meat) incompatible with the new permit procedures, which were streamlined but inflexible. There is indeed something very unwarlike about the preoccupation of officials, at the high tide of the Japanese advance in South-East Asia, with the ingenuities of the composite permit; and there must remain some doubt whether, even discarding such things, the system would work at all in a war of a different kind.

In one respect, indeed, there can be no doubt that it would fail utterly; in speed of introduction. This problem was one that the Beveridge Committee left on one side and the Food (Defence Plans) Department did not solve. It divides itself into two parts: the issue of ration-documents to the consumer, and the subsequent procedures. For the first, speed is to some extent in conflict with another requirement—avoidance of fraud and duplication—neglected in the food plans before the war, but admirably met (in the absence of air raids) by the enumeration device of the National Register. The second appears largely insoluble so long as one thinks, as officials did in 1939,

in terms of a consumer-retailer tie that must be made the effective determinant of supplies before rationing can begin. It was solved for tea by discarding the tie, and rationing overnight by coupon while stocks in the shops were ample; the tie could, of course, have been introduced later, and would have been, had rationing officials had their way.

While the experience of tea indicates a way of overcoming the most dangerous weakness of a system based on the tie, it also undermines the case for adopting the tie at all. One of the most curious dogmas that came to be held about rationing was that consumer registration was a more rigorous basis for it than any alternative. Lord Woolton, free from such traditional prejudices, was able, over both tea and points, to read officials a useful lesson in method. The contrast between their ingenuity and perennial freshness in device, and their reluctance to bring sustained criticism to bear on basic notions, is a striking feature of British food control. It seems to be akin to that 'doctrineless' attitude to economic controls that, as Professor Tawney has pointed out, was characteristic also of the First World War:

'... the system, if such it can be called, was only to a small extent the result of design, and even at its zenith... was rarely, if ever, envisaged as a whole. The different parts composing it had the common feature of being a reaction to scarcity, actual or threatening, and of being jolted forward by successive changes which made scarcity more acute. . . . Each had an independent origin. Each grew by a logic of its own, and developed the distinctive technique appropriate to the material which it handled. . . . Thus a collectivism was established which was entirely doctrineless'.¹

So with food rationing in both world wars; it was seen, not as the creation of a new self-propelling currency mechanism, but as an exercise in the administrative allocation of foodstuffs against production of the appropriate official form, duly completed. Beveridge's phrase about 'treating the nation like an army'² is revealing in this context, for the issue of army rations is nothing if not authoritarian. Such a temper—which sees any latitude given to consumer or retailer as a source of danger and anxiety—is revealed by the opposition to the points scheme and, for that matter, in Meat Division's desire to underpin the rationing system proper by arbitrary devices of its own, though this could be justified at first by the initial weaknesses in the system.

'If', wrote Beveridge of the first period of food control, 'the story shows at many points how rare a human quality is foresight, it shows

¹ R. H. Tawney, 'The Abolition of Economic Controls, 1918-21'. *Economic History Review*, Vol. XIII (1943), pp. 1-30.

² Beveridge, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

also how lack of foresight can be atoned for, given luck and time and determination.¹ The same is true of the second period of control; once again the rationing system was successfully adjusted, from uncertain beginnings, to changing circumstances. It by no means follows that it would have been adaptable to violent changes that were expected but never took place. True, much of the adjustment consisted in the jettisoning of superfluous or impracticable refinements; that is to say, of work that might have been done in the planning stage, had there then been a more critical analysis of precedents and prospects. In that case, the second Ministry of Food might not have required years of experience in which to attain a position, as regards the issue both of ration books to consumers and of supplies to retailers, that had been adumbrated by the Beveridge Committee in 1936. Even so, it is possible that the system, repeating the 'prodigious output of forms and instructions'² that had marked its predecessor, might, in different circumstances, have collapsed under its own weight.

From the point of view of mechanism, at least, a points system appears simpler, as dispensing with a variety of separate coupons, forms, and returns. Looking to the future, and taking an experimental view of past experience, one cannot but regret that Mr. Vivian's original proposal³ for a 'unit system' of this sort was not more carefully explored in the days when rationing technique was still fluid. A points system appears to have worked at any rate passably in the United States in 1943-44, although handicapped by an inadequate control on the supply side. The chief influence telling against it in Britain, in 1917 as in 1941, appears to have been that it made the kind of demand on administrators that they felt themselves unable to face. At the later date, with the rival system firmly established, the extension of points rationing to essentials was all but unthinkable.

Any form of rationing must be a compromise between conflicting requirements, including not only the mechanical problems that have been the main concern of this study, but imponderables such as public confidence and trade preference. People like what they are used to, and that, in the United Kingdom, must now count in favour of the consumer-retailer tie. Should it be necessary to design a third rationing scheme, it will be well to establish at the start what requirements are to have priority (other than the *sine qua non*, reasonably fair distribution of food). If emphasis is to be laid on flexibility and swiftness of operation, these may best be met by doing without the tie and

¹ *op. cit.*, p. 332.

² *Ibid.*, p. 221.

³ His original memorandum has come to light since Volume I of this history was published. It expresses so well the essential principles of points rationing that it has seemed worth while to reprint it (Appendix F, p. 779).

relying on coupons or even points to establish and guide demand. In such a case it would not be necessary to keep watch on the movements of each and every consumer. On the other hand, if this be desirable, on grounds of conscription or security, there is positive advantage in retaining the tie as a sanction, so deciding what at first sight seems a point of pure rationing technique on extraneous considerations of national policy.

It would certainly be a cardinal error to base any future scheme on the forms and documents that were eventually achieved in the Second World War, without regard to the circumstances they were designed to serve, or the processes by which they came into being. This account of those processes will be justified, practically speaking, only if it drives home the warning that the most dangerous legacy a rationing scheme can leave behind is a collection of its forms and instructions. Precedent is the uncritical recourse to history; many of the early difficulties of rationing in the Second World War, difficulties that fortunately time was given to remedy, may be traced to the way—a *catalogue non-raisonné*—in which the experience of the first world war had been officially handed down.

The necessity of this warning arises, of course, largely from the very success of the rationing machinery on both occasions, making it less likely to incur the scrutiny of a critical eye. Nothing that has been said here, by way of defining more clearly the manner and circumstances of that success, denies the fact of it; but, to quote Beveridge yet again,

‘Exaggerated praise of the British rationing system, in comparison with other systems, must be discounted . . . by reference to the conditions under which its success was achieved. The strain on the system was less, both because bread was not rationed and because the supplies even of the rationed foods were more abundant than in most European countries. The control of supplies was easier in so far as a larger proportion was imported’.¹

The account of meat rationing will have served to emphasise the backing that any rationing scheme, however sophisticated, needs from the commodity control; and this will become clearer as the controls of other major foods are studied. But, most of all, rationing needs the support of public opinion. The ingenuities in contrivance that have been described would have gone for nothing if the public, and even the retailers whom they harassed most, had not been convinced that they were fair and necessary.

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 231.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Changes in Ration Book Format

IN appearance, the ordinary ration book (R.B.1) changed considerably during the course of the war, though its essentials remained the same, viz.:

- (a) Provision for straight rationing by counterfoil and coupon or cancelled space;
- (b) Insurances against the unexpected;
- (c) A reference-leaf, or application form for the next ration book; or which were added from 1942 onwards
- (d) the 'points' and 'personal points' coupon pages;
- (e) the removals leaf (R.G.12A).

The first three issues consisted simply of coupon pages and counterfoils, both named and 'spare'. The names and addresses of retailers were entered inside the covers, whence, on the occasion of a removal, they had to be copied. These books were designed for coupon-cutting and so were printed on one side of the page only. Their coloured pages, fine paper, and security printing, reflected a peace-time spaciousness. As yet, too, the back cover was not used for rationing purposes.

The fourth issue, covering the year from July 1941, was the first to embody the changes proposed by the Ministry Committee the previous autumn.¹ Its twelve-months' duration was only practicable because another change, the abolition of coupon-cutting, made it possible to use both sides of the page. The Ministry would have preferred to keep a line of retreat open (particularly over meat meals in restaurants) by continuing to use one side only, but this would have made the book intolerably cumbersome; had an attempt been made to ration meat meals after all, separate coupons would have had to be printed. A third change in this issue—the omission of counterfoils for re-registration—was a matter for regret by officials even before the book was issued, for the decision to do without general re-registration in January 1941 (when, of course, the newly issued book contained counterfoils which the public obstinately tried to use) was already felt to have been mistaken.

The twelve-month book rubbed in this difficulty of being tied to a document that, when policy was fluid, might be out-of-date not merely before it was obsolete but before it was issued. The loss of flexibility had to be set against the savings of time and labour to the Stationery Office, Food Offices, and retailers. Two out of the three spare pages in the July 1941 book (which had gone to press in December 1940) were earmarked from the beginning for tea and cheese; preserves, rationed in June, were not provided for in the book till July 1942. As early as March 1941 it had become clear, with group-rationing and other devices in the air, that supplementary documents would be necessary. Loose pages of coupons, though used at first for the special cheese ration, were not favoured. They were easily lost; their distribution by post would require a vast

¹ See p. 565 *seq.*, above.

number of envelopes; and, above all, they had not the authority of a real ration book. Rationing, it was held, ought not to be reduced to an affair of grubby bits of paper.

Hence the decision to issue a supplementary ration book (R.B.9), as a sort of large-scale insurance against all sorts of possible developments and even one impossible one—value rationing. (It is not clear, in view of the Minister's declared opposition to this device, why authority was given for daily and weekly coupons to be printed for it. They survived to puzzle the public, year after year, as the 'grids' and 'panels' on the main ration books.) Opportunity was taken also to provide the counterfoils missing from the fourth issue; all, in fact, that was omitted was the one sort of provision that proved to be necessary—for points rationing, which demanded a supplementary book (R.B.10) of its own. The yellow R.B.9 was used, in the end, only for preserves and, from February 1942, for soap. Its production in time for issue along with the main book in July 1941 was a race against the clock, in which most of the main printing firms in the country took part; air attacks were disorganising transport just when the sheets were in course of transmission to local printers for folding and stitching. The life of the current book was prolonged for three weeks by using the backs of the (single-printed) coupons; it was this experience that led to the reopening of the whole question of ration-book printing.¹

The confusion of the rationing year 1941-42, with three ration books in operation simultaneously and numerous foods denoted by cryptic symbols like 'Spare B' and 'Monthly A', was cleared up by the fifth issue in July 1942. This, a handsome production in the style of its predecessors, though with pages all one colour, included named coupons for tea, cheese, preserves, and even eggs, which were not formally rationed. The coupons were, however, much smaller, and were grouped in conformity with the new policy of working in four-weekly periods. Points coupons and the various insurance devices from the supplementary book were also included; on the other hand, the page of printed instructions, that had been apt to be embarrassingly out-of-date at the time of issue, was omitted. Yet again the book had gone to press too early to provide for yet another rationing scheme—that for chocolate and sugar confectionery. When this was first mooted, in the late summer of 1941, Rationing Division had reluctantly proffered the Commodity Division a spare page in the yellow supplementary book (R.B.9); there had been much debate about allowing this page to be torn out and used separately. However, the supplementary book had expired by the time a decision to ration could become effective, and yet a third supplementary (R.B.11) had to be printed. It was designed for tobacco as well as sweets; hence a last minute decision to print in red those issued to children under 16 (R.B.11A).²

For the sixth issue, 1943, the ration book was recast completely, to include not only sweets coupons but the clothing book (as a detachable

¹ Appendix B.

² When in the following year the personal points coupons were embodied in the main book, the distinction between over and under sixteens was preserved, because children from five to sixteen had a separate ration book that year (1943-44). In 1944 the upper age for this book was raised to eighteen, but by this time there was no question of tobacco rationing.

insert);¹ the first of a series of austerity books, without security printing or coloured pages, it represented great economies in the use of paper, with only four more sheets than the limited book of January 1941. Some space was saved by reducing the number of insurance pages, using both covers, and cutting down counterfoils by insisting on combined registrations for fats and sugar/preserves. The main economy, however, consisted in the reduction of the coupons to mere tiny spaces for cancellation.² Opportunity was taken to group commodities together, week by week, on a single page, so that retailers could cancel several spaces at once, should the customer be registered with them for more than one commodity. Coupons were still provided for tea and three spares (lettered K, L, and M).

For the next three years the book was not altered in substance, but discussions on its form during the period of steady decontrol that was then expected to follow upon an armistice once again demonstrated the interdependence of policy and paper machinery. Commodity Divisions inclined to talk in terms of the re-introduction of branded foods, with its corollary, the replacement of the counterfoil by the cut coupon, were faced with the calculation that the ration book of July 1946 would then have to consist of at least 74 pages. In effect, that is to say, the tie to the retailer and the marked space would have to last as long as rationing. (The only way to break this deadlock would have been drastic; general points rationing and/or more frequent issue of ration books.) The new book was designed accordingly, except that its 'spare' coupons were enlarged so that they at least could be cut out; fortunately, for they were needed for bread rationing. The problem of unexpected changes continued to vex the Ministry; special 'bread-unit' pages were included in the books of 1947 and 1948, but no sooner was the latter issued than bread rationing was abolished.

One feature of the ration book remains to be mentioned; the link with the National Register. The first occasion on which printed arrangements were made for this was the third issue of January 1941; they took the form of a special line for the holder's coding, both on the cover³ and on the reference leaf. In July 1941 this line became a set of compartments, and to ensure that the coding was accurately supplied by the holder when applying for his next ration book, it was written on the reference leaf in the Food Office before the book was posted. To provide for this, while still having the centre of the inner edge gummed to prevent the book entrapping other mail, the reference leaf was made into the title-page, so

¹ The clothing book, with its coupons that were really lithographed stamps, and its coloured pages, remained a luxury book compared with the food book—by then reduced to a dingy paper spattered—to prevent forgery—with cowhair. The clothing book at first had an impressive series of panels inside the front cover with letters and figures labelled 'for official use only'. When this disappeared Rationing Division enquired, respectfully and with professional interest, what change of policy this represented. The reply was that it had only been put there to fill up the space and make it look official.

² There was some difficulty, in consequence, about specifying the 'appropriate coupon' in the Rationing Order; could *one side* of a piece of printed paper, with different matter on the back, be described as a coupon? (From July 1943, those to be cut out were printed identically on both sides.)

³ This issue and the next were, in the Ministry's best avuncular vein, headed 'Your Ration Book; issued to safeguard your food supply'. Critics pointed out that 'My Ration Book' would have been more in accordance with general usage; in point of fact, however, the book was the property of the Crown.

that the bottom edge of the front cover might be lifted to expose the spaces upon which to write the coding. (Technical considerations precluded the cutting, in advance, of the cover for this purpose; the risk of defacement or destruction, the use of the outside back cover as a reference leaf.) The abolition in 1943, of postal issue, made these elaborate devices unnecessary. From 1942, compartments for the National Registration coding were also provided on the counterfoils, and on the pages or parts of pages that might be deposited with a retailer. It is not evident whether they were commonly filled in accurately or at all; retailers could hardly be expected to check this. In any event, the provision had no connection with National Register procedure.

APPENDIX B

Printing and the Ration Book

THE part played by H.M. Stationery Office in the pre-war decision to start off rationing with a pre-fabricated permanent scheme instead of a temporary one¹ was the first of numerous occasions upon which rationing was decisively influenced by the purely practical factor of printing—and this despite the ingenuity of the Stationery Office in finding solutions at the eleventh hour. In the last resort, the translation into action of ministerial decisions and rationing policy had to be made effective through three machines at Wealdstone.

In January 1940, only three weeks after rationing had begun, the second edition of the ration book was already printing, and the Stationery Office had asked for the proofs of the third, which would run until July 1941. The life of a ration book, then six months, was also the time it took to print, even allowing for overtime, freedom from interruption and breakdown, and no enlargement in its size. This situation harked back to 1918. The ration book of that year, a finely printed affair with a 'security' background impressed on the paper, had been the model for the one prepared before the war, to print which, the Stationery Office procured three specially designed machines that could print background and letterpress in one operation. The need to be able to produce ration books in less than six months was obvious; so, too, was the danger of relying solely on three machines stationed near London. In May 1939 a strong plea to the Treasury, and the Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence on Stationery Requirements, for the duplication of these machines in the West of England had been turned down; they suggested instead that the machines should print the second edition of ration books and then be removed to the Stationery Office's new building at Gloucester, which was due for completion in January 1941.

This proposal proved impossible to carry out for want of a sufficient interval between successive printings, and in June 1941, the Ministry and the Stationery Office felt justified in raising the matter again. The fourth edition ration book had had to be issued with a supplement (R.B.g) which had been put out to time only by the sacrifice of security background, heroic efforts by Stationery Office staff, and the help of most of the principal printers in the country.

The Ministry described the task of preparing the ration book twelve months in advance as 'grotesque'. The food situation was becoming acutely changeable and the Government was in favour of great extensions of rationing; yet at a time when rationing needed to be particularly flexible, the printing needs of other Ministries were rapidly increasing. This time, the Treasury reversed its 'shortsighted policy of two years ago', and the Stationery Office was given practically a free hand. Unfortunately, it was too late; machines of the kind required could not be obtained, even

¹ p. 447, above.

from the United States, while the war continued. The only way of speeding up printing was to use the rotary presses on which telephone directories were printed. This meant doing without the security background; the sixth edition of the ration book (July 1943) was printed on Telephone Directory¹ machines, using a special tinted, flecked paper as a precaution against forgery. There was, however, no startling improvement in speed: the decision to use the Directory machines proved to be an example of running hard to stay on the same spot. The proofs of the 1945-46 book were asked for by August 1944; the final proofs of the 1946-47 book were sent for printing in October 1945, and essentials of the book had had to be decided by August. The end of the war only made matters worse. The printing trade decided against overtime and the man-power situation in it was serious. The paper situation was also getting worse; orders for the special paper had to be placed far in advance and the supply of manilla (for reference-leaves) was a particularly difficult problem.

Printing and the paper shortage were, therefore, always something of a strait-jacket for rationing policy, but, even in the strenuous days of 1941-42, the Ministry's recurrent nightmare—that a policy could not be put into operation because the documents were not there—never came true.

The printing of each issue was always the occasion for a friendly wrangle with the Stationery Office about the numbers needed. Rationing Division naturally liked to be surrounded by a comfortable surplus.²

The population figures had to be adjusted by various factors: the numbers needed in each class of ration book, with a margin for each, service call-ups and discharges, replacements for books lost, births, immigrants, and losses from bombing. There were also the normal distribution margins. Issuing the books simultaneously, especially when 20,000 sub-offices were used, was, from the Stationery Office point of view, a wasteful method. In 1943, it complained that its customers (of which the Ministry was the largest, but not the worst) regarded margins as safety-first guesses instead of closely assessable insurances—'. . . after three and a half years your local people can, if they will use the brains God gave them and the taxpayer is paying for, make far closer estimates than they have yet done'. For instance, the Ministry wanted to treat the introduction of the Junior (blue) Ration Book as an additional variable which would increase existing margins; the Stationery Office, quoting the theory of probability, regarded the introduction of an additional defined range as a factor reducing margins. The trouble was, of course, uncertainty about the distribution of the different categories within each area. The extreme choice was between a million surplus books at the end of the year and a hurried reprint. The Stationery Office preferred to risk the latter and, in the end, the Ministry accepted this policy. An additional reason was that the commonest form of abuse was not forgery but stolen ration books (no one would risk seven years for forgery when he could take a short cut by stealing, a much lighter offence) and the fewer books in stores the better.

¹ The use of Telephone Directory machines also made it possible to transfer part of the plant to Manchester, so providing simultaneous production there and at Wealdstone, and insuring against a breakdown of ration book printing from enemy action.

² A margin of about 12 per cent.

APPENDIX C

Recovery of Deceased Persons' Ration Books

By pre-war arrangements with the Registrars-General, local registrars of births and deaths assisted the Ministry of Food to recover ration books of the deceased. The ration book or, if it were not surrendered, a *default form* was sent to the nearest Food Office, whence it was, if necessary, re-transmitted to the Office of origin. A weekly return was made of these transactions. A registrar might not refuse to register a death because a ration book was not forthcoming; the legal onus to recover the book lay not on him but on the occupier of the house, or the owner or person in charge of the establishment, where death took place. He was, however, given an incentive, in the form of a fee paid by the Ministry for each book or default form. (The fee for issuing a *birth form* was paid by the Registrar-General's Department.) This procedure had become very complicated by 1941, for the scale of fees had to be modified to deal with supplementary books (to say nothing of the margarine coupons used for clothes rationing in which the Board of Trade was interested). Even before then, it had become evident that an astonishing number of interpretations, all demanding rulings from Headquarters, could be put upon an apparently simple graduated scale.

As from 1st January 1942, therefore, the system was simplified but loosened. No payment was henceforth made for documents recovered, and the default form was abolished; instead, a 'consolidated' fee of 3d. per death was paid by the General Register Office, on the basis of the weekly return, after the Food Office had checked it against the number of ration books received. The incentive to collect documents thus disappeared, although the weekly return remained a means by which the Registrars-General could exercise moral pressure on registrars.

The fees paid to registrars occasioned some friction with local authorities. Registrars were a complicated class, about two-thirds of them being salaried officers and the rest fee-earning. Some local authorities required their registrars to surrender such extraneous fees, and this in turn raised the question of local authorities pocketing moneys paid, via the Ministry of Food vote, out of the Exchequer, a practice deprecated by the Treasury.

APPENDIX D

Sugar For Domestic Jam-making

I

THE rationing of sugar immediately brought with it a problem of special allowances for preserving fruit at home. In the very first month—January 1940—the marmalade-making season had evoked a scheme of household permits based on 3 lb. of sugar for every registered customer who could produce evidence that 1 lb. of marmalade oranges had been bought. This scheme, which revealed an astonishing quantity of Seville oranges to have been imported, was later described by Headquarters as a 'glorious ramp'. It was, therefore, not an encouraging example when the Ministry of Food came face to face with the jam season.

There were conflicting interests to be taken into account. The Ministry of Agriculture, anxious that the fullest use should be made of the fruit crop in farms and gardens, was encouraging Women's Institutes to set up canning and preserving centres. The Ministry of Food was equally interested in the disposal of the home fruit crop; if there were no domestic jam-making, growers would be left dependent on commercial buyers, and would accuse the Ministry of having ruined their market. It was essential, in view of the scarcity of sugar, that what Sugar Division could spare for domestic jam-making should somehow be steered to those who could be relied on to mate it with the fruit. The safest class of user, decided the Ministry, would be those who grew their own fruit; in March 1940, it invited them to make application for sugar.¹ Members of Women's Institutes who did not grow fruit, however, might buy the communally-produced jam. The intention was that once these applications had been met, any sugar left over might be distributed more generally.

The scheme proved very unpopular indeed. It was, of course, attacked in detail;² but the main division of opinion was between town and country. Those who supported the scheme thought mainly of the fruit; those who did not, of the sugar. If, they argued, sugar was available for jam-making it should be available to all; those who bought fruit were just as effective in disposing of the fruit crop as those who grew it. When allocations turned

¹ The application form for the household permit asked for the weight of fruit and sugar used in 1939, the weight of fruit expected in 1940 (it was easy to make fun of this question, but distribution arrangements had to be set in train before the crop matured), and the estimated quantity of sugar that would be needed. (A similar scheme had been used in June 1918 after representations had been made by the Royal Horticultural Society. Subsequently, however, the distribution of sugar for jam-making had been left to Food Control Committees.)

² It was to apply to stone and soft fruits. But, it was asked, what of gooseberries, which were neither? Or rhubarb, or marrow, or wild fruit? Why the concession to non-fruit-growing members of Women's Institutes? Had it been made clear to them that they must not buy fruit to take to the centre?

out to be 6 lb. a ration book¹ townspeople who did not grow fruit thought that owners of gardens had been treated very generously indeed.

By June the sugar situation was said to be much easier, presumably because the domestic ration had been reduced to 8 ounces per head per week.² The Ministry was still trying to work out a scheme for co-operative preserving that could cover town as well as country, when the fruit became ripe, and a hasty decision had to be taken. Consumers were to be allowed 2 lb. a ration book in the week beginning 8th July, against a declaration that they would use the sugar only for jam. The approval of Ministers was not secured until 26th June; on that day Sugar Division began to move to Colwyn Bay; Rationing Division did not learn of the decision to exact a declaration—to which they (and Enforcement Branch) were strongly opposed—until it was too late; they were themselves on the move; Food Offices learned of the scheme from the Press, and were swamped by queues of traders wanting to know where the sugar was coming from, and of consumers wanting to know if there were declaration forms. When the issue was over it remained to indemnify those consumers who had not managed to get any sugar at all, and to tackle the question of retailers' permits (a task complicated by the fact that the whole affair had coincided with a general re-registration). Food Offices were supposed to adjust the next permit to the amount the retailer had sold (on the evidence of the declarations he sent in); but this would not cover wholesalers, for they had already received and distributed the extra four-weeks' ration for July. In the end, it was agreed to regard them as having had the necessary authority to do this. When, in August, a second and more orderly allocation took place, current permits were simply regarded as carrying the extra amounts.³

II

By the time the fruit crop of 1941 came up for discussion, a form of preserves rationing had been decided upon. In March the Ministry had announced that, because of the shipping situation, there could be no sugar bonus to households for preserving bought fruit; for home-grown fruit, it had ready a scheme for co-operative preservation.⁴ Preserves rationing,

¹ Applications, reported the Midland Divisional Food Officer, had varied between 12 lb. for a household with 10 ration books, and 10 cwt. for one with 3.

² Vol. I, p. 121.

³ Cf. the 50 per cent. increase in the value of butter permits (p. 557 *seq.* above).

⁴ This could cover town as well as country because it was to be run not only through Women's Institutes but through Garden Fruit Committees (set up by Food Control Committees), hospitals and other institutions, British Restaurants and canteens. Preserves rationing, it was feared, might imperil the scheme, because members of the centres could not be allowed to keep more than their ration. The disposal of W.I. jam did grow into a problem, for retailers were reluctant to take it lest they lose useful wholesale ties. The W.I. asked for retailers to be given supplementary vouchers, but the Ministry refused this on the ground that it would amount to condoning off-ration sales. The jam was disposed of mainly through the C.W.S.

however, would provide a simple and fraudproof method of issuing sugar for domestic jam-making, and it was at once suggested that people be allowed to give up their jam ration in return for sugar.

On 1st April the Minister asked that a sugar/jam option be considered; it was, however, turned down for administrative reasons, the chief being that to introduce such a complication into the unsteady preserves scheme might topple it over.¹ By June, the sugar situation was easier and the clamour for an option considerable. It was again turned down, the main objection this time being that people might be registered at different shops for jam and sugar. Instead, an unconditional bonus of 2 lb. of sugar was given by doubling the weekly ration ($\frac{1}{2}$ lb.) for four weeks.

In 1942 the administrative obstacle was out of the way; consumers were now obliged to register at the same shop for sugar and preserves. Moreover, the shipping situation precluded an unconditional sugar bonus. Several very complicated schemes were evolved, to be discarded for a straight-forward exchange of 1 lb. of sugar for 1 lb. of jam, to operate from May. (The original intention had been 12 oz. of sugar for 1 lb. of jam; the more generous rate of exchange was adopted to encourage people to exercise the option and so clear the fruit crop.) The machinery would be for retailers to cancel jam coupons, record the purchase of sugar 'in lieu', apply for a supplementary sugar permit in replacement, and then have this amount deducted from their next jam vouchers.² At the last moment the scheme was put forward to 4th April because Sugar Division had to clear stocks from vulnerable areas, and did not want to have to move them twice. It proved very popular with consumers;³ but not with Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Division, or with Jam Division. The former feared that there would be no sugar left over for the glut plum crop expected. This was taken care of by extending the option for another eight weeks (and, it was hoped, steering the extra sugar towards the plums) and giving an

¹ The other arguments were: (1) that the preserves scheme was a minimum share scheme, and consumers might therefore expect their minimum share as sugar and a share of the jam surplus as well, (2) that if the option operated from month to month, Sugar Division would never know what their commitments were; if jam were commuted to sugar for, say, six months in advance, it would be difficult to adjust the jam ration.

² It was intended that in August 1942, when a new permit procedure was to be introduced (see p. 635 above) and the Sector Scheme (see pp. 628-9 above) under which retailers were to be tied to 3 suppliers, would come into force, vouchers should be replaced by permits. Successive postponement ended, on 28th October, in a final decision to keep to vouchers. The reasons for the postponements were: (1) that manufacturers needed time to sort out the nominations they received and to see if they could accept them all, (2) there was then some possibility that jam might be put on points (see p. 775 below), (3) the problem of imported jam then cropped up. A last-minute change in the Sector Scheme arrangements allowed retailers to nominate 3 manufacturers as their suppliers instead of, as was originally intended, one wholesaler and two other suppliers. The imported jam could not be distributed through manufacturers, so Preserves Division favoured the abandonment of nominations. Finally, Rationing Division came down in favour of keeping vouchers because the varying sources and different volume of supply of the components of the preserves group would make it very difficult to work a permit system. The option was, of course, an additional reason for keeping vouchers.

³ Except in Scotland, presumably because fruit was scarce there. (The marmalade scheme of 1940 had revealed that there was normally a good trade in Scotland in pulp, especially apricot pulp, for domestic jam-making.)

unconditional bonus of 1 lb. as well (so enabling the consumer to take up commercial jam).

The troubles of Jam Division were not to be cured so easily. The option was running counter to the Ministry's new policy of 'variety in diet through increasing the supply of bread spreads'. Manufacturers were being encouraged to produce one-third more jam; quality had to be sacrificed to quantity, and this, of course, increased the popularity of the option. Retail stocks were piling up, jam distribution had been dislocated, and, when the full effect of the reduced voucher demand was felt, production would be dislocated as well. This threatened a far greater waste of fruit than shortage of sugar for domestic preserving, for if manufacturers could not clear their storage space¹ and pulp containers, they would not be able to make full use of the plum crop; nor would they want to, if they could not sell their jam. The Division had therefore to turn about and embark on long-term measures to spread the decline in demand evenly over the whole field of manufacture. The immediate effect of the option, however, was that syrup and treacle were transferred to the points-rationing scheme.

III

IN April 1943, the option began again.² In May, the Division responsible for fresh fruit realised that, most unexpectedly, another glut plum crop was on its way. They hastily sought reassurance from Sugar Division, which was readily given, that there would again be an unconditional bonus. But jam factories were still clogged by the jam and pulp produced from the 1942 plums. The pulp would not keep for more than two years; worse still, the Ministry had large stocks of unfamiliar imported jam that had already gone three years of its estimated life of five years. (The Director of Sugar Supplies, quoting the consumer's invincible dislike of quince jam in the earlier war, thought that the effect of the option on the disposal of tinned jam was being exaggerated.) During June there was, as a result, much talk of putting all preserves 'on points'. This was rejected, mainly because retailers were strongly opposed to any more coupon-cutting; instead, from September to December, a special ration of imported jam and home-produced plum jam was issued, which was not subject to the option. The Ministry cleared its whole stock of 22,000 tons of imported jam, and a good deal of plum; by the end of October stocks were once more in a 'magnificently liquid position'. Then, in November 1943, the option was made permanent.

This came about in a curious way. '... the soldier on a week's leave', explained rationing officials in July 1943, 'is only entitled to 4 oz. of jam

¹ Even large firms had very little storage space. (This was one of the reasons why the minimum share scheme had been turned into rationing, see p. 557 above.) The happiest solution, for the Ministry to maintain production at the existing level and itself to store the surplus, was put out of court by shortage of packing materials.

² The special reason for the early start in 1942 did not exist in 1943, but it was decided that people should be given the chance of 'saving up'.

and cannot get it'. This problem had beset the first weeks of preserves rationing, and the Service Authorities had continued to press the Ministry hard about it. To say that the soldier must go without would not do; an attempt to cajole retailers, by Ministry circular, into serving 4 oz. of jam 'loose' was a failure, as the Services were quick to demonstrate. There was no escape from their reiterated request that the soldier be allowed to take 4 oz. sugar instead of his jam; and this meant that everyone must be allowed to exercise the option in perpetuity, for an option for one kind of consumer only would have been far too difficult to administer. Having gone so far, the Ministry felt it might allow a two-way option, and so perhaps dispose of a little more jam.

There were, at the same time, some changes in machinery.¹ First, retailers now took their unused preserves vouchers to Food Offices and exchanged them for sugar permits. If the option operated the other way, which was unlikely, supplementary jam vouchers would be issued, but there would be no corresponding decrease in sugar permits (which were now 'continuing');² instead, any surplus would be looked for on the retailer's return and he would be warned to reduce his purchases. Secondly, the checking of this return now became more complicated (preserves and sugar had to be taken as one total). Thirdly, the jam coupon on the temporary ration card had to be cut out so that sugar replacement could be claimed. Hitherto, it had been cancelled, because, with a 10 per cent. margin on preserves vouchers for unregistered sales there was no need for retailers to claim replacement. This margin was now reduced to 2½ per cent. for breakages.³

The permanent option was bitterly assailed by retailers, to whom, because of the difference in profits on sugar and jam, it meant financial loss. The two-way option, they claimed, virtually destroyed effective rationing of both sugar and jam; they could not reliably assess their requirements⁴ or keep track of their stocks; and the permutations open to the customer with several ration books hopelessly confused their staffs. Even stronger opposition came from the jam manufacturers. They, as well as retailers and wholesalers, were holding 'unprecedented' stocks;

¹ At the same time the purchasing period for sugar, and, therefore, preserves, was extended to eight weeks. This was to relieve an acute warehousing problem. The other two measures were advanced to coincide with this so that consumers should not be vexed by successive changes. Rationing Division always disliked the extended period and got rid of it in April 1944.

² See p. 634 above.

³ The weighing allowance for sugar was only 1 per cent., but retailers got the 2½ per cent. preserves margin for the supplementary sugar permits. To have taken the difference in margins into account when exchanging the vouchers would have been too complicated.

Rationing Division would have liked to avoid the exchange altogether by sending the vouchers themselves up the sugar chain. But Sugar Division could not consent. Subsidised sugar for domestic consumption had to be kept out of the manufacturing sugar channel, and they had very thorough arrangements for auditing the accounts of the registered dealers with whom the permits finally came to rest. They felt that the methods for 'killing' jam vouchers, i.e., making sure that they were not used twice, were not up to their standards.

⁴ At the end of 1944 Birmingham developed a plan for asking retailers to assess in advance in what proportions they would need sugar or jam. In October 1945, this was made a national scheme but it had, of course, to remain voluntary.

retailers would not replenish theirs until they had got rid of their plum jam; this would progressively accelerate the decline in demand by driving yet more consumers into the option.

The Ministry was, and remained, in a very awkward position. It had encouraged manufacturers to produce large quantities of not very palatable jam; it had then prejudiced the disposal of this and, in so doing, made impossible an orderly and planned production programme, by setting domestic jam-makers up in competition on what manufacturers held to be unfair terms.¹ It was faced, as a result, with recurrent surpluses of unpopular jam that must be disposed of, but that must not be declared too openly, because consumers were already critical of another aspect of the 'breadspreads' policy—the pre-emption of fruit crops for the jam factories. Each shift resorted to to clear these surpluses only aggravated the problem in the long run, by enabling consumers to secure jam without taking up their full ration.² Yet it could not pursue a policy of '*laissez aller*' in case poor fruit crops or a hitch in sugar supplies should send consumers rushing for jam that was not there because manufacturers had lost their labour.

In 1944 Sugar Division estimated the 'take-up' of the extra sugar as 37 per cent. Jam Division put it nearer 50 per cent.³ and was reducing production 'targets' by 25 per cent. It was clear that many consumers preferred their sugar 'straight', and that only Sugar Division could bring the option to an end. Instead, it declared that it was prepared to find the 50,000 to 60,000 tons extra sugar needed not only in 1944 but, as far as it could see, in 1945 as well. In April 1944, therefore, the current surplus was cleared by doubling the jam ration, and putting canned marmalade on points. The sugar and preserves coupons were now worth $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of sugar or 1 lb. of jam. (In July the usual bonus of 1 lb. of sugar was issued.) The doubled ration lasted until August.

Preserves Division had cleared its jam stocks but was then faced with the problem of too much marmalade. The citrus pulp held in October 1944, together with the pulp and the bitter oranges they were committed to import, was enough for three years' supply of marmalade. Rationing and Points Rationing Divisions again suggested that all preserves be put on points. 'We took over syrup and treacle', wrote the latter, 'because it could not be sold on the preserves ration. We took over imported marmalade for the same reason. We made a great success of both. I see no reason why we should not do the same with . . . all preserves'. Points rationing would not solve the problem of orderly jam production since demand would be even more unpredictable than under the option; but the real stumbling block was that the option, long divorced from the fruit question that had started it, and the soldier's 4 oz. of jam that had perpetuated it, was now sacrosanct. In April 1945, therefore, the preserves coupon became

¹ Because (1) the quality of 'shop' jam was the result of Ministry policy, (2) domestic jam-makers used subsidised sugar.

² For instance, the special jam ration of the autumn of 1943 had enabled consumers to 'stock up' just before the option was made permanent. It was also unfortunate that this should have happened just before Christmas, a season for which consumers normally bought large quantities of sugar.

³ In home-baking areas like Lancashire and Yorkshire, 'take-up' was said to be as high as 80 per cent.

worth 2 lb. of marmalade or 1 lb. of jam, and as a result the two-way switch was abolished. This year there were, in addition, three 'sugar for jam' bonuses.

In May 1946 a jam 'bonus' was issued (and repeated in the next two years). At the end of the year yet another attempt to include preserves in points rationing resulted in imported jams being transferred to it. The option was steadily increasing its hold. 83,000 tons of sugar had been allotted to it in 1944; 100,000 tons in 1947; 117,000 tons (as compared with the 165,000 tons for jam manufacturers) would be needed in 1948. Some 21,000,000 consumers, it was estimated, encouraged by the syrup, imported jams, and marmalade, that they could buy on points, were exercising it. In 1948, however, a Treasury fiat that there would not be enough sugar to maintain both jam production and the option, together with another glut plum crop, dealt it a death-blow. It took a desperate remedy to get rid of the monster that had grown from the soldier's 4 oz. of jam—the abolition of preserves rationing. The first stage of this took place in August 1948, when only blackcurrant, raspberry, and strawberry jams, and imported honey and fruit curd were left on the ration. This was reduced to 1 lb. for eight weeks and so, therefore, was the amount of sugar that could be secured by the option. Consumers, as was expected, looked on unlimited freedom to buy plum jam as no substitute for the 1 lb. of sugar they lost. In December, the de-rationing of jam was completed.

APPENDIX E

The Start of the Rationing Week

IN July 1942, the first day of the rationing week was changed from Monday to Sunday. For some months, complaints had been made that, as long as rationing changes were announced on Sunday morning to come into operation on Monday, the Sunday trader would be at an advantage. This argument was reinforced by a classic example of a run on the shops on a Sunday—the introduction of soap rationing in February 1942. Public Relations Division was insistent that Monday announcements were not feasible. The Sunday newspapers reached a larger public and could guarantee simultaneous insertion; and as the advertisement columns of the Monday dailies closed at the same time as those of the Sunday papers, the risk of leakage would be increased by a day.

Unfortunately, as it turned out, only the Jewish Traders' Advisory Council was consulted about the change. This seemed reasonable, because it was the Jewish traders who stood to lose by it, both in trade (if the representations about their advantages were correct) and by the loss of a day in which to digest the changes. They made no complaint.

Six months later, however, a campaign against the change was begun by the National Federation of Grocers and Provision Dealers Associations, which was careful to point out that its affiliates had not been consulted. By July 1943 the Ministry was under continual bombardment and being accused of surprising crimes; of fostering anti-Semitism, of undermining the Shops (Restriction of Sunday Trading) Act, and of favouring Jewish traders. These traders, having first been attacked for being open on the last day of a rationing week or period, and so garnering unspent points and coupons, were now under fire for being open on the first day and creaming off the new points and coupons. The Federation argued that this grievance would harden into anti-Semitism and would drive other traders, in self-defence, to open on Sunday and thus break the law.

The Ministry, somewhat surprised at this uproar, refused to believe that people rushed out to shop the moment they read 'Food Facts' on Sundays; moreover, statistics indicated that points spending was heaviest towards the end of a week and a period (though there was a tendency to spend Personal Points on Sunday). In any case, the points goods most likely to be sought after on the first day were those that were scarce and, therefore, unlikely to be handed out to unregistered shop-crawlers, while goods that had been down-pointed because they were plentiful would still be plentiful on Monday.

The Federation threatened to enlarge the issue from preferential selling to Sabbatarianism, and enlist the aid of the Lord's Day Observance Society;¹ the Ministry reasonably considered this a matter to be argued elsewhere. The inflated agitation resulted in Parliamentary Questions and a deputation to the Parliamentary Secretary; but Divisional Food Officers reported

¹ The Federation also approached the Jewish Traders' Advisory Council; but it refused to be drawn in.

no increase in Sunday trading, there was no support from multiples and Co-operatives, and considerable opposition from the ranks of the independent grocers. Many considered the agitation to be fostered by the main-street grocer who had always disliked the back-street corner grocer who catered for those who bought in penny numbers and had no facilities for keeping any quantity of food. The illegal seven-day trader, they maintained, was not the Jewish trader, who might open till 2 p.m. on Sunday but who closed on Saturday—peak shopping day.

The Ministry, having trained people to look on Sunday as the first day of the rationing week, was not disposed to yield to claims that it regarded as exaggerated and unproved. In 1944, the agitation subsided; but it did not become extinct.

APPENDIX F

Mr. Vivian's Proposal for a Points Rationing System, December 1917

[The copy in the Ministry of Food records is in duplicated typescript, with certain additions in ink, which are indicated here in round brackets.]

(Vivian's) Memo. on Unit System of General Rationing (10. 11. 17)
(Presented to Committee on 11th December)

THE following system of general rationing has so many obvious advantages that it ought to be very fully considered before any other is finally adopted.

It is, briefly, a coupon system involving complete interchangeability of coupons. Each person has a given number of uniform coupons per week, say, for the 'normal' class, 100; and coupons have to be surrendered upon any purchase of a rationed foodstuff according to the current rate of exchange. Thus, on a purchase of bread, coupons would be surrendered at the rate of 5 per lb.; on a purchase of meat at the rate of 4 coupons per lb., etc., etc.

The rates of exchange for all the rationed foodstuffs would be so adjusted as to ensure, so far as possible, a relative consumption by the public corresponding to the available supplies of each foodstuff. As the total coupons available to each person would be limited, the public would be limited in the extent to which it consumed one foodstuff by the extent to which it was prepared to sacrifice its consumption of all, or any, of the other foodstuffs. The fullest latitude would be permitted as between the preference of individuals; but if the preference of the public as a whole involved the overconsumption of one foodstuff, the rate of exchange of that foodstuff would be put up. The result would be that for the coupons which the public in bulk had shown themselves prepared to devote to that foodstuff, they could only obtain the available supplies. Similarly, as the overconsumption of one foodstuff would involve the underconsumption of one or more others, the rate of exchange of those underconsumed would be put down. This would have two results, (1) to attract coupons back to the underconsumed foodstuffs, prevent waste and restore equilibrium, and (2) to supplement the total food value of the 100 coupons which had been reduced by the higher rate of exchange for the overconsumed foodstuff.

The advantages of the scheme may be summarised as follows:

(1) It is, from the machinery aspect, the extreme of simplicity; each individual gets, period after period, the same number of the same coupons.

(2) The coupons do not, by bearing a reference to a foodstuff or a particular quantity of a foodstuff, invite the implication that they afford a guarantee.

(3) The scheme is not a Continental one, whatever value in psychological appeal this point may have for the public.

(4) Foodstuffs may be introduced into or taken out of the rationing system at the shortest notice, the only administrative step being the alteration of the current schedule of exchange rates. With the ordinary coupon system such a change means a lengthy period of preparation for printing and issue, etc., of the coupons as affected by the change.

(5) If the total supply of any foodstuff is reduced absolutely, or if there is a sudden local temporary shortage, the exchange rate can be put up generally or locally as the case may be. It is true that on the ordinary coupon system, a reduction in the value of the coupon can be announced, but with far greater difficulty. To say that a coupon referring to $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of bread is to be deemed to represent some other quantity involves administrative difficulties. Moreover, the coupon would on the normal system presumably conform to some unit of purchase, as ' $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of bread', and this limits the range of convenience in the writing down of the value of the coupon, since a (say) 10 per cent. reduction on a $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. coupon would create difficulties in calculation and purchase.

It is, of course, true that the adjustment in their proper relation of the several exchange rates is a matter of some delicacy, since it is necessary to take into account not only the relative proportions of the total supplies of the rationed articles but also all other considerations affecting preference such as price, calorific equivalence, custom, etc. But these difficulties, though not to be underestimated, would attend the initial stage only. The first schedule of exchange rates would be frankly experimental, though compiled with the greatest care and attention to the considerations before mentioned. But experience would at once show whether this initial scale secured a state of equilibrium; and since the relative rates of consumption of the several rationed foodstuffs, as demonstrated by such experience, would themselves be the proved resultants of all tendencies affecting preference, it is probable that any corrective adjustment of the exchange rates would be almost, though not wholly, a matter of arithmetic, no subsequent necessity arising for any delicate estimation of the effect of the various grounds of preference.

It may be objected that if the excessive preference of one section of the population for a given foodstuff cause the exchange rate to be put up, the whole population is damnified, including those sections of the population which have been more moderate in their consumption of that foodstuff. But the answer to this objection is that the increase in the exchange rate affects individuals in proportion to their preference for the foodstuff in question. As individuals with an excessive preference for a foodstuff must be allocating a greater proportion of their coupons to its purchase than other persons, the depreciation in the value of those coupons hits the former specially hardly, while their comparatively small consumption of the foodstuffs for which the exchange rate has been reduced will not afford them much benefit until they reduce their overconsumption of that for which the rate has been increased. Hence there is this distinct advantage, that the effect of the increase is sharpest where it is most needed, and it should accordingly prove a by no means clumsy and

blundering instrument but one of considerable precision and delicacy. It does not merely render the stocks solvent by cutting down the consumption of excessive and moderate alike; it tends to bring down the excessive consumer to the level of the moderate consumer.

(S. P. VIVIAN.)

APPENDIX G

The Ministry of Food and Clothes Rationing

THE Ministry of Food had never intended to become involved to the extent it did with *clothes rationing*. In February 1941 it had been approached by the Board of Trade, which was in the awkward position of having a rationing scheme in prospect but no local organisation. The Board of Trade made three requests: (1) for a coupon-page in the current ration book to start off the scheme, (2) for one or more pages in the next book to be specifically designed for clothes, (3) if the clothing documents could not be incorporated, for their distribution through Food Offices. All that the Ministry would allow to begin with was the first; the Board of Trade was offered the unused¹ margarine page in the current (third edition) ration book. However, once the Ministry had taken part in the launching of the scheme on 1st June 1941, it was never able to disengage itself.

The initial rôle of Food Offices was to issue margarine pages to merchant seamen, and to replace lost pages.² These simple duties proved surprisingly onerous. They came at a time when Food Offices were 'battling through their periodic nightmare of a ration book issue', and coping with registration of eggs. The strain was exacerbated by the great secrecy in which the clothing scheme had to be prepared. All that Food Offices could be told in advance was to lay in stocks of margarine pages and expect a secret letter to be opened at 6.30 p.m. on 31st May 1941. When, therefore, Food Offices opened their doors, applicants were there in force before there had been time to brief the counter-staffs.

'Hundreds, nay thousands, of people', wrote a senior official, 'had no margarine page available. Either at the outset they handed it to the retailer, or getting bored with its inactivity they had torn it out and destroyed it, and they came to us in shoals for replacement'.

Prominent among these crowds were servicemen, wanting to know what provision had been made for them, and seamen. The latter could claim a margarine page by producing their seamen's ration book, R.B.6. But this was only held by seamen on weekly articles; those on foreign articles existed on temporary ration cards when ashore, as did shipwrecked seamen. They were finally handed over to Mercantile Marine Superintendents, but not before they had given port Food Offices, especially Glasgow, a very bad time.

No more margarine pages were replaced after 30th June; but although the initial flurry was over, clothing problems continued to nag at Food Offices. They had, after all, undertaken some routine work—the issue of

¹ Oils and Fats Division had asked for a separate page of margarine coupons in the third ration book because they were thinking of scrapping the combined butter/margarine ration.

² A minor but troublesome point was that for the first few days the usual charge for replacing a ration book or part of a ration book was made. Then it was decided not to do so because the margarine page had become a clothing document.

coupons to new-born babies, immigrants, and people discharged from the Forces.¹ The split personality of the ration book caused endless trouble; people found it hard to understand why, when a lost ration book was replaced, the margarine coupons were cut out.² In August the issue of the permanent clothing cards began. The Postmaster-General had undertaken this,³ but the old ration book, which had expired on 28th July, was the passport into the clothing scheme; post offices were to remove its front cover and give a clothing card in exchange. In spite of warnings to take care of the old book, people had lost it in large numbers and naturally expected to get it replaced at Food Offices. They were not comforted when told it had become a clothing document, especially as the Board of Trade's own arrangements and forms for replacement were not ready. Furthermore, the new ration book was also caught up in the tangle. Post Offices sometimes issued a clothing card on this by mistake and when, in November, it became the proof of entitlement to a points ration book, Food Offices found themselves confronted with mutilated books.

All these arrangements encouraged people to continue to take their clothing troubles to Food Offices. The Ministry besought the Board of Trade to keep them away, but had first to disentangle its own Food Executive Officers. (One, in the early days, had sought guidance on extra coupons for people sending clothing to prisoners of war, losses at cleaners, losses from bombing, and naval ratings acting as gunners on merchantmen who had to wear civilian clothes in the United States.) The Ministry instructed its officers whether they knew the answers or not to tell people to write to the Board of Trade at Bournemouth; but it was fighting a losing battle. The public's natural tendency was to take rationing problems to the local Food Offices; in any case, they had nowhere else to go. Clothes rationing, like food, affected the whole community; moreover, it was a complicated differential scheme, with special allowances for expectant mothers, and large and growing children. The Board of Trade

¹ Babies and people discharged from the Forces were the main source of trouble. Babies' clothing was not rationed at first, so babies receiving ration books after 1st June did not get margarine coupons. Some of them, however, had been born well before the 1st June, and had been registered late, or applied for ration books late. Their parents felt strongly that they had a moral entitlement to clothing coupons. On 5th August, expectant mothers were granted 50 extra coupons and as a result, babies' clothing was rationed from the 12th. This gave June and July babies a grievance. In January 1942, both hardship classes were given a compensatory issue (unpublicised) of 20 coupons. The first class had to get a certificate from the Food Executive Officer that they had been given a ration book without margarine coupons.

Ex-servicemen, if discharged towards the end of the rationing year, were normally given temporary cards until the new ration book came into force. This year, they needed an old ration book in order to get clothing coupons; but they did not get ration books until their discharge papers were available. Allowing for delay in issue of these, and for 28 days leave, this meant that they were left without clothing coupons for some time. There were some heated exchanges with the War Office over this question. As for people temporarily discharged from the Forces, they rivalled babies in complication.

² Especially as the Board of Trade did not automatically replace lost coupons in full.

³ Food Offices undertook the issue of their own three classes, and to ex-residents of Chiswick. The last had no front covers to their ration books because these had been taken to replace reference leaves lost when the Food Office was bombed. Special arrangements were made for Chiswick itself but it was hardly possible for post offices all over the country to keep a look out for ration books consisting of only a back cover with the Chiswick stamp on it. Food Offices were more used to these oddities.

had to run the scheme without the benefit of local offices that could act as filters for the inevitable difficulties caused by border-line cases, carelessness, and genuine misapprehension. The result was that the Board became overwhelmed by work that, in food rationing, would have been dealt with at much lower level. The ensuing frustrations continued to bring the public in to Food Offices, and, a year later, the Ministry was still asking the Board to

'take every conceivable opportunity in season and out of season of telling the world emphatically that the Food Offices have nothing whatever to do with the rationing of clothes, and that any enquiries and complaints and what not must be addressed elsewhere'.

Indeed, the Ministry's defences against clothes rationing were weakening. The Board of Trade had been among those impressed by Food Offices' expeditious distribution of points-ration books in November 1941. It had no idea how it was to get its 1942 clothing book into the hands of the public. There was no application form on the current card, and the Post Office was hardly likely to undertake another issue. The Board therefore approached Rationing Division again, and suggested that Food Offices might repeat their operation of November with clothing books, that some kind of application form should be put into the next food ration book, and that the Ministry should undertake some more local work—'the issue of special cards to special people and other such things'.

At first, the Ministry's reluctance to be mixed up with clothes rationing was maintained. But the arrangements for the 1942 issue of ration books required that people should bring their ration books and identity cards to sub-offices for examination; the new ration book would be sent by post later on.¹ Rationing officials needed a 'carrot' to bring people to the sub-offices, and bethought themselves of the clothing book; the Board of Trade was at last allowed inside the fence. The next year, 1943, the clothing book was incorporated with the ration book.

By 1944, Rationing Division had 'bit by bit . . . taken on more and more'. Food Offices were issuing supplementary coupons to large and growing children,² and expectant mothers, as well as certificates for

¹ See above, pp. 495-6.

² Food Offices first took part in this in the autumn of 1942. The 1941 issue had been carried out through (a) schools—a form for each child being signed by the head teacher, and passed, with age and measurements, to the local education authority; (b) Post Offices—by means of employment books in conjunction with a form signed by a parent, or an identity card, or a form signed by a J.P. or clergyman; (c) direct from Bournemouth by post. (There were 10,000 direct applications.) 6,000,000 forms of six different kinds had to be distributed among 30,000 schools and 17,000 Post Offices. A sample sent to the Registrar-General's Department revealed an estimated total of 3,000 frauds. Employers had to release temporarily 1,000,000 employment books, and teachers complained bitterly.

This tale was revealed when the Board of Trade asked if Food Offices could solve one part of the problem of proving entitlement for them by putting the age of the child on the back of the ration book when new ration books were being written up. Rationing Division decided that it would be simpler for Food Offices to take over the job. In 1942 a rather odd problem was revealed; that of fat children born between 1924 and 1928 who lived in N. Ireland but went to school in Eire and had no ration books. This meant that Food Offices could not check their applications against the age on their reference leaves. Another problem, however, was not recurring. The application forms for N. Ireland were sunk in the Irish Sea and their loss was not known for some time.

crockery and tea towels to caterers, and for hand towels to the food trades. Rationing officials were also insisting on things being done their own way. Emphasising that in their own sphere they were usually consulted to see whether a policy were practicable or not, they set out to streamline that part of the local administration of clothing rationing for which Food Offices were responsible, and to scrap 'niceties' when these would entail too much work. Expectant mothers must be able to obtain all their food and clothing requirements in one place on one medical certificate; standard sheets of all-purpose supplementary coupons should replace separate documents for each kind of special case; the clothing year should be the same as the rationing year; the ages of special entitlement in clothing should be the same as those in food rationing, and so on.

It should be remembered, however, that if Rationing Division was strong on administrative detail, the Board of Trade was strong on principle; it could offer the example of a classic coupon-flowback rationing scheme complete with coupon banking system.

APPENDIX H

Rationing and the General Post Office

Food Rationing imposed a very heavy burden on the postal services, quite apart from that connected with the issue of ration books by post on five occasions, the first in November 1939 and the last in July 1942. Not only was a massive delivery of individually addressed books, within a limited space of time, undertaken by the Post Office in its stride; on all but the first occasion a heavy previous traffic in reference-leaf applications had also to be carried.

The postal traffic between Food Offices and traders of all types assumed, in the words of the General Post Office, 'mountainous proportions locally'. Besides inward and outward correspondence, there were numerous forms of return (in both directions) and bulky packets first of ordinary and later of points, 'personal points', and (after the war) bread-unit coupons. Seventeen types of 'Official Paid' stationery were eventually in use by Food Offices, apart from forms, such as the 'R.G.24' and 'M.K.2', that also carried an 'Official Paid' impression and were constantly in use. Traders, too, came to use a variety of 'Official Paid' packets, individually coded for particular uses. All this traffic was apt to be concentrated at four-weekly and above all at eight-weekly intervals, coinciding with ration and allocation periods. On occasions it coincided with the bulk postal issue of ration-books or with the Christmas season. The Welfare Foods services also imposed a load on the mails, not merely on account of the weekly dispatch by 'Official Paid' envelope of the coupons collected by distribution centres other than Food Offices, but also through the delivery of dried milk, orange juice, and cod-liver oil to remote households.

Apart from the burden of traffic, the use of so many 'Official Paid' forms and envelopes meant extra work for the General Post Office (and the Stationery Office). Each of these had to be scrutinised before printing by the Postal Services Department, which co-operated with the Ministry of Food to ensure that postal needs and the requirements of food control were satisfied. It is probable that the forms so handled far exceeded those for any other Government Department.

APPENDIX J

Specimen of 'Food Office Procedures'

Note: The following reproduces verbatim the standard instructions for operating the removals procedure in Food/National Registration Offices. In their original form, the instructions under 'National Registration' and 'Food Office' each occupied one side of a foolscap sheet of paper.

Some abbreviations used:

I.C.—Identity Card; R.B.—Ration Book; N.R.—National Registration; N.D.M.—National Dried Milk; E.M.—Expectant Mother; W.F.—Welfare Foods; P.K.—Poultry Keeper; C.N.R.O.—Central National Registration Office.

F.O.P. 4

NATIONAL REGISTRATION

Counter Procedure for Removals

Preliminary Action	MAIN ACTION
<p>CALL FOR I.C. AND R.B.</p> <p>I. IF BOTH PRODUCED</p>	<p>1. EXAMINE I.C. If any signs of damage, defacement, alteration or erasure, if letter-code doubtful or non-existent or if official stamp is absent from any entry, refer to Supervisor.</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">I.C. not signed. If person attending is person by whom I.C. should have been signed, require signature forthwith. If person attending is some other person, see para. 5 (b).</p> <p>2. PREPARE N.R.29/30 AS FOLLOWS</p> <p>(a) Enter surname (in block capitals) Christian names in full and N.R. number.</p> <p>(b) Ascertain new address, make certain it is within the N.R. area and enter in full, including not only the name of the house, if any, but also its number and name of street or road. Enter area code opposite.</p> <p>(c) Enter last address:</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">(i.) If I.C. bears entry or endorsement of notice of removal to place outside U.K., confirmed by Immigration Officer's embarkation stamp, or bears embarkation stamp only, or if last address shown on I.C. is in Isle of Man, enter in space for last address the words "Outside U.K." followed by the name of the country outside U.K., if stated, or, if last address is in Isle of Man, by the entry of that address.</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">(ii.) In any other case, enter last address as shown in I.C.</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">(iii.) If address entered (either in U.K. or in Isle of Man) add the area code as shown on I.C. If entry is "Outside U.K." with no address, make a dash in space for area code.</p> <p style="font-size: small;">Outside U.K. If last address entry is "Outside U.K." or is in Isle of Man and I.C. produced is not a Yellow Card and does not already bear an endorsement "Usually resident outside U.K." require declaration on Form N.R.190.</p>

APPENDICES

- (d) Enter date of birth and delete inappropriate age-group.
- (e) Delete inappropriate nationality.
- (f) Enter class codes and type of I.C. produced.
- (g) Require person giving notice to sign and date N.R.29/30.

3. AFTER COMPLETING N.R.29/30 BUT BEFORE ENTERING NEW ADDRESS ON I.C.

Declaration	If declaration obtained on Form N.R.190 and states usual residence outside U.K. (a) If Card produced is two-fold Blue Card, impound it and issue Yellow Card coded "V" and valid for three months. Amend class code on N.R.29/30 and note issue of Yellow Card at foot of B. and C. side. Mark Impounded Card "Yellow Card issued" and set aside with N.R.190 for transmission to C.N.R.O. (b) If Card produced is three-fold Blue, Green or other photo-bearing Card, endorse Card on back "Usually resident outside U.K." and note N.R.29/30 in the space above the words "attainment age 16" below Notice of Removal panel.
Three-fold Blue Card.	If three-fold Blue Card produced with third panel not completed, impound and re-issue in two-fold Blue Form unless holder establishes that three-fold Blue Card has been issued quite recently. On re-issue endorse Impounded Card "Two-fold Blue issued" and set aside for transmission to C.N.R.O. Note N.R.29/30 at foot of B. and C. side.
Yellow Card.	If Yellow Card, verify still valid. (a) If validity of I.C. expired over 7 days ago refer to Supervisor. (b) If validity expired within last 7 days, or is due to expire within 14 days: (i.) if coded "V," renew for further period of three months from date of expiry; (ii.) if coded "C," first call for production of Travel Permit. If it shows that period of permitted stay has not expired and will not expire during the current period of validity of the I.C., renew as in (i.). If period of permitted stay has expired, or if Travel Permit not produced, refer to Supervisor.
Child's Card.	If Child's Card produced, and date of birth returned shows holder to be 16 or over, refer to Supervisor.

4. ENTER NEW ADDRESS IN I.C.

- (a) If I.C. is of Blue or Yellow type, enter new address in full in first vacant address space and stamp in ring opposite with official metal stamp, taking care to produce a legible impression. Unchangeable ink must invariably be used.

Grouped Areas. Care should be taken to ensure that the official metal stamp for the appropriate area in the group is used.

If all address spaces filled up Construct a new card repeating the last address from the old I.C. in space below class code. Stamp with the official metal stamp of the Issuing Office. The words "Re-issued by" should be written above the official stamp. Take care to produce a legible impression. The new address should be entered in the first removal section and legibly stamped in the usual manner. If old card bears an endorsement of intended removal outside the U.K. to which effect had not been given (as indicated by the absence of the Embarkation stamp) the endorsement must be repeated on the new I.C. in the second removal section unless the applicant on being asked indicates that he no longer has the intention of proceeding outside the U.K. Before entering class code verify against date of birth given on N.R.29/30.

- (b) If I.C. is of any other type affix firmly a label N.R.101 over previous address; enter new address in full and impress official metal stamp.

5. BEFORE PROCEEDING WITH R.B. ACTION LOOK FOR:

- (a) Endorsements on I.C. produced, viz.:

A.R.C. S.R. & O. 1943 No. 1378 "Diplomatic."	If in the case of Registered Aliens, enter on N.R.29/30 A.R.C. No., otherwise strike out "A.R.C. No." and insert S.R. & O. 1943 No. 1378, or "Diplomatic" as the case may be.
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APPENDICES

789

B.N.A. &c. Note N.R.29/30 with particulars.
Usually resident outside U.K. War Worker Note N.R.29/30 "U.R.O.U.K." or "War Worker" as the case may be, in the space above the words "attainment age 16" below Notice of Removal panel inserting "not" between "E.R.29" and "prepared."

(b) **Signature:** If I.C. is not signed, and person attending is not person by whom it should be signed, instruct person attending that holder must sign the I.C.

6. PROCEED WITH R.B. ACTION

II. IF I.C. ONLY PRODUCED

PROCEED AS ABOVE

- (a) If R.B. lost. Add pencil note to N.R.29/30 "No R.B. produced."
- (b) If R.B. merely not produced. Add pencil note to N.R. 29/30 "No R.B. produced."

III. IF R.B. ONLY PRODUCED

- (a) If I.C. lost:
 - (i.) Obtain completion of N.R.37 (in Scotland—N.R.21). Prepare N.R. 29/30 omitting N.R. number and noting "I.C. replacement applied for."
 - (ii.) If application for replacement already made elsewhere, prepare N.R.29/30 as in (i.), ascertain area in which application made and refer to Supervisor.
- (b) If I.C. merely not produced. Tell applicant to bring it.

IV. IF NEITHER I.C. NOR R.B. PRODUCED

TREAT AS FOR R.B. ONLY PRODUCED.

FOOD OFFICE

Counter Procedure for Removals

Preliminary Action	MAIN ACTION
CALL FOR I.C. AND R.B.	
I. IF BOTH PRODUCED	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. See that R.G. 12A is completed (back and front). 2. Impress F.O. Code No. on front cover and on R.G.12A (left of section B and enter date). Strike out old F.O. Code No. on front cover. 3. Fix slip over address on front cover. (Do not write new address.) <p>R.G.12A (FRONT)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Enter class of R.B.—R.B.1, 2, 4, 8X, 1 R.N. 5. Enter old F.O. Code No. (right of section B). 6. Enquire if changing all retailers.—Mark any being retained "RET." 7. Where no registrations have been effected see that coupons Meat..... Sugar in the ration book are intact and strike through retailer section. 8. Detach R.G.12A and fix new R.G.12A. <p>COUNTERFOILS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Get counterfoils for all foods for which fresh registration is required. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Milk, Eggs, Meat—enter Class of R.B. (b) Milk (i) enter date of birth if after July 31st, 1925; (ii) rationalised area, after enquiry—enter new retailer's name and address. <p>LOOK FOR:—</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. N.D.M. or C.M. on R.G.12A (Milk). Copy on to new R.G.12A. (If N.D.M. FREE: see para. 11.) Do not issue milk counterfoil. 11. "FREE" on R.G.12A (Milk). <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Issue W.F.1 (except for Service E.M. for whom same benefit continues). If in order on completion— (b) Endorse new R.G.12A (+ carbon) "FREE" or "N.D.M. FREE." (c) If liquid milk, make out W.F.9 in duplicate—1 for retailer, 1 for F.O. (d) If change of category—replace free vitamins and N.D.M. coupons with "paid" coupons. 12. "P.K." on R.G.12A (Eggs). <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Copy on to new R.G.12A OR (b) Issue Eggs counterfoil (if applicant wishes). 13. R.G.48 Proceed as in F of F.O.P.3 14. SPECIAL CASES <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (i) DUPLICATE RATION BOOK. Endorse old and new R.G.12A clearly "Duplicate." (ii) TEMPORARY RATION BOOKS. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Yellow card holder: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Compare date of expiry in front cover with that of I.C. and amend if necessary. (b) Enter "Yellow I.C." at top of back page of old R.G.12A.

- (c) Ascertain new retailers and fill in counterfoils and new R.G.12A.
- (d) Take F.O. copy of back page of R.G.12A and enter at top, name and initials; N.R. No.; "Yellow IC"; "Temporary till" (date of expiry as on front cover of R.B.), and attach it to old R.G.12A.
- B. **R.B.2 held by Expectant Mother:—**
 - (a) See that "EM" is entered at top of back page of old R.G.12A.
 - (b) Ascertain new retailers and fill in counterfoils and new R.G.12A in both R.B.1 and R.B.2. (They must be the same.)
 - (c) Take F.O. copy of back page of new R.G.12A in R.B.2 and enter at top, name and initials; N.R. No.; "EM"; "Temporary till" (date of expiry as on front cover of R.B.) (as in F.O.P.1), and attach it to old "R.G.12A." If FREE, follow para. 11 above.
- (iii.) **TRAVELLER**
 - (a) Leave R.G.12A in R.B. unless registrations have to be cancelled.
 - (b) See that R.G.12A (new or old) has retailer spaces struck through and is marked "T" at top of back page.
- (iv.) **R.B.8X.** (N.B.—No. I.C.)
 - (a) Make out "old R.G.12A" endorsing at top "R.B.8X"; "man" or "woman"; "billeted with or without subsistence." (With subsistence if either or both blocks of coupons on p. 3 of R.B.8X is left valid.)
 - (b) Stick new R.G.12A to p. 2 of R.B.8X with retailer page left showing.
 - (c) Issue counterfoils R.B.8C (or removals counterfoils endorsed in Red "HMF") specifying clearly M or W and billeted with or without subsistence.
- (v.) **R.B.1 (R.N.)** (N.B.—No I.C.)
 - (a) Endorse top of back page of old R.G.12A—"R.N."
 - (b) Endorse counterfoils—"R.N."

FINAL—N.R./Food Office.

- 15. Return I.C. and R.B. with new counterfoils.
- 16. Tell applicant:—
 - (a) to complete counterfoils and hand to retailers;
 - (b) to complete R.G.12A (Section A);
 - (c) to write new address on front of R.B.

II. IF I.C. ONLY PRODUCED

- (a) If R.B. not issued, e.g., re-entrant to country—prepare new R.B.
- (b) If R.B. lost—secure completion of R.G.5 and issue R.B.12 for 2 weeks and tell applicant to apply in 2 weeks with I.C.
- (c) If R.B. merely not produced—do not issue R.B.12 but tell applicant to apply again with I.C. and R.B.

III. IF R.B. ONLY PRODUCED

Issue R.B.12 for 2 weeks.

IV. IF NEITHER I.C. NOR R.B. PRODUCED

TREAT AS FOR "I.C. ONLY PRODUCED."

Appendix Tables

TABLE I: FISH (FRESH, FROZEN, AND CURED):

Landings of British Taking in the United Kingdom

'000 tons landed weight

Calendar Months	1934/38 average	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
January ..				25.1	15.9	9.6	14.7	14.4	16.9
February ..				26.4	14.7	19.1	16.8	20.1	19.2
March ..				31.7	19.2	25.9	26.2	26.7	27.6
April ..				30.2	15.5	21.4	19.4	22.0	27.5
May ..				38.4	21.0	26.9	27.2	28.6	35.9
June ..				27.2	23.8	30.9	31.8	34.9	49.9
July ..				32.3	29.4	42.5	39.0	41.6	58.9
August ..				27.4	30.5	37.5	42.0	47.7	57.4
September ..			26.0	20.1	27.2	28.2	33.3	28.7	45.6
October ..			43.7	17.7	17.7	21.7	22.0	22.5	48.6
November ..			56.6	18.2	16.2	26.0	22.1	22.8	64.9
December ..			31.5	20.7	19.4	19.2	21.8	19.3	40.1
Total Year	1,023	1,049(a)	787	315.4	250.5	308.9	316.3	329.3	492.5

(a) The increased landings from the Barents Sea and Bear Island waters in the years 1936, 1937, and 1938, make the 1938 figures a truer reflex of the pre-war figures than the 1934-38 average.

Source: Ministry of Food¹

TABLE II: FISH (FRESH, FROZEN, AND CURED):

Foreign Landings (Imports) in the United Kingdom

'000 tons landed weight

Calendar Months	1934/38 average	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
January ..				13.1	15.8	11.8	6.3	8.5	16.1
February ..				19.0	13.7	14.2	9.2	13.2	14.1
March ..				14.7	22.6	21.7	15.7	26.7	21.6
April ..				17.8	12.4	19.1	24.5	27.9	27.4
May ..				17.1	16.0	26.0	26.3	25.6	29.4
June ..				13.3	11.8	18.0	21.4	18.9	18.3
July ..				12.3	14.2	18.2	16.9	18.6	26.1
August ..				14.0	17.7	11.3	17.0	20.9	21.5
September ..			1.7	13.4	12.6	12.0	16.7	18.9	16.9
October ..			6.6	14.1	13.6	9.9	13.8	14.1	18.1
November ..			8.6	15.6	15.9	10.7	17.1	16.9	19.2
December ..			12.4	11.6	15.8	6.7	17.4	12.8	11.2
Total Year ..	101	100	109	176.0	182.1	179.6	202.3	223.0	239.9

Source: Ministry of Food

¹ For detailed fishery statistics, reference should be made to the publications of the Fisheries Departments, e.g., *Fisheries in War-time* (H.M. Stationery Office, 1946); *Report on the Fisheries of Scotland, 1939-48* (Cmd. 7726, 1949).

TABLE III:

*Eggs in Shell: Numbers Passing Through Packing Stations
(United Kingdom)*

Million dozens

Statistical Months		1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947
January	(5 weeks)	*	9.5	7.6	6.9	6.9	9.1	8.3
February	(4 ")	*	9.1	9.3	9.1	8.5	11.3	7.2
March	(4 ")	*	15.3	16.1	13.4	17.0	17.1	10.6
April	(5 ")	*	26.2	23.7	21.9	25.7	28.4	26.8
May	(4 ")	*	17.9	16.0	15.0	17.1	20.9	21.9
June	(4 ")	*	14.4	12.2	12.1	13.9	16.8	17.6
July	(5 ")		13.2	10.5	11.6	13.1	14.9	16.4
August	(4 ")	} 34.9	8.5	6.7	6.8	8.1	8.9	10.0
September	(4 ")		6.7	6.1	5.9	7.4	7.7	7.9
October	(5 ")	} 17.5	4.9	4.8	5.0	6.2	6.8	6.8
November	(4 ")		2.5	2.5	2.5	3.3	3.9	3.0
December	(4 ") (a) ..		3.6	3.1	3.3	3.9	4.4	3.4
Total Year		52.4	131.8	118.6	113.5	131.1	150.2	139.9

(a) In 1943, December was treated as a 5-week month.

* Control of home-produced eggs began in July 1941.

Source: Ministry of Food

TABLE IV:
Potatoes: Acreage, Yield, and Utilisation in the United Kingdom

(from Agricultural Holdings of over 1 acre in Great Britain and of ½ acre or more in N. Ireland)

	Pre-war Average 1936/37 to 1938/39	1939/40	1940/41	1941/42	1942/43	1943/44	1944/45	1945/46
Acreage ('000 acres)	723	704	832	1,123	1,304	1,391	1,417	1,397
Yield per Acre (tons)	6.8	7.4	7.7	7.1	7.2	7.1	6.4	7.0
Total Crop ('000 tons)	4,873	5,218	6,405	8,004	9,393	9,822	9,096	9,791
UTILISATION OF CROP								
1. Human Consumption (a)	3,092	3,126	3,690	4,242	4,836	5,895	5,608	5,741
1a. Exports	49	40	7	17	30	137	298	505
2. Animal Feed	586	669	1,087	1,432	2,046	1,466	865	1,216
3. Seed	719	869	1,154	1,339	1,443	1,471	1,446	1,468
3a. Seed for Allotment and Gardens	50	58	69	74	68	62	65	63
4. Loss through Shrinkage, Disease, etc.	377	456	398	900	970	791	724	798
TOTAL	4,873	5,218	6,405	8,004	9,393	9,822	9,096	9,791
Price Index (incl. acreage payments after 1941)	100	93	131	149	148	148	152	158

Source: Ministry of Food; Agricultural Departments

(a) Including potatoes fed to domestic livestock. See text, pp. 153-4.

TABLE V:
Milk: Estimated Total Production and Utilisation in the United Kingdom
 Calendar Years

		<i>million gallons</i>									
Utilisation		1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946		
CONSUMED LIQUID											
Sold off farms through Milk Marketing Schemes ..		863	937	1,064	1,114	1,169	1,205	1,243	1,304		
In farm households		104	112	121	128	131	132	132	132		
Sold off farms outside Milk Marketing Schemes ..		44	27	19	19	20	19	19	18		
TOTAL LIQUID		1,011	1,076	1,204	1,261	1,320	1,356	1,394	1,454		
MANUFACTURED											
Off farms through Milk Marketing Schemes ..		411	272	146	146	169	167	176	186		
On farms											
Cheese-making under Schemes		25	18	13	9	6	6	5	4		
Butter		125	94	62	49	49	49	50	49		
Cheese-making outside Schemes		4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—		
Cream		14	8	—	—	—	—	—	—		
TOTAL MANUFACTURE		579	392	221	204	224	222	231	239		
Fed to stock		214	182	150	137	130	130	131	133		
Waste (a)		6	4	3	3	3	3	3	3		
GROSS PRODUCTION		1,810	1,654	1,578	1,605	1,677	1,711	1,759	1,829		

(a) Up to first stage of distribution, i.e., on farm and between farm and first buyer.

TABLE VI

Milk: 'Non-priority' Allowances, 1941-46

<i>Date</i>	<i>Allowance (Imperial pints per week)</i>			
1941: 13th April—	[Nominal cut of one-seventh of deliveries in			
11th October	week ended 7th March. See text.]			
2nd November	[5 per cent. cut in dairymen's total supplies,			
	compared with week ended 25th October.]			
10th November	[15 per cent. cut on same base week.]			
23rd November	2
1942: 15th March	2½
29th March	3
24th May	Unrestricted
30th August	3
25th October	2½
22nd November	2
1943: 14th March	2½
25th April	3
2nd May	4
4th July	3
1st August	2½
7th November	2
1944: 16th April	2½
7th May	4
18th June	3
7th July	2½
5th November	2
1945: 18th March	2½
22nd April	3
15th July	2½
4th November	2
1946: 17th February	2½
7th April	3
30th June	2½
25th August	2
27th December	2½

Source: Ministry of Food

TABLE VII
Milk: Prices and Distribution Costs, 1938/9 - 1945/6 (England and Wales)

Year (October-September)	Average Prices Received by Producers Selling Wholesale			Estimated Cost of Distribution (a)		Estimated Average Retail Prices		
	Weighted Average Price	Average Transport Deduction (pence per gallon)	Net Return to Producer	Percentage Increase over 1938/39	Pence per gallon	Percentage Increase over 1938/39	Pence per gallon	Percentage Increase over 1938/39
1938/39	12.95	1.43	11.52	—	11.5	—	27.5	—
1939/40	15.36	1.45	13.91	21	12.1	5	28.5	4
1940/41	18.98	1.52	17.46	52	12.4	8	34.8	27
1941/42	21.42	1.60	19.82	72	12.6	10	35.5	30
1942/43	22.31	1.63	20.68	80	12.6	10	35.7	30
1943/44	23.01 (b)	1.15	21.86	90	12.5	9	36.0	31
1944/45	23.37 (b)	1.06	22.31	94	12.7	10	36.0	31
1945/46	24.53 (b)	1.05	23.48	104	12.9	12	36.0	31

(a) Including all allowances made to distributors by the Ministry of Food or the Milk Marketing Board.

(b) Not including the temporary war-time production bonus (roughly equal to ½d. a gallon) paid on and after 1st January 1944.

Source: Adapted from Appendix IVa, *Report of the Committee on Milk Distribution*, May 1948 (Cmd. 7414).

TABLE VIII

Non-local Removals recorded in the National Register, 1939-45

Calendar Quarter	Number in Thousands		Percentage of Civilian Population	
	England and Wales	Scotland	England and Wales	Scotland
1939: 4th Qr.	1,283	150	3.2	3.1
1940: 1st Qr.	1,254	111	3.1	2.3
2nd Qr.	1,422	112	3.5	2.3
3rd Qr.	2,141	155	5.4	3.2
4th Qr.	2,746	194	6.9	4.0
1941: 1st Qr.	1,865	170	4.8	3.5
2nd Qr.	1,757	289	4.5	6.0
3rd Qr.	1,552	215	4.0	4.5
4th Qr.	1,321	187	3.4	3.9
1942: 1st Qr.	1,032	129	2.7	2.7
2nd Qr.	1,539	182	4.0	3.8
3rd Qr.	1,178	141	3.1	3.0
4th Qr.	1,031	143	2.7	3.0
1943: 1st Qr.	794	103	2.1	2.2
2nd Qr.	906	121	2.4	2.6
3rd Qr.	979	134	2.6	2.9
4th Qr.	936	128	2.5	2.8
1944: 1st Qr.	809	99	2.1	2.1
2nd Qr.	922	129	2.4	2.8
3rd Qr.	2,098	158	5.5	3.4
4th Qr.	1,555	148	4.1	3.2
1945: 1st Qr.	936	108	2.5	2.3
2nd Qr.	1,197	120	3.2	2.6
3rd Qr.	1,081	136	2.8	2.9
4th Qr.	1,065	142	2.7	3.0

Sources: Registrar-General for England and Wales: *Statistical Review, 1940-45*, Text, Vol. II. Civil, Table V. Registrar-General for Scotland: Unpublished material.

NOTE

The above Table indicates the order of magnitude of the removals problem as it affected Food/National Registration Offices, quarter by quarter. The following qualifications to its use should, however, be borne in mind:

1. 'Non-local' removals are those from one National Registration area to another. Their extent therefore depends *inter alia* on the location and frequency of area boundaries; thus in England and Wales, where there were about 1,500 areas corresponding roughly to the boroughs and county districts, non-local removals would be relatively more numerous (other things being equal) than in Scotland, where there were but 57 areas (counties and large burghs) for approximately one-eighth of the population.
2. 'Local' removals, estimated by the English Registrar-General very roughly at 60 per cent. of non-local removals for the war period, would be correspondingly higher in Scotland.
3. 'Non-local' removals usually, though not invariably, meant a change of retailer in England and Wales; this must have been even more so in Scotland, where indeed 'local' removals must have sometimes meant a change of retailer.
4. Removals not involving a change of retailer were frequently not detected until

the periodic re-issue of ration books (in January and July of 1940 and 1941, in May-June for the remaining war years). This would tend to inflate the figures for the corresponding quarters, especially in England and Wales.

5. The figures for England and Wales and for Scotland do not add up to strictly accurate totals for Great Britain, as they have been compiled in slightly different ways.

* * * * *

The peaks in the number of removals, for both countries, correspond with periods of enemy activity; in England and Wales in the last quarter of 1940, the number reached 2½ millions (6.9 per cent.) and it was never less than 2 per cent. throughout the war. The movement was naturally more intense locally, amounting to 25 per cent. or more, and was never all one way; 'in evacuation areas it was outward on balance, but the gross outward element was always accompanied by a material inward movement which itself was sometimes wholly abnormal'.¹ Hence the strain on Food/National Registration offices from these population movements was not confined to the reception areas, away from bombing.

TABLE IX

Retail Outlets for Sale of Food¹

Thousands

	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946
Shops and other outlets licensed:							
Total	745	—	638	590	589	590	598
Main Trades ² :							
Butchers	49	47	—	46	46	45	45
Dairymen ³	—	—	—	—	—	—	100
Fishmongers	—	—	—	—	—	—	27
Fish friers	—	—	—	—	—	—	22
Grocers, provision merchants and general food shops ⁴ ..	191	158	154	151	148	147	147
Retailers of fresh fruit and vegetables	—	—	—	—	91	93	110
Retailers of chocolate and sugar confectionery ..	—	—	230	—	—	226	—
Bakers ⁵	—	—	—	26	—	—	25

¹ Including milk depots, street stalls, market gardens, etc., but excluding hawkers' barrows and travelling vans.

² No adjustment has been made for duplication; some outlets are included in more than one category.

³ Depots from which milk is retailed. Great Britain only.

⁴ With sugar registrations.

⁵ Bakehouses producing bread, including a small number selling it mainly by wholesale.

Source: Ministry of Food

¹ Quoted from the analysis in the Registrar-General's *Statistical Review of England and Wales, 1940-45* (Text, Vol. II. Civil, pp. 17-19). H.M. Stationery Office, 1951.

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Index

INDEX

(A number in brackets indicates a footnote reference, where it is the only reference on that page)

Acts of Parliament

- Agricultural Marketing (1931), 179, 202
 - Agricultural Produce (Grading & Marking) (1938), 65(2)
 - Civic Restaurants (1946), 384, 393, 402, 411, 423
 - Essential Commodities (Reserves), 8
 - Merchant Shipping (1906), 610-2
 - Milk (1934), 180(1), 181: (1936), 181
 - Ministry of Supply (1939), 288
 - National Service (Armed Forces), 598
 - Sea Fish Industry (1938), 6(1), 8, 26
 - Shops (Restriction of Sunday Trading), 777
 - Town and Country Planning, 704(2)
- Adamson, Mr. John, 20
- Addison, Lord, 205
- Admiralty, 13, 613, 617, 621
- Age of adults, request for by Food/National Registration Officers, 491(2), 495, 521, 527
- Agriculture and Fisheries, Minister of (Mr. R. S. Hudson), 68, 91(2), 139-40, 144(3), 156-8, 169, 201, 225, 253
- (Mr. W. S. Morrison), 179, 181, 183, 185, 255, 603
 - (Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith), 193, 195
- Agriculture and Fisheries, Ministry of
- and cheese for agricultural workers, 508, 594-5, 608
 - and County War Agricultural Executive Committees, 71, 92, 119, 156
 - and Defence Regulations, 202
 - and domestic jam preserving, 770
 - and eggs, 65-66
 - control of hatching, 94
 - domestic poultry keepers, 87-88
 - National Mark Scheme suspended by, 66
 - and feeding schemes for farm workers, 413, 603
 - and fish: crab and lobster fishing, 50-51
 - fishermen's wages, 55
 - Parliamentary Secretary to (Duke of Norfolk), 130-131, 134-135, 170-171
 - and 'pie schemes', 415
 - and potatoes, 108, 112, 114, 123, 125, 131, 139-140, 156-158
 - and rations for agricultural workers, 593
- Agricultural Departments
- and eggs, 71, 73-74, 76-77, 89
 - and milk, 202, 207, 219
 - and potato crop (1940), 117, 130-131 (1943-44), 152, 156-157
- Agricultural workers' rations, 592-598, 602-605
- Air attacks, 317-380 *passim*
- 'Baedeker' raids, so-called, 317, 345, 347, 366
 - Bath, 345(2)
 - Belfast, 238, 374-375
 - Birmingham, 322(1), 323(1)
 - Bootle, 321-322, 336-337, 340(2) (4), 342, 374-375
 - Bristol, 321, 323-324, 335, 360
 - Cardiff, 339, 360, 363
 - Chatham, 360
 - Clydeside, 374
 - Coventry, 281, 337, 374
 - Dover, 360
 - Exeter, 345(2)
 - Glasgow, 334
 - Hull, 345, 374

Air attacks, *contd.*

- Liverpool, 360
 - London, 318, 345, 357, 362, 396
 - Margate, 360
 - Merseyside, 336, 374
 - Pembroke Dock, 366
 - Plymouth, 281, 295, 323, 335-336, 374-375
 - Portsmouth, 328
 - Provincial cities, 280, 317, 327-328, 363
 - Sheffield, 321
 - Southampton, 321, 324, 363
 - Swansea, 327, 339, 342
 - air raid victims, feeding of, 284
 - closure of shops from bombing, 561
 - faulty intelligence of, 325-327
 - lessons of air bombardment, 317
 - Lord Mayor's Air Raid Distress Fund, 359-360
 - mutual assistance pacts ineffective in, 281
 - reporting of, to food authorities, 328, 335
 - retailers, effect on, 323
 - supplies of flour and, 288
- Aircraft Production, Ministry of, 599, 717
- Air Raid Precautions Department, 286
- Albert Dock Seamen's Hospital, request for extra rations, 622
- Allied Suppliers, Ltd., 699(2), 720(1)
- Anderson, Sir Alan, 195
- Apples, Canadian, allocation of, 584
- Astor Committee on milk distribution, 176
- Attlee, Mr. C. R.—*See Lord Privy Seal*

Bacon,

- American fat, 589, 603
- and borax, 551(1)
- cheese option, 549
- cooked, rationing system and, 551-555, 588-589
- half ration for children proposed, 555
- imported, 543, 670
- rationing of, 551-556, 564, 588-589, 597
- 'Balancer-meal' and egg production, 87-88
- Bananas, marking of ration book for, 584
- Basal diet, potatoes as part of, 119, 123
- Baxter, Mr. Thomas (later Sir), 185, 218, 223
- Beaverbrook, Lord, 77-78, 248, 258
- Beet-sugar factories, use of for processing potatoes, 139
- Bennett, Mr. J. T., 5-6
- Beveridge, Sir W. H. (later Lord), *British Food Control*, cited: 4, 33(2), 65(2), 69(1), 105-106, 116, 120, 166, 175, 177, 187(1), 213, 427, 429(1), 431(1), 434, 436(1), 441(1), 445(1), 452, 624, 757, 759
- Committee, 444, 446-448, 456, 461-462, 463(1), 520, 533, 543, 625, 723, 754-758
- Billingsgate Fish Market, 4-5, 10-11, 30, 37, 49, 51
- Biscuits for railwaymen, 593
- for evacuation areas, 282-283, 285, 396, 304-305
- for Relief, 315
- Home Guard reserves of, 314
- Blackcurrant juice, 582
- Black treacle for dispensing, 578(2)
- Boothby, Mr. (later Sir) Robert, M.P., 60
- Borax in bacon, 551(1)
- Bowen, Mr. J. W., 195
- Boxes for eggs controlled, 67, 80, 101-102
- Bread: rationing threatened, 605-606
- supplies in emergency, 276, 322, 323(1), 337, 341-342, 345, 347-348
- British Employers' Federation, 591
- British Institute for Adult Education, 404
- British Market Research Bureau Ltd., 91(1)
- British Medical Journal*, 252, 257

- British Restaurants**, 352-421, *passim*—*See also Communal Feeding*
 article on future of, by Gordon Taylor, cited, 392(2), 397(2)
 Arts Council loans pictures to, 404
 as supplement to dock canteens, 421
 'cash and carry' sales in, 388, 680(1)
 closure of, 411
 commercial caterers' objections to, 395, 397-398
 'community kitchens', 388, 680
 cooking depots and, 391-392
 desired by Ministry of Labour, 390
 emergency feeding in, 314
 equipment pool for, 387, 397, 403, 406
 Essential Work Order (1942), 398
 evening meals in, 390-391(1)
 financial aspects of, 387, 396-402, 411
 food procurement for, 405-406
 growth and decline of, 411
 kitchen lay-outs, model, 387
 labour supplies for, 395, 398-399
 local authorities and, 387-409, 411
 meals sent to farm workers, 413
 mural paintings and posters in, 404
 National Council of Social Service pamphlet, cited, 395(2), 396(2)
 Nissen huts used as, 404
 nutritive value of meals in, 407
 pictures loaned to, by British Institute for Adult Education, 404
 points rationing scheme and, 405
 prefabricated, 404
 premises for, difficulty in securing, 387, 402-404
 priority given to, 405-406, 680
 school meals supplied by, 423(3)
The Times on, 410
 wider significance of, 410-412
- British Trawlers' Federation**, 10
- British War Economy** (Hancock & Gowing), cited, 205(1)
- Brooke Bond & Co. Ltd.**, 699(2)
- Buckmaster**, Lord, 33(2), 69, 177
- 'Buffer Depots'**, 293-294, 342-343, 345
- Butchers and lard**, 559(1)
 licensed to sell margarine, 559
- Butter and margarine option within rationing system**—*See Options*
 rationed, 543, 564, 597
 to retailers, limitation of suppliers of, 628
- Canada**, bacon imports from, 555
- Canadian apples**, distribution of on population basis, 584
- Canal boatmen**, feeding of, 621
- Canned foods**
 condensed milk for seamen, 618
 corned beef, 332, 341, 677(1), 686
 fish, emergency stocks of, 17, 35, 285(1), 296
 margarine, 296, 304
 meat, emergency stocks of, 282-287, 313, 347
 meat for railwaymen, 593
 milk, 186, 212(1), 282-285, 294, 297, 304, 339, 347
 reconditioning of, 332
 rice pudding for Relief, 315
 soups and stews, 304, 315
 special release of, 349
 stocks of, 293
- Canteens**
 classification of, 602
 colliery, 403, 416-418
 different categories of, 683
 and farm workers, 413, 603
 and food allowances, 684-685, 692
 industrial workers, 592

Canteens, *contd.*

- miners' dissatisfaction with, 601-608
- mobile, 340, 345, 349, 358, 362-369, 378-379, 414
- railway, 419
- school, regarded as industrial, 683, 684-685
- works, 352-353, 382-383, 408-409, 411, 593, 608, 682-683
- and seamen, 613
- and tea, 717
- Catering Wages Bill, 409
- Cathcart, Professor E. P., 607
- Central Electricity Board, 599
- Central Milk Distributive Committee (England and Wales), 181, 184, 186, 189, 191, 194, 204, 210, 215-216, 240, 245, 250, 265
- Central National Registration Office, 504, 528
- Central Tea Distribution (Defence) Committee, 704
- Chancellor of the Exchequer (Sir John Simon), 193
- (Sir Kingsley Wood), 194
- Changes of address by consumers—*See Removals*
- Channel Islands potatoes, 115, 126(1), 157(3)
- Cheese
 - agricultural rations, 508, 594-595, 608
 - designated as 'main dish' in catering establishments, 563
 - distribution scheme for, 560-562, 594
 - for diabetics, 599(3)
 - for inshore fishermen, 614
 - for miners, 593, 595-597, 601
 - rationing of, 562-563, 591-601, 603, 626, 683
 - reluctance of consumers to register for, 596
 - special supplementary ration, 413(1), 594-601, 650, 754
 - and Trades Union Congress Advisory Committee, 607, 609(3)
- Chocolate, 'iron ration' of, 282-283
- Christmas and rationing, 1939, 473
- Church Army, 357(2)
- Churchill, Winston S., *The Second World War*, cited, 77(1), 83(2), 86(1), 91(2), 384(1)
- See also Prime Minister*
- Civic Restaurants Act (1946), 384, 393, 402, 411, 423
- Civil Defence
 - canteens, proposal to pool, 368
 - emergency feeding, 338, 367
 - Executive sub-Committee, 364
 - ration books for, 518, 533
 - regional system of, 277
 - workers and continuing special permits, 637
 - identity card, 508, 622
 - rations, 305(1)
 - tea allowances, 714
- Civil Emergency Food Organisation, 445
- Civil Industry and Trade* (Hargreaves & Gowing) cited, 27, 427(3)
- Clothes rationing, margarine coupons and, 769
- Ministry of Food and, 782-785
- Clothing book, 496, 506(1), 507, 509, 512(2), 532, 534, 765, 769, 782-785
- Clothing coupons, supplementary, 496, 508(2)
- Coalminers and extra meat ration, 415
- 'Coastal Belt', the, 291-292, 299, 303
- reserve, emergency stocks, 303-306, 308(3), 310, 315-316, 346
- Coastguards, 636-637 b)
- Cocoa, 602, 734, 753
- Cod-liver oil (National Milk and Vitamins Scheme), 651
- Coffee, 730, 734-736, 740, 753
- Coffee essence, 602, 734
- Cold storage plants, anti-invasion measures, 291
- Coller, Frank H., *A State Trading Adventure*, cited, 4, 106, 108, 166, 431, 432, 436(3)
- Committee of Imperial Defence, 185, 287, 767; Sub-Committee on Food Supply, 448; Sub-Committee on Stationery Requirements, 451, 767
- Committee of Inquiry into Milk Distribution, 195-200, 248
- Committee of Investigation into Milk Marketing Scheme, 181, 218
- Committee on the Distribution of Unrationed Foods, 593, 720

- Communal Feeding, 318-423 *passim*
 Cash and Carry Scheme, 382, 388, 411(1)
 catering trade and, 372, 382-383, 395-398
 'evacuee' centres, 390
 financial aspects of, 385-386, 396-401
 for farm workers, 413
 legal aspects of, 356, 387-388
 local authorities and, 284-285, 352, 355, 358, 368-372, 377, 382-388, 392-393,
 398-399, 411(1), 421, 423
 opposition to, 370(3)
 post-war proposals for, 402
 premises requisitioned for, 404(1)
 standards of cooking, 408-409
The Communal Restaurant, pamphlet, cited, 398(4)
 voluntary organisations and, 353, 357-358, 362, 385, 393, 414
- Community Kitchens, 388, 680—*See also British Restaurants*
- Concentration of Industry
 egg packers, 89-90
 fish, 11, 19, 26-27, 30-31, 55
 milk, 237, 246-251
- Concentration of Industry, White Paper on, 26-27
- Concordat*, Food National Registration, 467, 469, 478, 493, 498, 520, 539
- Condensed milk for seamen, 618
- Conditions of sale, imposition of by retailers, 561-562, 572
- Conscription, link between food rationing and, 461-463, 466
- Consumers and advance or arrears rations, 569
 dilatoriness in registering with retailers for eggs, 80: for cheescs, 596-597
 entitled to special rations, 648
 reluctance to register, 577, 596
 registration of, 471, 487, 503, 595
 re-registration of, 1940, 568
 registrations with farmers, 560
 unregistered, 648
- Consumer-retailer tie, 213-214, 471, 475, 479, 539, 572, 701, 754, 757, 765—*See also Registration*
- Consumption Levels Inquiry, Report of, 48(2), 165(1)
- Cooked meat, butchers' sale of, 694(2)
- Cooking Depots, 325, 340, 345, 375-378, 391-393, 413, 421-423
 disadvantages of, 391-392, 423
 financial aspects of, 376, 377(1)
 financial losses on, 377(1), 402
 meals for farm workers, 413
 mobile, 379
 school feeding and, 378, 393, 421-423
 solid fuel equipment installed, 391
 transport difficulties, 378
- Cooking fats rationed, 1940, 543, 556-557, 564
 'one wholesaler for', 628
- Co-operative stores and disposal of preserves, 777(4)
 and milk registrations, 237 *seq.*
 and provisions distribution, 575
 and Sunday traders, 778
 and tea distribution, 699(2)
 and tea rationing, 702
- Cost-of-Living Index and egg prices, 67, 71-74, 76, 89(1), 96
 and fish, 17, 19, 39, 53, 60
 and milk, 190, 214, 271
 and potatoes, 114-116, 129, 133, 145, 152, 166
 and sugar, 634
 and tea, 708-709
- County Councils and emergency feeding, 374
- County War Agricultural Executive Committees, 77, 92, 156, 605
- Cream, manufacture of, prohibited, 210
- Custard powder, 602, 623, 740
- Customs, H.M., and dispersal of tea stocks, 705
 and victualling of ships, 610, 619-620
- Cutforth Commission on milk marketing, 181-183, 187, 270

- Dairymen, War-time Associations of, 234-237, 256-257
 Datum basis, allocation on, of meat to caterers, 666-668, 682; of tea, 701-711
 Davies, Mr. J. L., 184
 Defence Regulations, direction to L.C.C. under, 370
 Defence Regulations, appropriateness of to secure safe milk, 255-256
 and Rationing Orders, 642(1)
 Dehydration of potatoes, 151
 of water-damaged foodstuffs, 332-335
 De I.a Bere, Mr. (later Sir) R., M.P., 68(1)
 Department of Scientific and Industrial Research: spray-drying of eggs, process for, 84
 Devonport, Lord, 33(2), 430
 Diabetics, 599, 650
 Dispersal of food stocks, 292-293, 333
 Distribution, problem of, in emergency, 275-7, 307-318, 340-359, 627
 Distribution, rationalisation of, 627
 Distribution schemes
 cheese, 560-562, 580, 594, 596
 dried fruit, 584-585
 fish, 3-4, 5-12, 25-32, 45-50, 587
 onions, 580-581
 oranges, 580-584
 preserves, 573-578
 projected, 585-588
 sugar (1917), 431
 Distribution, tea, 701-707, 713-715, 720-726, 736, 739, 743, 747(1), 749
 'Divisional Emergency Reserve', 314-315
 Divisional Food Officers
 and British Restaurants, 399-401, 404
 and bulk stocks, 278, 373
 emergency action by, 326
 and food for agricultural workers, 414
 and mobile cooking units, 379
 powers of, 275-281
 and tea, 737
 relations with area commodity officers, 279-281
 with Regional Commissioners, 278-279
 reserves of food controlled by, 374, 376
 Dock workers, feeding of, 420-421
 Domestic Poultry Keepers' Council, 71, 77-78, 88
 Dredger crews, rations for, 611, 616, 621, 624
 Dried fruits, 584-585
 registration for, 573
 Dried meat powder, 686
 Dumps, emergency food, 283, 285, 294(1), 296-297, 304-306, 311-315, 373(1)
 Dumps of unrationed commodities, 344

 Economic Warfare, Ministry of, and Icelandic fish agreement, 32
Economist, The, 257(1)
 Education, Board of, 353, 385, 391(3), 403, 408, 421, 423, 609(2), 685
 Education Departments and school feeding, 353, 389, 421
 Education, President of the Board of (Mr. R. A. Butler), 421, 683(2)
 Egg boxes, control of, 67, 80, 101-102
 Egg Products Distribution Association, 84
 Eggs, 63-102 *passim*
 allocation by registration, 75, 586
 to ordinary customers, 76
 to retailers, 80, 98
 bakery trade and dried eggs, 84
 black market in, 76, 78, 87, 91, 93-97
 caterers, allocations to, 75, 79, 84-85
 concentration of egg packers, 89-90
 continuing permit for, 636
 control, enforcement of, 78, 80, 92, 95, 97
 exemption from, 79, 93
 Orders, weaknesses in, 92-94
 Cost-of-Living Index and, 71-72, 76, 89, 96, 101
 distribution of, 67, 71, 83, 86, 98, 100, 636

Eggs, *contd.*

- dried, 83-85, 90-91, 98-100, 583, 585, 605
 - allocations to non-priority consumers, 90-91
 - domestic poultry-keepers and, 88
 - double allocation to children under 5, 99
 - ship-saving value of, 90
 - enforcement and, 78, 80, 92, 95-97
 - feeding-stuffs, linking to egg deliveries, 74-77, 83, 85-86, 91, 97
 - feeding-stuffs policy and, 70-73, 79, 83, 89, 91
 - flake-dried, 65(1)
 - Food Mission, Washington and shipments of, 83
 - for invalids, 72, 76, 83, 98
 - grading of, 71, 78-79, 89
 - hatching, abuses connected with, 94-95
 - 'higglers', 65, 75(1)
 - hoarding Order, dispensation from, 68
 - home production of, 65-67, 70, 79-81, 86, 89, 101
 - imported, 65-71, 75, 80-81, 84, 97
 - legal aspects of control, 78, 80, 87, 92, 95-97
 - liquid, 65
 - imports prohibited except under licence, 67
 - Ireland, Northern, distribution scheme, 68, 79, 87
 - Lend/Lease price for, 84, 100
 - London Egg Exchange and control of, 66
 - margins, distributive, 70, 76
 - marking of, 65, 69
 - National Egg Distributors Association Ltd., 80, 84-85, 89(2) 91, 102
 - National Egg Packers Association Ltd., 89
 - National Mark Scheme, 65-66, 69
 - North American, 81, 83, 334
 - not rationed, 75
 - Orkney and Shetland, abuses in, 93-94
 - packers, licensed, 69-70, 89—*See also packing stations*
 - packing stations, 65, 69, 72-74-76, 79-81, 86-88, 91-93, 95, 100
 - concentration of, 89-90
 - remuneration of, 89-90
 - petrol shortage and control of, 89
 - rationing, 97, 100
 - prices and Cost of Living Index, 71-72, 76, 88-89, 96, 101
 - dried egg, reduced, 90
 - to producers, 71, 88
 - priority consumers of, reduced, 99
 - supplies, 72, 76, 83, 98-100, 650
 - ration book marked for, 76
 - rationing scheme impracticable, a, 78, 97
 - registration of consumers with retailers, 75-76, 80
 - retailers, allocation by registration, 75-76
 - entitlements, 98
 - otherwise mentioned, 65-66, 79
 - Scotland: areas exempted from control, 79, 93-94
 - clauses in 'consolidated' Control Order, 94
 - subsidy on, 71, 74, 94
 - supplies from Argentina, 67
 - Australia, 67
 - Canada, 80
 - Eire, 68, 84
 - Holland, 68
 - Hungary, 67
 - Portugal, 69
 - Rumania, 67
 - South Africa, 67
 - spray drying process, 67, 80-81, 83-85
 - transport difficulties in Highlands and Islands of Scotland, 79
 - wholesalers, 65-66, 68, 70, 72, 75, 95-96, 102, 636
- Electricity charges and shelter feeding, 358(1)
- Emergency bread scheme, 276-277, 345
- Emergency cards, 337

Emergency distribution schemes

- bacon, 276
- bread, 276
- butter, 276
- meat, 279
- milk, 277
- sugar, 276
- yeast, 276-277

Emergency dumps, food supplies for, 282-283, 285, 294(1), 296

Emergency feeding, 319-380, *passim*

in Belfast, 338-339, 375

- Bootle, 340
- Bristol, 360
- Chatham, 360
- Clydeside, 337, 366
- Coventry, 322-333, 337, 363
- Dover, 360
- Exeter, 345
- Liverpool, 360
- London Tube Stations, 351, 360, 362,
- Margate, 360
- Plymouth, 339-340, 375
- Sheffield, 325
- Southampton, 323-324, 363
- Swansea, 339

commercial caterers and, 358, 372

financial aspects of, 362-363, 365-366, 369-373, 386

local authorities and, 284-285, 365, 372, 382-383, 411(1), 421, 423

military help with, 323, 340

and navy, 339

poor-law, influence of on plans, 318-319

schemes, 275-276

schools as feeding centres, 421-423

stations, London County Council, 284

transportable cooking equipment for, 374

Emergency preparations, 275-289

Emergency stocks, food, 280, 294, 296-297, 303, 315, 327, 373-374

Emergency warehouses, register of, 281

Engledow, Professor F., 153, 166

Enumeration Schedules—*See National Registration*

Establishments, catering

and bacon control, 553

and cheese, 563

control of, 652-653, 666-668, 678-683, 685-686, 690-695

coupons for meals in, 602, 691

different categories of, 602, 683

dried meat powder for, 686

and eggs, 72, 75, 79, 84-85, 88(2)

and fish, 40, 49-51, 57-58

meat allocations to, 662, 666-668, 677-683, 685-686, 690-695

and potato demonstrations, 125, 145

and preserves rationing, 578(2)

rationed for tea, 730, 736

Southern Railway vessels licensed as, 620

tea allowances, 713, 725, 728, 731, 735

buying permits, 725

under-consumption by, 685

unrationed meals, 585-586, 668

'Victory dish', 145

wholesale buying permits, 678

wholesale purchases, 549(2)

Estuarial seamen, rationing of, 615-619, 636(6)

Evacuation scheme, food supplies for, 282-283, 343, 349, 376

'Evacuées', meals services for, 389-390

Evaporated milk for seamen, 618-620

Express Dairy Company Limited, 204, 206, 227, 261

- Farmers denied special cheese, 598
 Farmers licensed to sell margarine, 559-560
 Farm workers, feeding of, 413-415, 600, 603-605, 607-608
 Farm Workers' Union, 607
 Feeding-stuffs for pigeon post service, 330(2)
 Field kitchens, Army, 323, 353
 travelling, 364-365
 'Finance of Civic Restaurants, The' (Gilbert Sugden), *cited*, 398(4), 399(2), 411(3)
 Fire Service, National
 air attacks on Bristol, 324
 firemen and 'special authorities', 636
 priority attention for Key Points, 288
 Fish
 Advisory Committee, 14
 Agricultural Departments and, 20(1)—*See also Fisheries Departments*
 allocations of, 6, 19, 21, 23, 27, 29, 41-42, 45, 49, 58
 difficulties at Eyemouth and St. Abbs, 42-44
 to fish-friers, 6
 Arbroath, evasion of allocations at, 45(1)
 auctions, 6, 9, 41
 Billingsgate Market, 4, 5, 10, 11, 30, 49, 51
 undersized fish at, 36
 canned, 11, 17, 35
 caterers and, 40, 49-51, 58
 cod, frozen fillets of, 14-16, 36
 dry-salted, 33-35
 fresh-salted—*See cod, wet-salted*
 Icelandic, 18-20, 32, 35-36,
 wet-salted, 32-34, 36
 concentration of fish trade mooted, 11, 19, 26-27, 30-31, 55
 control in First World War, 3-4
 crabs and lobsters
 Billingsgate, at, 51
 and catering establishments, 50-51
 dressed, 52(1)
 price control of, 51-52
 restrictions on catching, 50-51
 'customers' lists', 29, 35, 45, 47
 depots, 7-12, 61
 distribution Committees, 24, 27, 46, 49
 Officers, 29-30
 scheme, 1939, 5-12: revoked, 10
 1942, 25-32, 45-50
 Eire, fresh salmon from, 38-39
 Eyemouth and St. Abbs, allocation troubles at, 42-44
 fillets, imported frozen, 14-16, 36, 46
 fish-and-chips, 15
 fish-cakes, control of, 34, 52
 fishermen, inshore, feeding, of, 590, 613-614, 617, 620, 622-623
 fish-friers, 14, 16, 29-30, 33, 46, 48(1), 49
 fish-salters, 33-36, 59
 hake, 7, 19, 23(1), 37, 53-56
 herrings, allocation of, 13, 21, 58-60
 distribution scheme, 25
 marketing at Aberdeen, 58
 Moray Firth, 58, 60
 hospitals, white fish priority for, 29
 immature, 37-38
 legal aspects of control, 18-21, 29, 34
 licensing of traders in, 26, 42-44, 49, 58
 London Fish Trade Association, 5
 long and cross haulage of, 23-24
 margins of profit, 16, 38-39, 55-58
 merchants, coastal wholesale, 5, 9, 15, 17, 21-23
 inland wholesale, 5, 15, 17, 23, 25, 27, 29-30, 55
 N.A.A.F.I. priority white fish supplies, 29
 Newfoundland, imports from, 36

Fish, *contd.*

- port wholesalers—*See merchants, coastal wholesale*
- prices; abolition of price control, 49
 - Cost-of-Living Index and, 17, 19, 53, 60
 - Excess Profits Tax and, 53, 57
 - hake, 53, 56
 - herrings, 59
 - Icelandic, Lend/Lease, 36
 - inshore fishermen and, 55
 - lobsters, 51
 - maximum, 11: maximum retail, 3, 57
 - salmon, fresh, 38
 - salt cod, 36
 - Treasury and, 16, 19
 - trawler-owners oppose reductions in, 57
 - ungutted, 53
 - wartime increase of, 14, 16-17, 52
- recipes devised by Ministry of Food, 33
- salmon, fresh, 38-40
- salmon, smoked, 39-40
- shellfish, 50, 52(1)
- smoked salted fish Advisory Committee, 34
- Spain, shipments to, 34
- Times, The*, quoted, 10
- trawlers and trawling industry, 4, 6, 9, 37, 53-57
- transport of, 7, 23-25, 28, 31
 - levy, 23(1), 33, 53
- vessels, chartering of, 6, 9, 20, 32, 36
- virus disease in salted, 34-35
- white fish, 8-58, *passim*
- wholesalers, 4, 6, 9, 16-17, 21, 25, 29, 34, 39, 43, 46-47, 49, 55
- zoning, 24-29, 32, 36, 45-47, 49, 58
- Fish Allocation Committees, 21, 23, 27
- Fish Industry Joint Council, 26, 30-31, 54
- Fisheries Departments, 7, 26, 37, 39, 55(1), 58
- Fisheries in War Time*, 55(1)
- Fishes Royal, 333(3)
- Fish Trades Gazette*, 29, 30
- Floud, Sir Francis, 195
- Flour
 - 'calorific conversion ratio', flour to potatoes, 147
 - damage to, 348(4)
 - mills, anti-invasion measures in, 291
 - potato, 118, 135, 142-143, 150, 164
 - production and flying bomb attacks, 348(1)
- Flying bombs, 326, 344(4), 347-349, 360, 362, 368, 379, 654, 693
- Food and Drugs Regulations, 560
- Food Controller (Mr. G. H. Roberts), 443, 476, 572; (Lord Rhondda), 3, 187, 431-432, 435(2)
- Food Council, 176, 260
- Food, decontamination of, 286-287
- Food (Defence Plans) Department, 188(2), 281-285, 298, 351
 - and central index of consumers, 539
 - fish control, 5
 - half ration of meat for children, 452(2)
 - meat ration, 659
 - National Register, 540
 - and pork butchers, 669
 - and potato policy, 108-110
 - and rationing procedure, 434, 445-446, 520, 756;
 - and seamen's rations, 610
 - and tea, 702-703, 707
- Food, Minister of (Colonel J. J. [later Lord] Llewellyn), 96, 101, 261, 529(2), 743
- Food, Minister of (Mr. W. S. Morrison)
 - and milk, 190, 193, 195
 - and potato scheme, 112-114, 168-169

- Food, Minister of (Lord Woolton)
 broadcast on ration books, 517
 on commercial caterers and British Restaurants, 395, 401, 408
 and communal feeding, 381-384, 408
 and differential rationing, 602
 and eggs, 69, 73-77, 83(2), 86, 96
 and farm workers' rations, 603
 and fish, 22, 26, 28, 31, 57
 and small food retailers, 643-644
 and milk, 193-196, 207-208, 214, 220, 235, 248, 250, 253
 and points rationing, 757
 and potatoes, 139, 143-146
 and school feeding, 421, 683(2)
 and tea, 699, 719, 722-723, 728-729, 738, 740, 742-743, 757
- Food, Ministry of (1916-1921), 427-443 *passim*
 Central Index of sugar consumers, 431-432, 436, 463, 539
 Food Control Committees, 433, 437-438, 440, 444, 454, 456
 Food Controller (Mr. G. H. Roberts), 443, 476, 572; (Lord Rhondda), 3, 187, 431-432, 435(2)
 Local Authorities Division, 434
 Local Food Commissioners, 429-430
 Local Food Offices, 431-432, 435(2), 437, 439, 441-443
 local rationing schemes, 434
 London and Home Counties Rationing Scheme, 1918, 434, 455(2)
 meat, rationing of, 441
 official history of, 434, 445(1), 463
 polling booths used for ration book issue, 438
 Post Offices, sugar coupons obtained from, 431-432
 Sugar Registration Clearing House, 429, 432, 436, 463, 539
 Registration, Director of, 431-436
 tea rationing, 573, 701-702
- Food, Ministry of (1939-1945)
 advertising campaigns:
 carrot, 33(2), 145
 cheese, 562
 dried egg, 85
 fish recipes, 33, 35
 herring, 58
 Kitchen Front, 355
 potatoes, 107, 124, 144-149, 166, 170
 salt cod, 33, 35, 58
 Adviser on Wholesale Distribution, 281
 Ancillary Materials Division, 342, 404(2)
 Animal Feeding-stuffs Division, 133-134
 Area Commodity Officers, 280-281, 308, 332-333
 Area Liaison Officers (Emergency), 301-302
 Area Provisions and Groceries Committees, 294
 Assistant Divisional Food Officers
 and emergency feeding, 386
 and Queen's Messenger Service, 368
 Bacon Division, 471, 546(3), 550(2), 552-553, 555, 561-562, 588, 627
 Area Distribution Officers, 552-553
 Director of Distribution, 552
 and ceiling permits, 630
 wholesalers' permits, 569(2), 626
 bombing of London headquarters, 329
 Butter and Cheese Division, 471, 547, 556-557, 561, 595-596, 598
 Bread Officers, Emergency, 276
 British Food Mission (Washington), 83
Bulletin, 31
 Catering Adviser, 717
 Catering Division, 51-85, 679(1), 736
 Catering Establishments Committee, 406
 Concentration Panel, 246
 Chief Divisional Food Officers, 297-298, 307, 309
 (London), 300-301
 Chief Scientific Adviser, 286

Food, Ministry of (1939-1945), *contd.*

- Committee on Distribution of Unrationed Foods (Eggs), 72
- Communal Feeding, Director of, 370, 384
 - Division, 327, 355(1), 371
- Cook Advisers, 408
- Colwyn Bay, at, 510, 529, 534, 548(1), 576, 577(2), 705, 712(3)
- Costings, Director of, and fish margins, 16
 - and potatoes, 132
 - Division, 102
- Dehydration Branch, 151, 332
- Despatch Rider Service, 329
- Distribution Plans Division, 628, 707, 730
- Divisional Food Officers
 - and British Restaurants, 370, 386-388, 390-391, 399-401, 404
 - and bulk stocks, 278
 - emergency activities of, 286, 290-316, *passim*, 326-331, 337-338, 343-344, 349-350
 - and food for farm workers, 414, 605
 - and mobile cooking units, 379
 - and National Registration, 503-505, 536-539
 - powers of, 275-279
 - and rationing, 513, 515-517, 519, 526, 561, 679-681, 713, 737
 - relations with Area Commodity Officers, 279-281
 - with Regional Commissioners, 278-279
- Divisional and Local Organisation Branch, 548(1)
- Divisional Salvage Officers, 331
- Dried Fruits Division, 584
- Economics Division, 126-127, 133, 643
- Eggs Division, 67, 74, 85, 87, 89, 91-92, 94, 99, 102
- Emergency Bread Supplies, Director of, 276
- Emergency Services Division, 293-294, 297, 304-305, 311, 327, 329, 336, 343, 627
- Enforcement Division, 633
 - and sugar for domestic jam making, 771
 - and eggs, 42, 78, 80, 92, 95-97
 - and fish, 42-43
- Finance Department and fish prices, 51, 56-58
- Fish Advisory Committee, 14
- Fish, Director of, 10, 19, 22, 25, 30, 54
- Fish distribution officers, 29-30, 32
- Fish Division, 18, 21, 23-29, 37-38, 39, 42, 44-45, 54, 60, 573, 587
 - Herring Control Officer, 59
- Food Advice Division, 407
- Food Control Committees, 122, 235-236, 241, 282, 309, 406, 409, 533, 536, 549, 645
 - (Local Distribution) Order, 549(2)
- Food Decontamination, Adviser on, 286
- Food Economy Division, 355
- Food Executive Officers, 334, 339-361, 467, 473-475, 482-486, 492-498, 504-509, 511-519, 527-528, 531, 546, 561, 583, 601, 617, 638-639, 644-645(2), 654, 668, 676, 677, 679-680, 684(2), 691, 695, 713, 715, 721, 732, 783
- Food Executive Officers, 'pivotal', 307
- Food Executive Liaison Officers, 301-302
- Food Executive/National Registration Officers, 491(2), 516
- Food Office Procedures, 535-536, 639, 641; specimen of, 788-791
- Food Offices, local, air raid damage to, 324, 326, 339, 340(2), 341
 - 'fusion' with National Registration Offices, 499-505, 523-525, 533-539
 - and National Registration, 461-540 *passim*
 - and rationing, 445, 451-755 *passim*
- Food Office Visitors, 537-538, 639, 689
- Food Supply Board, 38
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Division, 581-583, 772
- General Department, 150, 410
- Home-Produced Egg Trade Advisory Committee, 68
- Imported Fruit Distribution Committees, 583
- Intestation Division, 348
- Internal Audit Division, 685
- Legal Adviser, 18, 21, 236, 370(1)

- Food. Ministry of (1939-1945), *contd.*
 Legal Branch, 34(1), 642(1)
 Margins Committee, 39, 132, 157, 228
 Meat Agents, Area, 660-661, 673, 677-678, 684, 686, 689, 691, 693
 Meat Agents, Deputy, 685-687, 689, 691, 693(3)
 Meat and Livestock Division, 279, 382, 471, 550(2), 562, 586-587, 659-660, 663, 671-673, 676, 679, 681, 683-684, 686, 689-690, 692-695
 Military authorities, relations with, 290-292, 297-306, 310-312, 323, 335, 340, 347
 Milk Movements Branch, 218-223, 231
 Milk Utilisation Committee, 210
 Oils and Fats Division, 471, 547, 556-559, 590, 626, 631, 633, 782(1)
 Orders Committee, 38, 78, 93, 132, 135-137, 222, 741, 745
 Organisation and Methods Division, 167, 500, 635, 640(2), 642, 693(1)
 Enquiry, 534
 Oxford, at, 8-10, 133(3), 138, 169, 575-577
 Points Rationing Division, 775
 Potato Division, 126-130, 134-142, 145(2), 146-147, 151-155, 157, 160-162, 167
 Potato Supplies, Director of, 131, 167
 Preserves Division, 575-577, 772(2), 773, 775
 Public Relations Division, 33, 90, 145-146, 162, 514, 528, 530(2), 777
 Rationing Division, 50, 85, 99, 160, 382, 491(2), 538(1), 547, 550(2), 551, 555, 580, 582(2), 634, 639, 649(2), 745, 764, 768, 774, 785
 relations with Commodity Divisions, 478, 508, 548-549, 564, 567-568, 576, 584, 586, 589, 597-598, 600, 625, 628-629, 630-644, 640(3), 659-696
 Regional Salvage Officers, 330
 Retail Distribution Division, 721, 724
 Retail Trade Adviser, 627(3), 645(2)
 Salvage Branch, 291
 Salvage Committees, local, 331
 Scientific Adviser and dried egg specification, 84
 and British Restaurant meals, 407(1) (2)
 and oranges, 582(1)
 and supplementary rations, 594, 602(1), 606
 Shelter Feeding Branch, 361, 371
 Ships' Stores Branch, 610
 Smoked Salted Fish Advisory Committee, 34
 Sugar Division, 548(2), 577, 626, 630-639, 774(3), 775
 Tea Division, 561, 606-607, 705-748 *passim*
 Distribution Section, 714-715
 Director of, 715-716, 739, 742
 Transport Division, 25, 155, 740
 Voluntary Food Organisers, 292(1), 304, 308, 310, 313, 315, 353, 357-358, 364
 Warehousing Division, 293, 313(1)
 War Room, Colwyn Bay, 327-329
 War-time Meals Advisers, 387, 400, 406-410, 416, 418, 420
 War-time Meals Division, 314, 338-351, 365-368, 401(1), 413, 418
 Wholesale Co-ordination Division, 294
 Trade Adviser, 281, 342-343
 Food Organisers, Voluntary, 308-310, 353, 357-358, 362, 385, 393, 414
 Food Policy Committee, 73, 77, 193, 207-208, 352-355, 421, 555, 576(1), 593, 595
 Food purchases by the poor, proposal to subsidise, 352(1)
 Food Supply Sub-Committee, of the Committee of Imperial Defence, 448
 Food (War) Committee of the Royal Society, 105
 Ford Emergency Food Vans Scheme, 363(1), 378
 Ford, Mr. Henry, 363(1), 378(2)
 Forms, official, inaccuracy with which completed, 243-244, 488, 490, 494, 525-526, 653
 unwillingness to complete, 92, 222
 Foster, Mr. Sidney, 184-185, 187, 203-204, 231-232
 French, Sir Henry, 8(3), 10(4)
 Friends' Ambulance Unit, 366
 Fuel and Power, Ministry of
 and mine workers' rations, 603, 608-609
 and pithead canteens, 418, 609
 Gas, poison—*See poison gas*
 Gates, Lieut.-Col. Valder, 185
 General Post Office and Rationing—*See Postal aspects of rationing system*

- Glass splinters in foodstuffs, 332(3)
 Grapefruit, 584
 Great Western Railway, 621
 Greengrocers, marking of ration books by, 580-581
 Griffiths, Mr. James, M.P., 602
 Grigg, Sir Edward, 179
 Commission on milk marketing, 179, 183, 187
 Gypsies and rationing arrangements, 650
- Hammond, Mr. W. R. Morris, 83(3)
 Hargreaves and Gowing, *Civil Industry and Trade*, cited, 27(1), 427(3)
 Harvest ration allowances, 604-605
 Health Departments, 282
 Health Food Stores and vegetarians, 595
 Health, Minister of (Mr. Aneurin Bevan), 538
 Health, Minister of (Mr. Walter Elliot)
 and cheap milk schemes, 193-194
 and rationing, 468(1)
- Health, Ministry of, 283-286, 310, 334, 351, 364, 369, 373(2), 376-377, 452
 and cheese for diabetics, 599(3)
 cheap meals for 'evacuees', 389
 issue of clothing books to refugees, 496
 rest centres and local authorities, 371
 safe milk, 254
 school feeding, 353, 389
 Standing Committee on Medical and Nutritional Problems, 214
 supplementary rations, 592
- Hellyer Brothers Limited, 32
 Herbert, Sir Alan, quoted, 252
 Hill, Professor A. V., 602(1)
 Holiday resorts and meat allocations, 695
 Home Defence Executive, 291-310, 313, 315, 347
 Home Guard, food for, 305-306, 310, 314, 347, 636, 714(2)
 Home Office, 282, 528, 609(21)
 Home Security, Ministry of, 285-288, 296-297, 311, 324, 326, 330, 364-367
 Regional Commissioners, 278-279, 361
 War Room, 326
- Hop-pickers, ration cards for, 649
 Horsbrugh, Miss Florence, 530(1)
 Hotels and Restaurants Association, 682
 House of Commons
 on differential rations, 602(1)
 egg control, 67, 83
 fish, 10, 22, 31
 milk, 182, 193, 238, 261
 National Register, 463, 518, 520, 538
 potatoes, 112-113, 168-169
 ration book issue, 518, 520
 Select Committee on National Expenditure, 741
- House of Lords
 and eggs, 87
 fish, 22, 26
 identity cards, 538
 milk, 194, 205, 208, 212-215, 231
 potatoes, 130-131, 170-171
- Identity Cards, 445, 462, 465, 466(2), 483, 486, 488, 491-499, 501-502, 504, 506-508,
 510-511, 513(1), 514-515, 528-529, 533, 538-539, 618, 622, 731(1)
 British Seamen's, 612, 617-618, 624,
 Civil Defence, special, 508
 Mercantile Marine, 496, 612, 618
 new issue of (1943), 499, 505-522, 635, 690, 753
 and re-issue of ration books (1944), 523-524
 Services, 534
 —See also *National Register*, *National Registration*
- Import Executive and food for dock workers, 420
 Import programme, 1941, 605

- Incorporated Association of Purveyors of Light Refreshments, 396(2), 397(1)
- Inflation within the rationing system, 428, 525, 550-557, 657-658, 663-665, 675-676, 688, 690-691, 713-714, 717
- Interdepartmental Committee on Food Prices
 and eggs, 68
 and fish, 19
 and milk, 191
 and potatoes, 105-106, 109, 112-119, 121, 124, 132
- Interdepartmental Committee on Relief in Kind in Wartime, 284(1)
- Invalids, eggs for, 72, 78
 and differential rations, 650
 special diet for, 452
- Invasion, precautions against, 290-327 *passim*
- 'Iron rations', 282, 296, 311
- Islands, food stocks on, 297
- Jam—See Preserves*
- Jews, coupons for, 452
- Jews, vegetable margarine for, 590(1)
- Jewish Traders' Advisory Council, 777
- Jewish traders and Sunday trading, 777-778
- Joint Industrial Council rates of pay, 398-399
- Kensington, Mayor of, and emergency feeding, 386(1)
- 'Key points', 287-288, 391(3), 326
- Labour, Minister of (Mr. Ernest Bevin)
 and communal feeding discussions, 352, 382, 408
 and factory canteens, 383, 390, 409
- Labour, Ministry of, 353-354, 390, 398(2), 497, 504, 531, 599, 601, 602(2), 606
 and British Restaurant service, appeal for greater, 390
 courses for canteen cooks, 408
 differential rationing, 607
 extra rations for coalminers, 415
 Factory Department of, 419-420
 Factory Inspectors and Welfare Officers, 383
 fishing crews, wages, 54-55
 food allowances for establishments, 683
 potatoes, 126
 Welfare Officers of, 353
- Lard, animal, from United States, 590
- Lard rendered by butchers, 559(1)
- 'Last Line of Defence' Dumps, 296-297, 304, 314
- Legal aspects of food control
 bacon, 552(2)
 conditions of sale, 562
 Customs procedure, 620
 eggs, 78, 80, 87, 92, 95-97
 fish, 18-21, 29, 34
 identity cards, 498
 legal rights of seamen, 614
 meat, 666
 milk, 185, 234-236, 255-256
 potatoes, 157-158
 tea, 712(4)
- Legislation Committee, 255-256
- Lemons, 584
- Lemon curd, 575(1)
- Lend/Lease food supplies, 35, 212(1), 605
- Licences for cooked meat, 694(2)
- Licensing of manufacturers, 576
 pork butchers, 672
 retailers, 453, 549
 wholesalers for tea, 726
- Lighthouse keepers, rations for, 611
- Limpsfield, seamen's home at, special concessions to, 622-623
- Liverpool Corporation and communal feeding, 369, 384

- Liverpool Corporation, contd.**
 and feeding of dock workers, 421
- Local authorities and emergency feeding, 284-285, 352, 355, 358, 368-372, 377, 382-388, 392-393, 398-399, 411(1), 421, 423**
 authorised to run pie schemes, 414(2)
 and mobile cooking depots, 379
 and poison gas, 286-287
- Local Defence Volunteers, 355**
- London, air raids on—See Air Attacks**
- London Civil Defence Region and shelter feeding, 358-359**
- London, concentration of tea stocks in, 700**
- London, cost of milk distribution in, 197-198, 227-228, 263**
- London Council of Social Service, 398(4)**
- London County Council, 284, 320, 349, 355(1), 359, 362, 369-371, 374, 379, 384-385, 396, 398**
 and emergency feeding, 372, 379, 386
 kerbside feeding, 379
 meals centres, establishment of, 369
- London Egg Exchange, 66**
- London, Port of, salvage work in, 321**
- London Wholesale Dairies Limited, 277**
- Londoners' Meals Service, 369-371, 377, 381, 384-386, 388, 393(2), 396**
- Lord Advocate, 255**
- Lord Chancellor (Viscount Simon), 538**
- Lord Mayor's Air-Raid Distress Fund, 359-360**
- Lord Mayors and communal feeding schemes, 355**
- Lord President of the Council (Sir John Anderson), 330**
- Lord President's Committee**
 and differential rationing, 606-607
 emergency feeding, 370
 feeding-stuffs, 91(2)
 fish price reductions, 58
 milk heat-treatment, 254-255
 Pie Scheme, 413(2)
 potatoes, 142-143, 148(4), 158, 160
- Lord Privy Seal (Sir John Anderson), 463-464, 468**
- Lord's Day Observance Society, 777**
- Lyle, Sir Leonard (later Lord), 83**
- Lyons & Company, J., 699(2)**
- MacFisheries Limited, 5**
- Maggs, Mr. J. H., 196, 205, 218, 223, 269**
- Man and Boy (Sir Stephen Tallents) quoted, 446(1)**
- Manchester Ship Canal, 613, 621**
- Margarine**
 and cooking fats option—*See Options*
 de-rationed (1918), 443
 emergency ration of, 305, 309
 for Relief, 315
 rationing of, 543, 556-560, 589-590
- Margins of profit, distributive;**
 eggs, 70, 76
 fish, 5, 16, 39, 55, 57-58
 milk, 194, 196-198, 201, 225, 227, 229-230, 260-261, 264
 potatoes, 127, 133, 141, 157
 scheme for limiting double, 628
- Marmalade, glut of materials for, 775-776**
- Marmalade, home-made, sugar for, 770, 772(3)**
- Meals, restaurant, proposed rationing of, 607**
- Meat**
 agricultural workers' allowance, 413(2), 415
 allocation of 659, 661, 672, 676, 678, 686, 692-693, 696
 advance, 693-695
 butcher's weekly assessment sheet, 696
 Buying Committees, Retail, 661-662, 680, 690, 693(2)
 catering supplies, 406(1), 660, 662, 666-668, 678-683, 685-686, 694-695
 commodity control, machinery of, 659-661

Meat, contd.

- Commodity Division and butchers' Returns, 664-667
- cooked ham, 694(2)
- cooked meats, 668
- dried meat powder, 686
- expectant mothers given extra, 692
- extra ration requested by coalminers, 415
- half ration for children under six, 452(2), 555
- inflation in rationing system—*See Inflation*
- main meals, allowance for in catering establishments, 682
- manufacturing allowance, calculation of butcher's, 660, 664, 671, 684, 693(1)
- meat meal in restaurants, 666, 669(2), 763; difficulty of defining, 682
- non-registered customers, supplies to, 677
- offals, proposal to ration, 585
 - put on ration, 593, 673, 676
 - taken off ration, 443, 681
- permits, 659-686 *passim*
 - fictitious character of (1940), 662-666, 675
 - supplementary, 675
- pies allowed to railwaymen, 593
- pork, American fat, 693
- pork butchers, problem of, 546(2), 668-676
- prices, differential, effect of on rationing mechanism, 660, 668
- procedure, rationing, 660-661; revision of, 686-688
- products, butchers' sale of, 694(2)
- rationing, 543, 564, 659-696 *passim*
 - in 1918, 441
- rationing devices of First and Second World War compared, 686
- regulations, abuse of, 665
- Retail Buying Committees, 660, 662, 687
- sausages, proposal to ration, 586, 601
- schools, supplies to, 692
- shortage in 1918, 433
- supplies and communal feeding, 692
- supply crisis, 675-681, 686, 696
- temporary local surpluses, treatment of, 695-696
- unbought rations, allowance for, 688, 696
- underconsumption of by establishments, 685-689
- unrationed, proposal to ration, 585, 668
 - butchers' sale of, 694(2)
- value ration, complications arising from, 660, 659, 663-666, 684, 696
- Medical Research Council: Committee on Tuberculosis in War-time, 253, 256
- Medical Research Council: Special Diets Advisory Committee, 72, 76, 98, 147, 253, 592, 650(2)
- Members of Parliament, special rationing arrangements for, 650
- Mercantile Marine Identity Cards, 496, 612
- Mercantile Marine Superintendents, 616-617
- Merchant Shipping Act (1906), 610
- Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, 421
- Metropolitan Water Board, 599
- Middlesex County Council, 374
- Military authorities, relations of Ministry of Food with, 290-292, 295, 297-306, 310-312, 323, 335, 340, 347, 528, 551, 774
- Military exercises, effect of on food distribution, 347(1)
- Milk**
 - accommodation premiums, 178, 199, 208, 210, 215-216, 221, 228, 230-231
 - accredited, 254
 - Astor Committee and distribution (1917), 176
 - 'balancing' of supplies, 178, 199, 208, 215, 225, 228, 230
 - bottling plants damaged, 348(2)
 - canned—*See milk, condensed*
 - census of registrations for, 242
 - Central Milk Distributive Committee (England and Wales), 181, 184, 186, 189, 191, 194, 204, 210, 215-216, 240, 245, 250, 265
 - Certificate of Requirements (Form M.K.2), 217, 220, 222, 242-245, 633(2)
 - cheap milk schemes, 193-194, 270
 - collective producer/distributor contracts, 178-179

Milk, *contd.*

- Committee of Investigation on Complaints, 181, 218
- Committee on Rationalisation, Joint Advisory, 245-246, 248-249, 250-251
- Concentration of depots, 246-251
 - proposed retail, 237
- condensed, 176, 178, 189, 192, 201, 210, 212(1), 282-283, 294(1), 297, 304, 339, 347
 - export trade in, 190
 - Lend/Lease supplies of, 212(1)
 - seamen, importance for, 618-619
 - shortage of, 209
- contracts, proposal to abolish, 184, 221, 223
- control, legal aspects of, 185, 202, 212, 234-236, 242
- Co-operative Societies and
 - 'accommodation' premiums, 216, 221, 230
 - distribution costs, 197-198, 206, 227, 230, 260
 - rationalisation schemes (farm collections), 256
 - rationalisation schemes (retail), 237-242
- Cost-of-Living Index and, 190, 214, 271
- Creamery Proprietors' Association, 190, 223, 225, 246, 250
- Cutforth Commission, 181-183, 187, 270
- decontrol of, 271-272
- depots, 176-177, 181
 - feeder, 246; attempted closure of, in Nidderdale, 247-249
 - hostility of Milk Marketing Board to, 181, 218
 - main supply, 246
 - proprietors, remuneration of, 216, 226, 229, 258-259
 - rationalisation and, 246-251
- distribution costs, 175-176, 182, 196-200, 205-208, 216, 226-230, 232, 258-268
- distribution difficulties in air raids, 341
- distributors, 175, 177, 181-276 *passim*
 - 'functional' remuneration of, 228-230, 265-268
- diversion of supplies, 221-223
- dried, 178, 201, 210, 583
- emergency distribution of, 277, 317
- emergency transport of, 337
- evaporated, issue of in lieu of liquid, 220
- 'freezing' of consumer registrations for, 234, 239-245, 258, 525
- 'gallon-for-gallon' rule for rationalisation, 245, 249, 251, 270
- Grigg Commission, 179-183, 187
- half-pint bottle, proposal to abolish, 197-198, 206, 241
- heat-treatment of, 241, 252-258, 257-258; heat-treatment allowance, 264-267
- ice-cream, use in, prohibited, 210
- Industry Bill (1938), 182-187, 192, 196, 205, 253, 270
- legal aspects of control, 185, 202, 212, 234-236, 242
- 'level delivery' premiums, 225, 230-231
- levy, unlawful (1917), 177
- licensing of retailers, 234-237
- licences of dairymen, power to revoke, 235
- liquid consumption, restrictions on, 210 *seq.*
- for manufacture, 190, 210, 212, 222
- Marketing Boards: Aberdeen and District, 209
 - English, 180-193, 198-199, 201, 203, 206, 209, 214, 218-224, 226, 231, 245-246
 - Scottish, 180, 206, 269
 - North of Scotland, 180
- 'milkless days', 210-211
- permits, 213, 217, 243
- Perry Inquiry into Distribution Costs, 17(1), 180, 195-200, 204-208, 227, 260, 261
- prices
 - manufacturing, 179-182, 189-192, 201
 - Milk Marketing Boards and increase of, 192, 201; minimum, 180, 199, 207
 - new structure of, 218, 225-233, 247, 258-271
 - producers' summer, 177-179, 191-193, 201
 - winter, 179, 191, 201, 219, 225, 258
 - retail, standstill on, 191
 - Treasury agreement to increased, 209

Milk, contd.

- priorities, 209, 213-217, 222, 242-244, 650, 652
 - producer-retailers, 180, 183, 194, 206, 213-214, 220-222, 223-224, 232, 253, 256, 260, 264
 - quasi-rationing of, 214-222, 242-245
 - rationalisation of farm collections, 245-251; savings from, 251
 - of retail deliveries, 183, 199, 226, 230, 234-243, 262-263
 - rationing proposed, 184, 209, 212-217, 220, 243
 - registration with retailers, 215-217, 239-241, 243
 - census of, 512
 - Retailer's Certificate of Requirements (Form M.K. 2), 213-214, 217, 220, 225, 242-245, 633(2)
 - retailers, licensing of, 235-270
 - 'safe milk' proposals, 252-258, 263
 - effect of on margins, 264-265
 - in-Schools Scheme, 182, 189, 207-210, 270, 651
 - self-wholesaling allowance, 229, 232, 258-265
 - special handling allowance, 265, 267-268
 - subsidies on, 190-191, 194-195, 201
 - supplies in emergency, 341
 - Supply Scheme, 214-222, 242-245
 - surplus, manufacture of, 178, 210, 213, 220-222
 - transport of, 176, 203, 226, 245-252
 - tuberculin-tested, 191, 225, 241, 252-255
 - Tuberculosis, Committee on, 253, 255-256
 - utilisation, restrictions on, 184, 203, 210
 - war-time associations of dairymen, 188-189, 223, 234-237, 256-257
 - Wilts United Dairies case (1922), 177
 - wholesaler, 176(2), 177, 209, 218-220, 227, 229, 232, 258
 - zoning of retail deliveries, 196, 199, 226, 234, 237, 242 *seq.*
- National Register, 436, 445, 461-500 *passim*, 506, 521, 532-533, 538-540, 617-618, 756, 765-766
 - enumeration schedules, 464-468, 473-474, 476, 479
 - Registration Number, 418, 486-495, 510, 514, 519-521, 523(2), 525, 536, 537-539
 - Officers, 467, 479, 486-487, 491-493(1), 495-498, 500(2)2, 504-505, 510, 533, 538-539
 - and seamen, 618
- National Service Hostels Corporation, 408, 419
- National Union of Agricultural Workers and pie schemes, 414-415
- National Union of Railwaymen, 621
- National Union of Seamen, 618, 622-623
- National Vegetable Marketing Company, 580-581
- Naval shore establishments, rations for, 649
- Navy, Royal, and emergency feeding, 339
- Nell, Mr. W. A., 204
- Nidderdale, milk depots in, 247-248
- Northern Ireland, egg scheme in, 68, 79, 87
 - Ministry of Public Security, 338
 - National Registration in, 478(4)
 - potatoes, 130, 134, 135(1), 137(1), 153-154, 159, 163
 - rationing in, 443(2), 626(1), 656
 - tea in, 642, 726
- Nutritional classification of workers, 606-607
- Nuts, edible, 584, 595
- Oils, edible, damage to, 348(1)
 - processing of, 289
- Onions, distribution scheme for, 580-581
- Options within rationing system:
 - bacon/cheese, suggested, 549, 607-608
 - butter/margarine, 556-560, 589
 - cooking fats/margarine, 556-560, 589-590
 - sugar/jam, 608, 632, 772-776
- Orange juice for children, 651
- Oranges, 549
 - distribution scheme for, 580-584
 - effect on potato policy, 160-161

Orders, Statutory Rules and

- Bacon (Addition of Borax), 551(1)
- bacon, rationing of, 552(1)
- Conditions of Sale, 572-573, 580
- Current Prices, 741-742, 744
- Docks (Provision of Canteens), 421
- eggs, 66-68, 73, 75, 88, 90(1), 92-96
- Essential Work, 398-400
- Factories (Canteens), 383, 419, 679(3)
- Fats, Cheese, Sugar and Tea (Rationing), 747
- Fish, 3, 9-10, 13, 16, 18-19, 20(2), 23-25, 29(3), 33-34, 37, 39, 41, 45-58
- Food Control Committees (Local Distribution), 549(2)
- Food Rationing (General Provisions) (Tea and Preserves), 736, 747(4)
- Food (Restrictions on Meals in Establishments), 682(1)
- Food Transport, 24
- Local Authorities (Community Kitchens and Sale of Food in Public Air Raid Shelters), 383, 387-388, 402
- Local Authorities (Directions to Caterers), 372
- milk, 189-191, 194, 202, 204, 210(1)(2), 211-212, 221-222, 243
- Mines and Quarries (Canteens), 416
- potatoes, 110-111, 114-115, 119, 120(3), 122, 132-133, 135(2) (3), 141-142, 149, 154(3), 157
- Rationed Foods (Emergency Stock), 309, 641(1)
- Sale of Food (Public Air Raid Shelters), 358, 361
- Ships' Stores Control, 620
- Tea (Current Prices), 739
- Tea (Rationing), 712
- Tea (Restrictions on Dealing), 712, 725, 747
- Organisation and Methods inquiries, 534-538
- Orr, Sir John Boyd (later Lord), 182, 607
- 'Oslo Breakfast', 407(1)
- Oxford, Ministry of Food offices in, 8-10, 133(3), 138, 169

Parliament, Members of: special rationing arrangements for, 650

- Parliamentary Counsel, 255-256
- Pearl Harbour, attack on, 590, 628
- Pie Schemes, 413(1), 414-415, 592(1), 601(1), 603, 605, 690, 692
- Pigeon post, Ministry of Food, 329-330
- Pithead canteens, 416-418, 601-602(1), 608-609
- Points Banking Scheme, 628
- Poison gas, precautions against, 385-387, 327
- Police cells, temporary ration card for persons in, 649(3)
- Poor-law, influence of on emergency feeding plans, 284-285, 318-319
- Population movements, effect of on rationing system, 474, 649, 654-655, 701, 756
- Population, Royal Commission on: assistance to by rationing authorities, 529-531, 533
- Port Allocation Committees (Fish), 29, 42, 44
- Port Arbitration Committees, 611(1), 616, 618, 621-622, 623-624
- Port of London Authority, 700, 705, 714
- Port Superintendents, 614-616
- Ports, food stocks in, 293
- Postal aspects of rationing system, 438-439, 450-451, 454, 469-472, 474(2), 475, 476, 486, 506, 546, 699, 786
- Postmaster-General and Clothing Books, 783
- Post Office emergency wireless service, 329
- Potatoes, 105-171 *passim*
 - acreage for, 106-109, 117-119, 120, 129-131, 134, 142, 152-153, 155-158, 163-165, 166-167
 - Agricultural Departments and, 117, 130-131, 152, 156-157
 - Agriculture and Fisheries, Ministry of, and, 108, 112, 114, 123, 125, 131, 140, 163
 - animal feeding, for, 118-119, 123-124, 127, 145, 148, 152, 160
 - bakers and use of potato flour, 107, 118, 124, 143, 149
 - beet factories for drying, 139, 143, 145, 150
 - Beveridge, Sir William, on, 105-106, 116, 120, 166
 - 'Bishop Auckland experiment', 124
 - blight, 135-136, 139, 165
 - bread dilution and Minister of Agriculture, 139
 - caterers and, 125, 145

Potatoes, *contd.*

- control, pre-war plans and establishment of, 105-116
- consumption of, 130-134, 139, 146-147, 148(4), 151-154, 159-160, 162, 166, 170
- 'cosettes', use of, 143, 150
- Cost-of-Living Index and, 114-115, 126, 129, 133, 145, 152, 166
- Channel Islands, supplies from, 115-116, 126(1), 168, 171
- 'cuts, scales and cracks' sold as ware, 159
- dehydration of, 139, 143, 145, 150-151
- depots, proposed, 108-112, 116, 167
 - fish scheme and 8, 111, 116
- deterioration of in clamp, 127, 144, 149
- distribution of, 122, 138, 161-162
- distributive margins, 114-115, 122, 126, 129, 132, 141
- early, 119-120, 127-129, 137, 152-153, 162
- eelworm, 156, 158, 164
- end of season reserves of, 125-128, 132, 135-141, 154, 157-158, 162
- farina, proposed use in, 106, 118, 150
- fed to livestock, 153-154, 166
- First World War, in the, 105-107
- fish friers and fats allocation, 145
 - special subsidy on sales to, 123
- flour in bread, 118, 135, 142-143, 164
- Government statements on policy, 168-171
- growers, acreage subsidy to, 121, 129-131
- growers' prices, 105, 111-115, 117, 119, 138-139, 145
- growers' stocks, 139, 141, 148, 162-163, 165
- guaranteed market for, 113-114, 117, 125, 168-170
- in flour confectionery, 149
- legal aspects of, 157-158
- Lend/Lease, as reverse, 156
- levy, 113-115, 120-121, 125-126, 133, 133(2)
- licences for lifting main-crop, 119
 - to growers, 122
 - to retailers, 113
- loaf, in the, 107, 118, 135, 142-143, 164-165
- main crop, 106-119-122, 154
- margins of profit, distributive, 114-115, 122, 126, 129, 132, 141
- mash powder, 150, 153
- meal for animal feeding, 118
- National Potatoes Advisory Council, 133
- Northern Irish, 130, 134(1), 137, 152-154, 159
- potato flour, 106-107, 118, 135, 142-143, 150, 153, 164, 171
- 'Potato Pete', 124(1), 145
- prices, 105-170 *passim*
- processing of, 118, 122-123, 134-135, 139, 143, 145, 149-150, 153, 166, 171
- propaganda campaign, 124, 144-147, 166, 170
- queues for, 105, 127, 161, 167
- rationing of, 136-137, 143, 152, 155, 160-161, 164, 167
- requisitioning, proposed, 135-137
- retailers, 110, 111, 113, 115, 133, 141, 148, 160
- reverse Lend/Lease, as, 156
- riddle size, 123-124, 149, 154-155, 159, 163
- Scotland, movements in, 135, 155, 158, 161
 - prices, 121, 130
 - supplies of, 163
- seed, 112, 115, 124, 131, 133-134, 139, 145, 153-157, 163
- shortage of, actual, 105-106, 127, 160-162
 - apprehended, 137, 148, 151, 153, 155
- source of calories, as, 105, 109, 119, 164-165
 - compared with bread and flour, 119, 147, 170
 - Vitamin C, 108, 119-120, 162, 144, 165, 170
- stockfeed, sale of, 123-124, 127, 134, 143, 146, 151, 166
- prohibited, 158, 160
- subsidy
 - acreage, 129-131, 163, 167, 171
 - claims, difficulty of checking, 133(3), 138(2), 142(1), 167
 - to fish-friers, 123

Potatoes, *contd.*

- tonnage, 126-127, 129-131, 133, 141-142, 146, 148, 163, 170-171
 - subsidy, tonnage, differential, 142
 - ware for planting as seed, 163
 - surplus of, 106, 112-115, 117-119, 123-124, 127, 129, 139, 144, 151, 166
 - transport costs in relation to, 124, 129, 133, 153, 163
 - Transport Order, Food, 141, 162
 - transport prohibited between certain areas, 137
 - restrictions on, 135, 141-142, 155, 163
 - wholesale prices and, 127, 132, 141
 - transported by coaster, 155
 - utilisation of, 118, 123, 142-143, 150(1), 151, 170
 - ware, 106, 112, 115, 120(1), 125, 132, 152, 163
 - wholesalers, 110-111, 113, 115, 122, 132, 160-161
- Potato Marketing Board, 108-110, 112-113, 116, 118(1), 148, 168**
- Poultry Industry Bill, 65**
- Poultry keepers**
- domestic, 88, 90
 - small, 77-78, 85-86, 97
 - specialist, 79
 - 65, 67, 70, 76, 81, 91, 95
- Poultry Keepers' Council, 71, 77-78, 88**
- Poultry, proposal to ration, 585-586**
- Premises, emergency retail, 341-345**
- for emergency feeding, 372
 - stocks, 342(1), 377
 - wholesalers, 343-344
- Preserves distribution scheme, 573-579**
- Prices**
- egg, 65, 67, 70-72, 76, 81, 84, 88-89, 90, 96, 100-101
 - fish, 3, 11, 14-17, 19, 36, 38, 49, 51-53, 56-57, 59-60
 - meat, 555, 659-660, 664, 668
 - milk, 117-119, 182, 189-192, 191-193, 201, 207, 209, 218-219, 225, 258-271
 - pig, 670
 - potato, 105-109, 115, 117, 119, 121-122, 124, 126, 129-130, 132, 144, 145(2), 153, 163, 168, 170
 - sugar, 634
- Prime Minister (Mr. Winston Churchill)**
- on communal feeding, 384
 - eggs, 77-78, 83, 85, 87, 91(2), 100-101
 - potatoes, 127, 149, 156: otherwise mentioned, 490(2)
- Prime Minister (Mr. David Lloyd George)**
- and guaranteed potato prices, 105
- Prime Minister, Deputy (Mr. C. R. Attlee), 256**
- Prisoners of war, rations for, 623**
- Processing plant, defence of against air attack, 287-288**
- Production Executive, 291(3)**
- Production, Ministry of, 254**
- Prothero, Mr. R. E. (later Lord Ernle)**
- and fish, 3, 60
 - and potatoes, 3, 105
- Prunier, Madame, 50**
- Public assistance authorities and emergency feeding, 284-285, 339, 374, 377**
- Public Security, Northern Ireland Ministry of, 338**
- Public utility supplies, air raid damage to, 325**
- Publicity, problem of at ration book re-issues, 495-498, 513-519**
- Purchaser's Shopping Card (1919), 439, 754**
- 'Purchases by Penniless Persons' scheme, 295(3)**
- Purchasing periods, rationing, 646-647**
- Quarrymen, rations for, 600**
- Quasi-rationing, 573-585**
- (dried eggs), 585
 - (eggs), 100
 - (onions), 580
- 'Quasi-seamen', 613**

- Queues for food in 1918, 433
 at ration book re-issues, 497, 507, 515, 517
- Queen's Messenger Convoys, 314, 327, 337(1), 340, 343-346, 364-369, 371, 373, 375, 379, 380, 386
- Railway Executive Committee, 419-420, 593(1)
- Railwaymen, feeding of, 418-420, 591-593
- Railways and dispersal of refugees, 311
- Ration Book—*See Rationing Documents*
- Clothes: issued by Food Offices, 496, 764
- Rationing, clothes, 651, 734, 769, 782-785
- Rationing, food:
- assessment of achievement, 753-759
 - bacon, 543, 551-556, 564, 588-589; American fat, 489, 603
 - cooked, rationing system and, 551-555, 588-589
 - half-ration for children proposed, 555
 - cheese option, 549
 - Beveridge Committee on, 444-447, 461-465, 476, 520, 533, 543, 625, 723
 - bread, proposed, 606-607
 - butter, 543, 557-558, 564
 - changes of address by consumers—*See Removals*
 - cheese, 562-563, 591-601, 603, 626, 683
 - supplementary, 594-601, 764
 - clerical burden of, 491, 564-565, 572, 625
 - Committee for the Revision of Forms and Documents, 490(2), 565-571
 - consumer-retailer tie, 427, 456, 475, 754-759
 - origin of, 429-431, 433, 754
 - sanction for National Register, 461-462
 - as supposed guarantee of ration, 456, 754-755
 - and tea, 701-702
 - cooking fats, 543, 556-560, 589-590
 - delay in introduction of, 468-477
 - differential, 438(1), 452, 585, 591-624 *passim*
 - and Electoral Registration, 491(2), 494, 499-501, 534-535, 539
 - emergency plan for, 296(1), 303-308
 - 'fish, flesh, fowl' group, 586-587
 - fraud and duplication, safeguards against, 431, 436, 438, 461, 486, 489, 755-766
 - gypsies, 650
 - harvest allowances, 604-605
 - Identity Cards, use of—*See Identity Cards*
 - inflation within the rationing system, 428, 525, 550-557, 567-568, 663-665, 675-676, 688, 690-691, 713-714, 717
 - institutions, 480, 532(1)
 - lighthouse keepers, 611
 - local authorities and (1917), 431
 - margarine, 543, 556-560, 564, 567, 589-590
 - meals, restaurant, proposed, 607, 682
 - meat, 441, 543, 588, 593, 655-696 *passim*
 - crisis, 571, 601, 675, 681
 - and National Registration—*See National Registration*
 - offals, 585, 676
 - options
 - bacon/cheese, suggested, 549, 607-608
 - butter/margarine, 556-560
 - cooking fats/margarine, 556-560, 589-590
 - sugar/jam, 608, 772-776
 - Parliament, Members of: special arrangements for, 650
 - period, introduction of four-weekly, 579
 - 'perishable protein points', 586-587
 - points scheme: dried fruits added, 586
 - points, proposed in 1917, 758, 779-781
 - (1941), 572, 584, 628, 734
 - postal aspects of, 438-439, 450-451, 454, 469-472, 474-476, 486, 489(1), 506, 699, 786
 - poultry, proposed, 586
 - preserves, rationing of, 578-579, 771, 775; ended, 776
 - priority allowances, 606

Rationing, food, *contd.*

- priority pork permit, 672
 - quasi-rationing, 573-585
 - queues for ration books, 497, 507, 517
 - records, air-raid loss of, 336
 - refugees, 546(4)
 - register of consumers, 480, 487-488
 - regulated areas, ration book issue and, 528
 - relaxation of in emergency, 323, 325, 341
 - removals, 464, 467, 474-475, 480-525, 532, 534, 540, 637-638, 755-756, 788-791, 798-799
 - residential establishments, 455
 - retailers: control of supplies to, 439-443, 625-642
 - retailers' unofficial schemes, 573
 - rural areas, issue of ration books in, 513-517, 519, 527
 - scheme, 'intermediate', proposed, 447-448
 - soap, 573, 585, 764, 777
 - sugar (1917), 429-442
 - (1940), 543, 564, 597, 770
 - sugar for domestic jam making, 771-772
 - surplus rations, attempt to reclaim from retailers, 448-449, 568, 570, 630, 634, 685
 - suspended after air attacks, 323, 325, 341
 - sweets, 427, 585, 734
 - syrup and treacle, 575(1)
 - system of July 1918, 437-443
 - influence of, 442-443, 456, 563, 709
 - limited scope of, 443
 - uncritical attitude towards, 456, 758-759: exemplified, 563
 - tea, 699-749, *passim*
 - children's ration, abolition of, 730-732
 - Christmas, double ration at, 716
 - concessionary supplies under, 714-715, 717
 - coupon-cutting abandoned, 723
 - restored, 728-731
 - coupons, retail supplies based on, 733-734
 - evasion of, 727
 - in Northern Ireland, 642, 726
 - old people, extra ration for, 730
 - permits,
 - retail, 724-728, 731-739, 743-749; 'continuing', 745-749
 - supplementary retail, 745-746, 748
 - points scheme for, proposed, 427
 - population movements and, 702, 715, 721
 - postal trade under, 712
 - registration of consumers with retailers, proposed, 716, 728-729
 - return, retail (Form G.C.3), 727, 731-732
 - tea mixtures, 712(5)
 - time factor, importance of in rationing system illustrated, 428, 431(2), 447-448, 457, 465, 468 *seq.*, 508, 549-550, 557, 594-597, 626, 640, 678, 690, 731-732, 748, 753-754, 756-757
 - types of, 427-429, 764, 759, 779-781
 - vegetarians, 590(1), 594-597
 - week, start of, 777-778
- Rationing Division, relations of with commodity divisions, 548-549, 567-568, 630-634, 659-696**
- Rationing Documents**
- Advice Form, Food Office-Wholesaler, 632-634, 636
 - Application for Supplies, retailers' form, 454, 543, 557, 563, 569, 727(1), 763
 - Authorisations, butchers', 660, 664, 667, 671, 679, 685-689, 693-696
 - caterers', 685-686, 691
 - Authorities, special, 636-637, 725(1)
 - Authorities, Sugar (1917), 564 n
 - Authorities, Tea, 747-748
 - Butchers' returns, 664, 685, 686, 693: temporary, 690
 - weekly statements, 687, 689
 - Cards: daily, for seamen, 612
 - for Services (Leave or Duty), 663, 677

Rationing Documents, *contd.*

- Cards, Preserves, 575, 577
- Certificate of purchase, caterers' 688.
- Certificate, wholesaler's, proposed, 569-570, 629-630
- Cheese, Special, slip for, 600
- Clothing Books, 496, 512(2)
- Committee on the Simplification of, 565-571, 646, 763
- Counterfoils, 428, 439, 444, 479, 498, 525, 543, 544, 570, 580, 596, 610, 625, 637(2), 687, 763
- Coupons
 - cancellation of, 568, 570, 716, 765
 - cheese, 596, 763-764
 - clothing, margarine used for, 769, 782
 - supplementary, 496, 508(2)
 - cutting: 545-547, 568-569, 583, 629
 - abolition of, 545, 625, 634, 676, 763, 649(2)
 - for oranges, suggested, 583
 - reintroduction for tea, 726(1), 728, 730, 731, 744
 - depositing of with retailer, 546, 671
 - for eggs, 764
 - envelopes for return of, 545
 - margarine, used for clothes rationing, 769, 782
 - for meals, 607, 691-692
 - mislaid or pilfered, 656
 - period for which valid, 559, 569, 646-647
 - preserves, 764, 775
 - sheet of sugar (1917-1918), 432, 439
 - 'spare', 647
 - tea, 712-713, 716, 764-765
 - used for oranges, 730(3)
 - temporary meat, 649, 687, 691, 694-695
 - civilian and services, 649, 691, 694-695
 - unused, 546
 - vegetarians', 595
- Declaration of Requirements, 746
- Employer's Certificate for supplementary cheese ration, 599
- Hop-picker's form (H.P.33), 649(2)
- Household Application Form (1917-1918), 430, 437-438; (1936-1939), 445, 448, 451, 454, 464-465, 468-469, 471, 476, 484(2)
- Jam Vouchers, 575, 578(1), 579, 585, 647
- Order Books, Establishments', 455, 633, 653, 667-668, 713, 717, 726(3)
- Permits, buying:
 - bacon, 564, 588, 626, 632
 - basis of compilation, 566-568, 630, 642-727
 - butter, 564, 632, 655, 771(3)
 - 'ceiling', 568, 625-626, 630, 653, 656, 727
 - changes in physical form of, 633-636
 - cheese, 568, 626, 632, 636
 - composite, 625-629, 633, 637-638
 - 'continuing', 625-626, 633, 635-637, 654; for tea, 744-745, 748-749
 - delay in transmission to wholesalers, 547-548, 550, 626
 - Enforcement Division and, 568
 - estuarial, 617, 622
 - extended period for, 564
 - 'global', 626, 628, 630-632, 636, 641
 - inflation of—*See Rationing: inflation*
 - issue of 1939, 476
 - jam, 579(3)
 - margarine, supplementary, 589
 - onion, 580-581
 - period for which valid, 445, 452, 564, 633
 - priority pork, 672
 - reform of 1942, 627, 643
 - sugar, 439: supplementary, 631, 774(3)
 - supplementary, 544, 549-550, 558, 572, 588-589, 630-631, 635(1), 649, 654-655, 690, 745
 - supplementary margarine, 558

Rationing Documents, *contd.*

- meat, 676-677, 694
- sugar, 631-632, 774(3)
- tea, 715, 722, 724-725, 727, 733-734, 739, 743-746, 748
- otherwise mentioned, 453-454, 526, 544, 547, 553, 557, 561, 625, 629, 653-654
- Preliminary Demand Notes, Establishments', 455, 544, 666-667, 660
- Preliminary Authorities (meat), 660
- Purchaser's Shopping Card (1919), 439, 754
- Ration Book:
 - adolescent boy's, 437, 452-453
 - black market value of, 512(2)
 - changes in format, 763-766
 - cheese pages, 763
 - child's, 437, 452-455, 582(1), 584, 650, 651-652
 - clothing, 496, 506(1), 507, 731, 765(1), 782-786
 - deceased persons', 467, 526(2) 4, 769
 - despatch of (1939), 476
 - detachable page (R.G.12A), 525, 638, 763
 - expectant mother's, 1943, 651
 - 'food ages' introduced into, 648
 - format of, 647-648, 763-766
 - heavy worker's, 437, 452, 596(1)
 - issue of, 462, 489-490, 493, 505-520, 545, 635, 766, 786; in 1918, 437-438
 - 'Junior', 496(1), 508, 651, 768
 - lost, 485, 768
 - marking for eggs, 585, 647
 - by greengrocers, 580
 - for unrationed foods, 577(1), 584
 - Naval shore establishments, 649
 - and oranges, 583
 - Personal Points (R.B.11), 496-497, 763
 - Points (R.B.10), 493-494, 763
 - poultry keeper's, 508(2)
 - printing of, 447-448, 450-451, 508, 511(2), 763-765, 767-768, 786
 - priority slip, 650
 - public errors in filling up, 488, 490, 527, 532
 - purchasing periods, 646-647
 - 'quasi-seamen's' (R.B.6 modified), 614, 617, 621
 - queues for, 514-515, 517
 - for refugees, 546(4)
 - sealing before issue, consequences of, 451, 484-486
 - Seamen's (R.B.6), 610-624 *passim*
 - Service Authorities and recruits', 534, 551, 578(1)
 - sweets, 507
 - theft of, 518
 - travellers', 437, 453(2), 648-650
- Ration Card (1919), 439
- Ration Card, Services' Leave or Duty, 453(2), 648-649, 663, 677; temporary, 696
- Ration Paper (1917-1918), 431-433, 436
- 'reference-leaf' in Ration Book, 243-244, 438, 449, 451, 465, 480-540 *passim*, 637, 763, 765-766, 768
- removals form (R.G.12a), 525
- return, composite, 569, 629
- return, retailers' stock, difficulty of verifying, 566, 625, 629, 641-642, 654, 664-665
- special authorities (tea), 725
- tickets, sugar (1917), 432
- Visitor's Declaration Form (1918), 452(1), 649(1)
- vouchers, preserves, 575, 578-579, 585, 772(2), dried fruit, 584-585
- syrup, 578(1)
- weekly assessment sheet, butcher's, 696
- wholesaler's certificate of delivery, proposed, 627, 629-630
- Ration levels, 453, 654
- Ration period, introduction of four-weekly, 579
- Rations for seamen, 610-624 *passim*
- Reading, Dowager Marchioness of, 365
- Reading, Marquess of, 538

- Reckitt & Colman Limited, 345
 Reconstruction, Minister of (Lord Woolton), 249
 Red Cross and tea, 714; temporary authorities, 636-637(6)
 Refugee Emergency Service, 311(2)
 Refugees fed by public assistance authorities, 284
 Refugees from invasion, policy towards, 310-311
 Refugees, movements of, 285, 296, 310, 338, 561, 694
 Regional Commissioners and emergency feeding, 278-279, 292-299, 301, 326, 365, 367-368
 Regional system of Civil Defence, 277
 Register, electoral, 528-529
 Registrar-General for England and Wales, 436, 445, 461, 473-480, 482-489, 492-499, 500-510, 511-513, 519, 523(2), 526-529, 532, 534(3), 536-537, 769—*See also National Register*
 Registrar-General for Scotland, 497(1), 504, 509, 511, 514
 Registrar-General of Shipping and Seamen, 496, 610(2)
 Registrars of births and deaths, 467, 480(1), 769
 Registration of consumers, 471, 474, 476, 480, 543
 central v. local, 432-437: fallacies concerning, 434-436
 distinction between two senses of, 435-436
 with retailers—*See Consumer-retailer Tie*
 Registration-without-rationing, 573 *seq.*
 Regulated areas, ration book issue and, 528
 Relief in kind for air raid victims, 285
 Relief, use of emergency food reserves for, 285, 315
 Removals, 474-475, 480-525 *passim*, 532, 534, 540, 637-638, 651, 755-756, 788-791, 798-799
 Reserves, food—*See Stocks*
 Rest centres, 284-285, 311, 318, 325, 338-340, 345, 368-369, 371(2), 373(2), 376-377
 Retail Fruit Trade Federation, 583
 Retailers, control of—*See Rationing, passim*
 depositing of coupon pages with, 546
 limitation of supplies to, 627-635
 mutual assistance pacts, 277, 281-282, 325-344
 with under 25 registrations, withdrawal of rationed food from, 549, 627, 643-646
 unofficial rationing by, 573, 584
 Rhondda, Lord, 3, 187, 431-432, 435(2)
 Rice pudding, canned, for Relief, 315
 Road transport drivers, feeding of, 418-420, 592
 Roberts, Mr. G. H. (Food Controller), 443, 476, 572, 703
 Rockets, long range, 346, 349, 379
 Royal Commission on Population, 529-531, 533
 Royal Commission on Wheat Supplies, 106-107
 Rubber stamps, use of, 71-72, 489, 493, 494-497, 515(1), 523, 726
 Rural areas, issue of ration books in, 513-517, 519, 527
 Salaman, Dr. Redcliffe N., 119
 Salvage, food, 287(1), 291, 317, 320-321, 330-335, 348
 Salvation Army and shelter feeding, 357, 363(2)
 Sanitary inspectors and food salvage, 333
 Scales, shortage of, in emergency, 342(3)
 Schedule of Essential Occupations, 701(1)
 School canteens, feeding of general public in, 390
 School meals, 352-353, 376, 393, 421-423, 679-680, 685, 692
 Schools, use of for emergency feeding, 372
 'scorched-earth' policy, 290-292
 Scotland
 canteens, mobile, organisation of, 368
 Chief Egg Officer, Edinburgh, 80
 Chief Divisional Food Officer, 298
 emergency stocks in, 297
 enforcement difficulties in, 41-45, 93
 fishing industry, 24, 31, 36-39, 41, 43, 50, 58
 Glasgow Divisional Office, 338
 herring drifters, rations for, 623
 Herring Control Officer, Fraserburgh, 59
 problem of ration book re-issue in, 496-497, 514-515

Scotland, *contd.*

- Registrar-General for, 478(4), 497(1), 503
- seed potatoes brought by sea, 153(2), 163
- Scotland, Islands of, excluded from egg control, 79, 93
- Scottish Divisional Food Officers and National Registration, 504
- Scottish Home Department (fisheries), 27, 59; (identity cards), 528
- Sea-Fish Commission, 48(1)
- Seamen, rations for, 610-624
 - temporary ration, 649
 - weekly ration, 691, 726(3)
- Services, Armed, and rationing, 468, 480(1), 578, 603, 624, 663, 677, 684, 687(1), 774, 783(1)
- Services' Leave or Duty Card, 453(2), 648-649, 663, 677, 730(1)
- Shelters, air raid, feeding arrangements for, 318-319, 348(2), 357-362
- Shipping, Ministry of, 20
- Ships, victualling of, 610, 612, 619-620
- Short, Mr. A. G., 195
- Soap, rationing of, 573, 585, 764, 777
- Solicitor-General, 255
- Soup kitchens, mobile, 363
- Soups, Ministry of Food emergency, 304, 315, 373(1), 379, 422
- Southern Railway, 620
- Southport, Central National Registration Office at, 478, 504, 508, 528, 534, 537
- Special Diets Advisory Committee of the Medical Research Council, 72, 76, 98, 147, 595, 650(2)
- Stationery Office, H.M., 447-448, 450-451, 496, 508, 511(2), 577(2), 763, 767-768, 786
- 'Stay-put' policy, 310-311
- Stephenson, Mr. W. L., 195
- Stewart, Mr. Henderson, M.P., 68
- Stews, use of in emergency feeding, 372, 373(1), 375, 379
- Stock record procedure (1946), 655
- Stocks: bacon, 552
 - bulk, in emergency, 280, 287, 291-295, 303, 308, 345, 347, 373
 - butter, 558, 588
 - cheese, 600
 - control of retail, in emergency, 309
 - dispersal of, 292-297
 - emergency, 283, 285, 294(1), 296-297, 304-306, 311-315, 373(1), 374, 376
 - preserves, 773
 - tea, 701, 711(1), 716(1), 721, 742
 - dispersal of, 705, 709
 - handling of bulk, 714, 716(1), 720
- Storage accommodation, shortage of, 293, 313, 344
- Subsidies:
 - eggs, 71-74, 94
 - milk, 190-191, 194-195, 201
 - potatoes, 123, 126-127, 129-131, 133, 141-142, 146-148, 152, 154, 157, 163, 167, 170-171
 - tea, 738-739, 741
- Suet, unrationed, 664
- Sugar consumers, central index of (1917), 431-435, 445, 463, 539
- Sugar for domestic jam-making, 579, 634, 770-776
- Sugar/jam option—*See Options*
- Sugar rationing, 470, 543, 564, 573, 597
- Sugar, registration for, 765
 - and wholesalers, 432, 436
 - shortage of (1916), 429, 433
 - otherwise mentioned, 276, 289, 293, 296, 304, 348(1), 429, 442, 564
- Sugden, Gilbert, *The Finance of Civic Restaurants*, cited, 398(4), 399(2), 411(3)
- Supply, Ministry of, 287, 403, 598
- Surrey County Council, 374
- Surveys, consumption (dried egg), 91(1)
- Sweets rationing, 427, 585, 764
- Syrup and treacle, 575(1), 577-578, 773

- Tallents, Captain (later Sir) Stephen, 436, 446
- Tate & Lyle Limited, 289, 578(1)
- Tawney, Professor R. H., in *Economic History Review*, cited, 757

- Taylor, Gordon, *The Future of British Restaurants*, cited, 397(2), 410(2)
- Taylor, Mr. R. J., M.P., 602(1)
- Tea, 276, 296, 304-305, 309(3), 318-319, 321, 340, 382, 699-740 *passim*
- allocations, wholesale, exchange of, 725(3), 747
 - allowance for 'office teas', 714, 725(1), 730-731
 - block stowage of, 718
 - brands, maintenance of, 699, 701, 716-717, 734, 738-742; price control and, 728-729, 738-742
 - caterers, supplies to, 713, 717, 728, 730, 733, 735-736
 - Central Tea Distribution (Defence) Committee, 704-705
 - children's ration, withdrawal of, 730-732
 - commodity control organisation, 705-706
 - concessions, 714, 726(3), 728(1)
 - consumption of, 708
 - dispersal of stocks, 704-707, 709, 720(2)
 - distribution on datum basis, 701-703, 706-708, 710, 743-744; within rationing system, 706-707, 710-716, 720-726, 739, 741, 747(1), 749
 - double ration for Christmas 1940, 716
 - emergency allocation, 715
 - 'grocer's teas', 699
 - herbal, 712(4)
 - high-priced, scramble for, 738-742
 - measures to stop, 743-744
 - in First World War, 701-702
 - Minister of Food's attitude towards, 699, 719, 722-723, 728-743, 757
 - National Control Tea—*See Tea, pooling of*
 - packeted, significance of, 699, 700-702, 704-706, 712, 719-720, 740, 742(1), 743
 - packing plant, dispersal of, 717-720, 737-738
 - pooling of (1918), 701-702
 - pooling of, proposed, 703-704, 709, 719, 722, 729, 738-742
 - prices, 701-702, 708-709, 729, 738-744
 - for railwaymen, 592, 593
 - registration of consumers with retailers, proposed, 702-703, 716, 720-724, 728-729, 762
 - 'sector scheme' and, 735-737
 - shortages of, 708, 710
 - stocks, amount of, 701, 711(1), 716(1), 721, 742
 - concentrated in London, 700, 709, 717-718
 - smuggling of into Eire, 721
 - Trade Associations, 702, 705
 - trade organisation, 699-701, 740
 - transport economy and, 738, 740-741
 - wholesalers, 700, 706-707, 713, 720(2), 725, 744
 - licensing of, 726
 - primary functions of, 706-708, 725
 - restrictions on, 737
 - secondary, 745, 748
- Teashops, meat allowances for, 682
- Teletypewriter service, use of in emergency, 328-329
- Times, The*, and Billingsgate Market, 10
- British Restaurants, 410
 - ration book information, 530(2)
- Titmuss, Prof. R. M., *Problems of Social Policy*, cited, 282, 284, 318(4), 376
- Trade, Board of, 67, 320, 344(1), 345
- clothes rationing, 445, 496-509, 531-532, 769, 782-785
 - concentration of industry, 26-27
 - Mines Department, 415-416—*See also Fuel and Power, Ministry of*
- Trades Union Congress, 383, 598, 609(3), 622, 624, 715
- agricultural workers' meals, 415
 - and coalminers' rations, 415, 417
 - and differential rationing (1918), 438(3); establishments' allowances, 683
 - industrial workers' rations, 592, 609
 - quarrymen, 600
 - seamen, food for, 614-618, 623
- Trades Union Congress Advisory Committee, 562, 585, 593, 601, 607-608, 615
- Trades Union Congress General Council, 591
- Transport and General Workers' Union, 54, 614-615, 618, 621, 624(2)

- Transport Board, London Passenger, 357, 360, 361(3)
 Transport difficulties connected with cooking depots, 378
 Transport economy, 630, 704, 708, 716, 719, 738-742
 Transport immobilisation of civilian, proposed, 294
 Transport, Ministry of, 355, 599
 Trawlermen, rations for, 610, 612, 620
 Treasury, H.M., 286, 330(2)
 bacon imports from Canada, 555
 British Restaurants, 369, 386
 cooking depot meal charges, 392
 and Cost-of-Living Index, 67, 71-74, 76, 89(1), 96
 deceased persons' ration books, 769
 eggs, 67, 70, 72-74, 96, 100-101
 emergency feeding, 359, 384
 fish prices, 16, 17, 19, 39, 53, 57; fish scheme, 8
 grant for printing ration books (1937), 448
 margarine rationing, 557(1)
 milk, 190, 192-193, 201-202, 205, 219, 229-230, 261, 270
 National Register, 500, 536
 potatoes, 108, 114-115, 125, 130-133, 144(1), 146, 148, 152, 163
 printing machines, ration book, 767
 and Queen's Messenger Convoys, 366
 rest centres, 376
 tea subsidy, 741
 'Trekking' after air raids, 318(1), 323-324, 338-339, 345(1), 375-376
 Tube-station feeding service, 357, 360, 362
 Tugboatmen, rations for, 611, 613, 616, 622
 strike of, 622
 United Dairies Limited, 175-176, 180-181, 187, 196-198, 209, 215, 218(1), 221, 227, 261
 United States of America
 animal lard from, 590
 British War Relief Fund, 364
 points rationing in, 758
 Unrationed Foods, Committee on the distribution of, 593
 Unrationed priority supplies of, 405, 602; shortage of, 561, 572, 628
 meat, butchers' sale of, 694(2)
 Vegetarians, food for, 452, 590(1), 594-597
 Vivian, Mr. (later Sir) Sylvanus P., 431(4), 432, 435(2), 436, 476, 758—*See also*
 Registrar General (E. & W.)
 proposal for a points rationing system, 779-781
 Voluntary organisations and communal feeding, 308-310, 353, 357-358, 362, 385, 393, 414
 'V' weapons, 346-349, 379
 Walworth, Mr. G., 204
 War Cabinet
 and fish, 3
 and milk, 207, 254
 and potato prices, 117
 and preserves distribution scheme, 576(1)
 Scientific Food Committee, 119
 War Cabinet Office, Economic Section of, 147, 606
 War Office, 305(1), 314, 355, 378, 404, 714(2)
 War Room, Ministry of Food, 327-330
 Home Security, 326
 War Transport, Minister of (Lord Leathers), 25
 War Transport, Ministry of
 and fish transport economy scheme, 25-26, 28
 food for seamen, 609(2), 613, 615, 617, 621, 623
 for transport drivers and railwaymen, 418-420
 petrol demands of egg packers, 89
 quarrymen, 600
 Ships' Stores Control Order, 620
 Statutory Rule and Order (Seamen), 624
 transport for tea, 740

- Water supplies, Army help with, 323
 for bakeries, 276, 337-338
- Weddings, ration concessions for, 637 (note), 714
- Welfare Schemes, 651-652
- Westminster, City of, 370(2), 490(1)
- Wheat, damaged, used for animal feeding, 293, 333(1), 334
- Whisky, illicit distilling of, 641
- 'White Paper' on Concentration of Industry, 27
- 'White Papers' on Milk Policy, 182, 223, 236, 254-255, 264
- 'White Paper' on School Feeding, 422
- Wholesale Egg Distributors Association, 72
- Wholesale markets, emergency, 336(1)
- Wholesale trade, vulnerability of, 316, 342-344
- Wholesaler's certificate of deliveries, proposed, 569-571
- Wholesalers under emergency conditions, 281, 292-293, 303, 322, 324, 336, 342-343
- Wilson, Professor G. S., 253
- Wilts United Dairies case, 177
- Women's Institutes
 and fruit preservation schemes, 578(2), 770-771
 pic schemes, 414, 770-771
 rationing, 516
- Women's Land Army, 599
- Women's Legion, 357(2)
- Women's Voluntary Services, 357(2), 365, 367, 391(3), 414-415, 515-516, 519, 596(3)
- Woolton, Lord, 22, 26, 28, 31, 57, 67, 69, 74-77, 83-86, 96, 143-146, 193-196, 207-208, 214, 220, 235, 248, 250, 253, 381-383, 384-385, 395, 401, 408, 421, 517, 602-603, 643-644, 683(2), 699, 719, 722-723, 728-729, 738, 740, 742-743, 757
- Works, Ministry of, 288, 330, 345, 354, 374, 377, 403, 405, 420(1), 422
- Yeast, 289
 emergency organisation, 276-277
- Young, Brigadier Sir Julian, 299
- Young Men's Christian Association, 357(2), 363(2), 714
- York, Major Christopher, M.P., 247, 253
- Zoning of distribution
 fish, 24-29, 32, 36, 45-49
 milk, 234-245
 wholesale deliveries, 628
- Zoning of food stocks, 293, 295-296

