

## "FORTIFIED" FOODS

(Written for "The Listener" by DR. MURIEL BELL,  
Nutritionist to the Health Department)

PERHAPS due to the war atmosphere of recent years, perhaps merely for alliterative effect, the term "fortification" has been applied to certain procedures whereby the nutritional value of foods is purposely increased. It is a short-cut method of making up for the deficiencies that exist in the diets of a section of the population, without changing either their food habits, or their method of agriculture, or their manufacturing processes. There is much to be said in favour of achieving the same ends by these slower means, but the speedier method of "fortification" has been favoured in a few limited cases. The wholesale use of fortification has however been frowned on, because it holds dangers of creating a racket, or of cutting across established principles such as are contained in their equivalent of our New Zealand Food and Drugs Regulations. Some examples are given below of the few instances where approval has been given by nutritional authorities to the policy of fortification of foods, because it was a way of doing good by stealth.

Wherever goitre is prevalent, the root cause is a deficiency of iodine. The remedy chosen is to add iodine to the salt, and, wherever this has been adequately done, it has reduced the incidence of goitre. It is a procedure which meets with the approval of public health specialists.

Where margarine forms a large part of the dietary, it has been fortified with vitamins A and D, for the use of unfortified margarine would have resulted in the diseases met with in the last war, such as the blindness in Danish children when Denmark exported butter and consumed margarine, or the rickets so prevalent throughout Europe during the last war. The New Zealand butter ration of 6oz. a week goes a long way towards supplying the needs for vitamin A. As to vitamin D, we cannot get enough of it from any of our ordinary foods: but the policy of a community like ours should be to get our quota by making it ourselves in our skins with the aid of sunshine, with special provision of fish liver oils for infants (and for ourselves too in winter time), rather than go to the bother of fortifying our butter with it, or of irradiating our milk, which is one of the methods allowed in certain States in U.S.A.

A policy of fortifying bread has been put into operation in U.S.A. To white bread, they have added vitamin B1, riboflavin, nicotinic acid, iron and calcium. This policy was justified by the urgent need in their case to do something about their many cases of pellagra and other deficiency diseases; but it has been criticised by some of their own nutrition authorities on the ground that the British and Canadian methods are better — namely, to alter the milling technique in such a way as to retain more of the nutritional value of the wheat grain.

The United Nations Commission on Food and Agriculture states:

"While we consider that fortification will need to be carefully controlled, and should not be undertaken lightly either by governments or commercial interests, it is a weapon which most countries, and especially those with low standards of living, cannot afford to neglect." Note the proviso "with low standards of living"—for I scarcely think that they have this country in mind.

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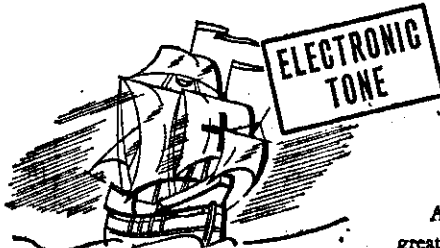
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