

WORK AND BREAD

Britain on Short Commons

WHY, it is sometimes asked, don't the people of Britain work harder and longer, produce more, and so get out of their economic difficulties and reduce food rationing? The answer is that they can't. The average worker can do just a bare day's work on the rations he is allowed; more than that would be physically impossible.

Figures secured by *The Listener* from the Food Controller in New Zealand show that the United Kingdom to-day is on the lowest food-level per capita since rationing was introduced in January, 1940. And she is far worse off than New Zealand, Canada, the United States of America, or Australia. How South Africa and Russia are faring we were not able to discover. At any rate, the Englishman to-day talks to his grocer and his butcher in terms of ounces; the New Zealander deals in pounds when ordering most foods.

British rationing started with butter, bacon, and sugar. Since 1940 it has been extended so that nearly all important foods are now controlled by rationing or other distribution schemes administered by the Ministry of Food. The Ministry is also responsible for the rationing of soap.

The British system is highly complex; but under the ordinary rationing scheme, the consumer is restricted to a fixed quantity of each food for a fixed period. There is also a points scheme through which the consumer is allowed to spend, in a period of four weeks, a given number of points on any of the foods included in the rationing system. He does not register with his retailer, but he can spend his points coupons at any shop at which the foods are available. When first introduced in December, 1941, the points rationing scheme was confined to canned, meat, canned beans, and canned fish, but it was later extended to cover a wide range of foods.

To provide his monotonous meals for a week, the Englishman is allowed to buy himself 10 ounces of sugar, six ounces of table fat (which includes two to three ounces of butter, varying according to supply), one ounce of cooking fat, 1/2 worth of meat (of which 2d worth must be canned), two ounces of cheese, three ounces of bacon, two ounces of tea, and 2 1/2 pints of milk—that is, if he can get these supplies, after queueing.

Even Bread is Limited

There would be something very wrong with a day in a New Zealander's life without an ample supply of bread—for the morning toast, with the mid-day or evening soup, perhaps two or three slices of tea or dinner, and one to top off with cheese at supper. Yet in England, this, the commonest of all British foods, has been rationed since July 21 last year. It was necessary to adopt a differential scale of allowances to meet variations in the need for bread which exist between different classes of the community.

A normal adult gets nine ounces of bread a day, a child under four years, five ounces; from four to 11 years, nine ounces; from 11 to 18, thirteen ounces; and an expectant mother must make do

with 11 ounces. If flour and cakes are bought, the quantity of bread allowed is reduced. By contrast, New Zealand troops have an allowance of a one-pound loaf per man per day—a dry ration which only the most voracious can dispose of. The only things not rationed at present in Britain are fish, potatoes, and other vegetables. Eggs and egg-powders, so necessary for baking and for providing variety to the menu, are available only as they come to hand.

American Cornucopia

There is no rationing in the United States of America. Sugar is still controlled when supplied to the manufacturers, but not when sold to household consumers. Sugar is the only food rationed in Canada, but even that may be free at any time now; meat and butter rationing was dropped some time ago. In Australia, sugar-rationing has been discontinued. The meat allowance is two pounds a week, and the butter ration is the same as in New Zealand—six ounces a week.

The New Zealand housewife knows the workings of food-buying as well as she knows her own wedding-ring, but for purposes of comparison, we give the New Zealand figures to show how much better off she is than her British sister: 12 ounces of sugar a week, two ounces of tea, six ounces of butter, and meat to the value of 1/6 (or 2 1-7lb.) are her and her family's individual portion. Sweet-toothed people in England may yet have no need of teaspoons, for there is talk of dropping their sugar ration still further.

Freedom in the Restaurant

Any extensive rationing scheme must have a certain proportion of anomalies. For instance, the diner in a British restaurant is not asked by the waitress to surrender coupons for his cuts of beef, his steak, or his mutton. At one sitting he can eat as much as he wants to—if the fare is available—provided he has the price in his pocket. Restaurant coupons were suggested recently, but so far there has been no announcement of their introduction.

Coming to an item which the average New Zealander regards as a necessity and the Englishman as a luxury, sweets are heavily rationed. Use your points for confectionery and your sugar ration is correspondingly reduced. Tobacco is unrestricted. But a cigarette costs 2d with a possible rise shortly to 3d. So the hospitable habit of passing round the packet has gone, for smokes are, in effect, rationed by their price.

Canadian Programmes

DETAILS of the programmes to be directed to Australia and New Zealand next Sunday evening (September 7) by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation are as follows:—7.45 p.m., Listeners' Corner; 8.0, News and Weekly Commentary; 8.15, Canadian Chronicle; 8.30, Concert of Welsh Songs by John Charles Thomas; 8.45, Canadian National Exhibition (Toronto)—Actuality broadcasts and a commentary on the Commonwealth exhibits.

Frequencies: 11.72 m/c's, 25.6 metres, and 9.61 m/c's, 31.22 metres.



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