

**T**HOUGH it has been given less publicity than the political conferences, the Food Conference which will meet at Copenhagen on September 2 may prove more important than all but one or two of the others. In the opinion of one London newspaper, the *Daily Herald*, it will decide whether "millions will be granted a healthy life—or millions will be sentenced to death."

Headline-ranking politicians are unlikely to attend. For delegates to the World Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) Conferences are mostly technical experts. (Three from the New Zealand Department of Agriculture left here last month.) But FAO's Director-General should be a household name. For if he can, before this Conference ends on his 66th birthday, have persuaded it to launch the World Food Board which he will propose to it, Sir John Boyd Orr, Kt., D.S.O., F.R.S., M.A., LL.D., will have crowned with another large-scale achievement a career of quite extraordinary service to humanity.

After World War 1 (which he passed in the Medical Corps, winning M.C. and D.S.O. and mention in despatches), John Orr, at 40, produced with one professional collaborator, a physiology textbook, and with another an "Investigation into the Energy Expenditure of Infantry Recruits in Training." Then, during the 'twenties, as Director of the Rowett Agricultural Research Institute at Aberdeen, and of the Imperial Bureau of Animal Nutrition, he organised surveys into the place of essential minerals in animal diet. His staff conclusively proved—in Britain and in Kenya—that pastures which did not contain tiny, but sufficient, "traces" of calcium, phosphorus, potassium, sodium, chlorine, iron, iodine, and other more obscure elements could, not produce first-class cattle. Beasts fed on deficient pastures—and deficiency was found to be widespread—grew slowly, were susceptible to disease, and—last but not least in importance to practical farmers—had abnormal appetites.

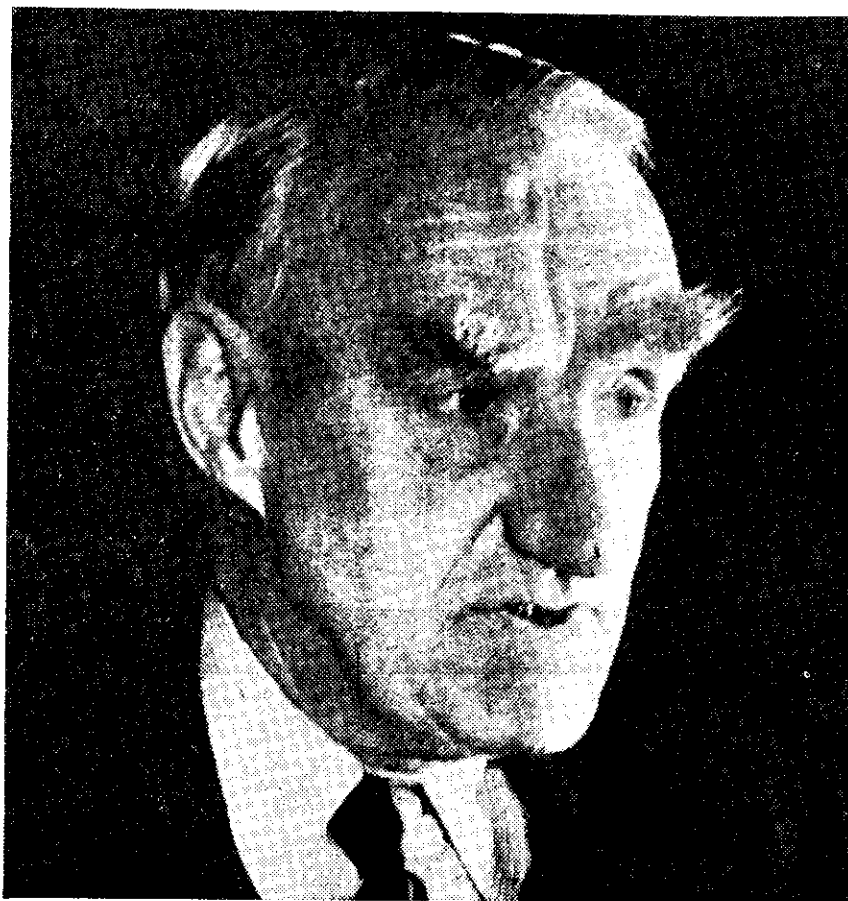
#### From Beasts to Humans

Through the 'thirties Orr extended his researches to human diet. Investigations which he organised showed that a large part of every country's population was underfed—if not by quantitative standards, then by qualitative. In his own words (in the film *World of Plenty*) "You don't need to look half starved, my friend, to be sick from undernourishment. Undernourishment is often the result, not of having too little to eat, but of not having enough of the right kind. People used to think that the food was good if they felt their bellies full. But in the last 20 years we have completely changed our ideas about food requirements. In Britain, before the war, if you'd felt hungry, you could have sat down and had a few hunks of white bread, with margarine and jam. You'd satisfy your sense of hunger, but that's about all. For health you'd want foods with plenty of vitamins in them such as milk, eggs, fruit and vegetables—but they'd cost you twice as much. Hence, the poorer the family, the less they could buy of the more costly but quite essential vitamin-rich foods. And there are quite a few people in Britain, you know, who have to live on less than £2 a week."

#### From Diets to Incomes

So investigating pastures led Orr, via investigating diets, to investigating incomes. This investigation produced *The*

# PILGRIM TOWARD PLENTY



## Sir John Boyd Orr

whose "career of quite extraordinary service to humanity" is described here by A.M.R.

*National Food Supply* in 1934 and *Food, Health, and Income* in 1936. The latter book was a social landmark. For it incontrovertibly established by scientifically-ascertained statistics what had hitherto been only political assertion—namely that one third of the world's best-fed, best-organised and best-educated community went through life dangerously undernourished.

That documented conclusion stirred the British government to action. It was not prepared for the drastic levelling-up of incomes that seemed indicated. But it was prepared greatly to extend the social services that had already raised the height of the 1935 school-leavers over two inches above that of their parents at the same age, and had 50% lowered the death-rate from T.B. and almost completely abolished the rickets which had in 1913 afflicted one child in every two in the industrial towns. And with its extended care for the "lower income" groups—exemplified by milk distribution in schools and free food to poor mothers—it broadcast also advice on what to buy and how to cook. As part of a government scheme that used all methods of publicity, Sir John Orr (he had just been knighted—in 1935) wrote fairly widely and appeared in the film *Enough to Eat*. In the 1942 M.O.I. film *World of Plenty*—which linked nutrition

with income and income with world prosperity and the whole with concerted international planning for plenty—his honest rugged countenance and "grave music of good Scots" (Shaw's phrase) stole the screen.

Meanwhile Orr's field had also been widening in another direction—into the economics of agriculture and the organisation of marketing. In 1932 he sat on the National Committee for the Reorganisation of the Fat Stock Industry; in 1935 on the Reorganisation Commission for Milk; and later—moving out internationally—on the Colonial Advisory Council for Agriculture. The future General Secretary of the World Food and Agriculture Organisation was certainly serving a very extensive apprenticeship.

#### Food and the Power of Endurance

That Britain successfully weathered the war is undoubtedly due, among other equally essential causes, to its wholehearted adoption of the combined food-production and food-consumption policy for which Sir John was a leading protagonist. In a book called *Feeding the People in Wartime*, Orr and Lubbock argued at war's outbreak that (1) Victory depends on powers of endurance; (2) Therefore food policy should be based on health requirements; (3)

This involves, at the production end, growing "not what the farmer thinks will bring him the most profits... but the food we need to feed the nation"; (4) At the consumption end it requires that the "automatic but unequal rationing caused by price" must be replaced by subsidies and coupons to ensure that everyone can afford to buy, and also that everyone will find available, enough of the relatively dear "protective foods" to ensure fitness. "With enough milk, vegetables, and potatoes and oatmeal there need be no starvation" (The high praise for potatoes, "perfect alternative" to bread, should interest New Zealanders to-day when the whole world needs wheat but we have locally plenty of potatoes.)

National food planning led to international food planning. In May, 1943, the United Nations' Conference on Food and Agriculture met at Hot Springs and set out in detail the connection between good nutrition for townsfolk and good returns to farmers. Each depended on each. Consumers could only eat if producers could only keep producing if consumers had incomes high enough to buy their produce, at payable prices. But this precisely had been Orr's gospel—"propagated with the zeal and persuasive moral power of a prophet"—for well over a decade. So by outlook and enthusiasm as well as by the completeness of his experience—practical farmer (it is his "recreation"), nutritionist, organiser, agricultural economist, and propagandist—he was obviously the man who must become the permanent executive head of FAO, the permanent body that was created to continue the work of the Conference.

#### What Are We Fighting For?

His present World Food Board Plan hopes to make actual the outlook he expressed with eloquent tongue and eyebrow in *World of Plenty*: "Look at a map of the world. When peace comes our wartime strategy of food and farming should give us a better understanding of how the world food supply should be distributed according to the needs of the nations. You saw what happened before the war, the amount of food produced and distributed was fixed not by the amount the whole population needed for health: it was fixed by the amount that could be sold at a profit. But so soon as the shooting is finished, we're pledged to win the other war—we're pledged to go on fighting until we have fulfilled the promise to bring freedom from want to all men in all lands. Freedom from want means food for everybody on the new gold standard of health."

"Is this revolutionary? Well, tell me, what are we fighting for if not for something revolutionary? What do people like you and me hope to get out of this war if not a better world? The empty slogans, 'A World Safe for Democracy,' 'A Land Fit for Heroes'—these mean nothing. Plain people know what they want. They want security. And that doesn't mean dole, relief, or charity. The common man everywhere demands freedom from want. He demands it not only for himself, but for all men. There must be no forgotten people."

Does that sound to you a practical aim expressed with a religious zeal? If so, you will not be surprised to learn that this scientist-organiser is essentially a religious man. His first published book was theological—an account of the 1904 Scottish Church Crisis.