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Recipe for Reform: The Food Economy Movement  
in Britain During the First World War

by

Michael Dennis Buckley

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of

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University of California, Berkeley

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# Recipe for Reform: The Food Economy Movement in Britain During the First World War

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## Abstract

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This dissertation is about the movement for food reform in Great Britain before and during the First World War. At the turn of the twentieth century, Britain depended on overseas trade for approximately half of its food. Simultaneously, a large proportion of Britain's working class suffered from endemic undernutrition according to contemporary dietary standards. In the light of increasing economic and military competition around the globe, food insecurity became a potent moral and political problem in Britain. Before the war, food reformers addressed endemic hunger itself along traditionally liberal lines by attempting to educate the public in economical catering and cooking. Meanwhile, Joseph Chamberlain's tariff reform campaign failed due in part to the prospect of higher food prices. The Liberal government that took office in 1906 had campaigned on a platform of "free food" and did little to address Britain's dependence on imports. As a result, Britain had few public institutions for producing, storing, or distributing food in 1914. To address the shortages that came with the First World War, Britain had few other choices but to fall back on the prewar reformers' program of "food economy." However, the war inspired a spirit of cooperation and solidarity that forced food reformers, both in and out of the government, to overcome their class biases and reach out to the poor and the rich alike. The food economy campaign also boosted women into active citizenship as so-called "quartermasters of the kitchen" with a vital role in prosecuting the war. The surviving evidence suggests that many Britons sympathized with food economy, but hesitated actually to change their diets to meet its requirements. Ultimately, voluntary economy gave way to compulsory rationing as the solution to the wartime food crisis. Despite its practical failures, food economy revealed the staying power of traditional British individualism and liberalism and recast women and their traditional domestic role as relevant to national prosperity and security.

**Table of Contents**

Acknowledgments	ii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: What to Do with John Jones	10
Chapter 2: The Importance of Diet in the Life of the Nation	38
Chapter 3: £3.75 Million in Lumps of Sugar	62
Chapter 4: The Nation Is Placed upon Its Honour	85
Chapter 5: An Extraordinarily Wasteful and Extravagant People?	126
Chapter 6: Victory Now Depends upon Our Women	154
Epilogue	175
Bibliography	185

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## Introduction

The British economy in the early twentieth century depended on international trade, especially the importation of food from overseas. Cheap foreign grain in particular helped to improve the standard of living for Britain's working class while simultaneously containing costs for employers. However, the advent of war in August 1914 curtailed both food production and seafaring trade. The machinery of modern warfare ran riot across the wheat fields of northern France and western Russia, leaving a worrisome shortfall in the global grain supply in its wake. Moreover, German submarines prowling the Atlantic sank dozens of merchant ships, reducing the availability of freight and increasing its cost. Suddenly, the outsourcing of agriculture transformed from a convenient economic efficiency into a national security liability. By the end of the war, food prices had doubled. Ultimately, the newly-minted Ministry of Food instituted compulsory rationing, which tamed rising prices and safeguarded dwindling stocks.

Rationing left an indelible mark on the history of the First World War. As a tribute to wartime food control, many Britons donated old ration books to the Imperial War Museum. Likewise, many historical accounts of the war bring up rationing in passing even if they do not delve any deeper into the food crisis. Indeed, rationing has loomed so large that the rest of the wartime food crisis has disappeared in its shadow.<sup>1</sup> Yet, ironically, the government resisted intervening in the food trade for more than half of the war. Compulsory rationing only arrived at the end of a long food economy campaign in which private-sector activists and government officials alike encouraged their fellow citizens to reduce waste and to substitute cheap home-grown foods for expensive imported ones. The campaign aimed to solve the food crisis with voluntarism and the free market, two of the central tenets of Victorian liberalism. Moreover, food economy had ties to a diet reform movement that dated back to at least the mid-nineteenth century.

Since rationing superseded it at the end of the war, food economy escaped the attention of both contemporaries and historians. Immediately after the war, the journalist Dorothy Peel wrote a memoir of her experience as one of the Ministry of Food's chief propagandists. Oddly, her account overlooked the private-sector organizations that had spearheaded the food economy campaign in 1915 and 1916, including the National Food Reform Association and the National

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Marwick's social history of the war, The Deluge, discusses the inflation in food prices and the imposition of rationing in detail, but makes no mention of other policies intended to address the crisis: Arthur Marwick, The Deluge: British Society and the First World War (New York: Norton, 1970). In his recent general history of the turn of the twentieth century, Geoffrey Searle briefly mentions Lord Devonport's voluntary economy scheme, but, like Marwick, focuses more intently on compulsory rationing: Geoffrey Searle, A New England? Peace and War, 1886-1918 (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004) 710, 806-822, especially 814-815. L. Margaret Barnett's monograph on British food policy during the First World War devotes only four pages to the official economy campaign without any mention of the unofficial one that preceded it: L. Margaret Barnett, British Food Policy During the First World War (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985) 114-118. More general histories of the war fit the same pattern, for instance: Niall Ferguson, The Pity of War: Explaining World War I (New York: Basic, 1999) 276-277; Brock Millman, Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain (London: Cass, 2000) 221-222, 244, 266, 286, and John Howard Morrow, The Great War: An Imperial History (New York: Routledge, 2004) 225, 271.

Food Economy League.<sup>2</sup> William Beveridge's history of British food control dismissed the economy campaign as ineffective without offering many details about its organization or operation.<sup>3</sup> Arthur Marwick's The Deluge, a seminal social history of the war, did not mention the economy campaign, though it did discuss other aspects of the food crisis at length.<sup>4</sup> Marwick's Women at War made good on this initial oversight, but with only a brief paragraph.<sup>5</sup> Even L. Margaret Barnett's otherwise comprehensive book on British wartime food policy gave over just a few pages to the economy campaign.<sup>6</sup> Each of these writers had a reason for overlooking food economy. Peel's autobiographical book concentrated logically on her own experience rather than that of her predecessors. Beveridge emphasized the efficacy of government intervention in compensating for economic instability, much as he would do two decades later in helping to design Britain's welfare system. Modern historians have naturally taken their lead from earlier accounts, especially one as authoritative as Beveridge's. Moreover, food economy did not work, so neither contemporaries nor historians have had much incentive to pay attention to it.

However, despite its failure in practice, food economy does suggestively juxtapose two phenomena that have long preoccupied historians: first, the decline of Victorian liberalism and second, the improvement in the economic and political condition of British women. On the one hand, liberalism suffered two heavy blows with the collapse of the free market in food and the subsequent failure of old-fashioned voluntarism to prop it back up. On the other hand, the same failed voluntary campaign empowered women within their role as homemakers. As the quartermasters of the kitchen front, women alone could stave off starvation and the military defeat that would surely follow. Indeed, women stood at the forefront of the food reform movement, both before and during the war. In other words, the failure of economic orthodoxy provided a new perspective on the old gender division of labor, refashioning women's work in the home into an issue of national consequence. Elucidating this dynamic may help bridge the gap between the large bodies of scholarship on political economy and on gender in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain.

### The strange death of liberal England

Historians generally agree that between roughly 1850 and 1950, Britain retreated from Victorian liberalism and embraced social democracy. In this context, "liberalism" refers not to any particular political party, but rather to a widely-shared set of values that, according to the

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<sup>2</sup> Peel likely knew of the existence of the National Food Economy League. First, the league contacted the Ministry of Food to offer assistance, correspondence that likely went past Peel as the point person on food economy. Second, Peel had served alongside Lady Chance, the founder of the NFEL, in the United Workers, a wartime organization that promoted thrift. See United Workers, "Policy of United Workers in regard to reconstruction," 9 Jan. 1917, box FL364, 2/LSW/E/13/38, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, London.

<sup>3</sup> William Beveridge, British Food Control, Economic and Social History of the World War: British Series, ed. James Shotwell, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 1928).

<sup>4</sup> Marwick 1970.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Marwick, Women at War (London: Croom Helm, 1977) 137.

<sup>6</sup> Barnett 114-118.



historian Jose Harris, derived from a belief in a "natural liberty" that existed "prior to and beyond the reach of state control:"

This view was both reflected in and fostered by the relatively narrow practical scope of mid-Victorian government – government whose main overt purpose was not to shape the character and destiny of British society, but to provide a framework of law, liberty, and sound finance within which 'society' and autonomous social institutions could largely govern and develop themselves.<sup>7</sup>

In practical terms, Victorian liberals generally trusted the free market more than government. Where the market failed, voluntarism could fill in the shortfall. In Harris's words, this philosophy fostered a "vast, ramshackle mass of voluntary, self-governing, local, parochial and philanthropic provision that was attempting in a myriad of different ways to assist, elevate, reform or coerce the poor and other persons in need."<sup>8</sup> By the end of the third Labour government in 1951, this cacophony had succumbed to central direction and financing in the modern welfare state.<sup>9</sup> Of course, any historical generalization by definition glosses over confounding nuances. For all their faith in individual liberty and the moral discipline of the marketplace, Victorians did impose government regulations on factories, mines, schools, and other institutions.<sup>10</sup> Even at its height, the welfare state did not completely supplant the free market or private philanthropy. At the same time, however, most historians would agree that the structure of the state and the attitude of its citizens changed significantly over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The historical debate has centered around how, when, and why such a political realignment took place. Following in the footsteps of the famous jurist A. V. Dicey, one school of thought has emphasized the early onset of change. In a series of lectures published in 1905, Dicey lamented that collectivism had displaced individualism in the popular consciousness, which increasingly tolerated Parliament's attempts to legislate away Britain's social problems.<sup>11</sup> In a less cynical vein than Dicey, George Kitson Clark has attributed this newfound faith in state intervention to an increased awareness of the poverty afflicting modern cities:

To master the forces which their society had engendered, to do something for the myriads who thronged their streets, to respond at all effectively to the demands of justice and humanity, they had to use increasingly the coercive power of the State [sic] and the resources that could only be made available by taxation.<sup>12</sup>

Following in Kitson Clark's footsteps, Gareth Stedman Jones and Anthony Wohl have identified the London housing crisis of the 1880s, which underscored the poverty of the urban working

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<sup>7</sup> Jose Harris, Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914 (London: Penguin, 1994) 181, 183.

<sup>8</sup> Jose Harris, "Political thought and the welfare state 1870-1940: An intellectual framework for British social policy," Past and Present 135 (May 1992): 116.

<sup>9</sup> Harris 1992 117.

<sup>10</sup> The historian Oliver MacDonagh has argued that the supposedly laissez-faire Victorians presided over a veritable revolution in the scope of government: Oliver MacDonagh, "The nineteenth-century revolution in government: A reappraisal," Historical Journal 1.1 (1958): 52.

<sup>11</sup> See lectures VII and VIII in A. V. Dicey, Lectures on the Relation Between Law and Public Opinion in England During the Nineteenth Century (London: Macmillan, 1905).

<sup>12</sup> George Kitson Clark, The Making of Victorian England (New York: Atheneum, 1969) 280.

class, as the inflection point in British public opinion.<sup>13</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb has differed from Kitson Clark, Stedman Jones, and Wohl primarily in her nostalgia for the Victorian period.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, other historians have looked past popular sentiment generally to the specific influence of intellectuals. Michael Freedon, Peter Clarke, and Ellen Paul have credited a cadre of thinkers, including J. A. Hobson, L. T. Hobhouse, and Alfred Marshall, with laying the philosophical foundation of the welfare state in the late 1800s. In their telling, the so-called "new liberalism" of Hobson and Hobhouse attempted to marry respect for individual liberty to common responsibility for those who could not help themselves.<sup>15</sup> In a third strain of this historiography, Maurice Bruce and Bentley Gilbert have attributed the rise of collectivism to bureaucratic and Parliamentary politics.<sup>16</sup>

A second school of thought has emphasized liberalism's staying power as opposed to its decline. This historiography has not denied that collectivism eventually triumphed, but rather that liberalism collapsed so quickly. Robert Haggard has pointed out that Parliament passed almost no collectivist legislation before the turn of the century.<sup>17</sup> In addition, socialists did not break into the political mainstream until after the First World War. Meanwhile, Victorian liberalism maintained its ideological predominance even within the trade union movement.<sup>18</sup> Geoffrey Finlayson has asserted that the landmark social legislation enacted by the Asquith government co-opted voluntary institutions rather than supplanting them. Well after the advent of the welfare state, voluntarism remained integral to British civic virtue.<sup>19</sup> Martin Daunton has recently downplayed the practical differences between liberalism and collectivism, arguing that "the question was not whether action should be taken; it was by whom and on what terms."<sup>20</sup> He

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<sup>13</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 312-314, and Anthony Wohl, The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 2002) 249.

<sup>14</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age (New York: Knopf, 1983) and Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians (New York: Knopf, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Michael Freedon, The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1978), Ellen Paul, Moral Revolution and Economic Science: The Demise of Laissez-Faire in Nineteenth Century British Political Economy (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1979), and Peter Clarke, Liberals and Social Democrats (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Maurice Bruce, The Coming of the Welfare State (London: Batsford, 1961) and Bentley Gilbert, The Evolution of National Insurance in Great Britain: The Origins of the Welfare State (London: Joseph, 1966).

<sup>17</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones and other historians on his side of the debate have conceded this point. Stedman Jones has written, "The work of Booth, the new liberals, and the social imperialists constituted a literature of crisis which accompanied the troubled years of the mid-1880s. The fact that their ideas found no immediate reflection in Parliament, in no way diminished their ultimate significance." See Stedman Jones 312-313.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Haggard, The Persistence of Victorian Liberalism: The Politics of Social Reform in Britain, 1870-1900 (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey Finlayson, Citizen, State, and Social Welfare in Britain 1830-1930 (Oxford, UK: Clarendon P, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> Martin Daunton, Wealth and Welfare: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1851-1951 (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2007) 23.

has characterized the welfare state less as a definitive break with the liberal past than as a readjustment in the balance between private and public institutions.

More recently, the historian Frank Trentmann has reexamined the shift from liberalism to collectivism in terms of personal consumption and popular politics rather than social policy. His Free Trade Nation traces the rise and fall of free trade as a uniquely British system of values. He argues that in the first decade of the twentieth century, the proponents of free trade managed to transform it into a legitimately popular cause that encompassed not only low, non-discriminatory tariffs, but also old-fashioned liberalism with its emphases on individual liberty, economic choice, and public morality. Much of the popularity of free trade derived from the advent of consumer politics – of policymaking with the express intention of aiding those who buy goods, not just those who manufacture them. Free trade supposedly lowered prices to the extent that the typical Briton enjoyed a higher standard of living than his counterparts in protectionist France or Germany. In the debate over tariff reform – Joseph Chamberlain's proposal for a schedule of duties meant to favor commerce within the British empire – the cheap loaf of white bread came to symbolize the benefits of free trade. Indeed, liberals charged that duties on food would lead to starvation, as they ostensibly had in the 1840s. At the same time, free trade guaranteed the probity of politics by preventing Parliament from favoring vested interests with preferential duties to the detriment of the average consumer. Free trade entrenched itself so deeply in British culture that historians have treated it as a given that requires little or no explanation. However, the war briefly squeezed the availability and quality of essential foods, especially milk, which overwhelmed the old fixation on cheapness. This shift in priorities evolved into a less liberal approach to food markets and to trade generally that culminated with the general tariff of 1932. Though he writes in a slightly different lexicon, Trentmann seems to arrive at the same fundamental conclusion as Haggard, Finlayson, and Dauntton that liberalism persisted well into the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup>

The story of the wartime food crisis splits the difference between the two schools of thought on the strange death of liberal England. On the one hand, the food economy campaign kept rationing at bay for most of the war, a testament to the durability of Victorian liberalism even under remarkable stress. As Trentmann's analysis would predict, food reformers sought a "free trade" solution to wartime price and supply problems through economy in the individual household. Meanwhile in Westminster, the politicians of the Liberal and coalition governments had learned the lessons of the defeat of tariff reform so well that they refused to interfere publicly in the private market for food. The hegemony of economic liberalism only broke down as it proved incapable of guaranteeing the stability of prices and supplies. Even then, rationing and other collectivist aspects of government food control did not survive for long after the war. Britons simply preferred to do their own catering to their own tastes. Nonetheless, at the height of the food crisis, the public had eventually welcomed – even demanded – the imposition of rationing. The experience of food control cast some doubt on the inviolability of economic liberalism. For instance, the journalist Dorothy Peel – a leading exponent of middle-class Victorian domesticity and liberal sensibility before the war – had become an advocate of organized labor by 1918.<sup>22</sup> Though Britain's journey to the welfare state did not proceed in a

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<sup>21</sup> Frank Trentmann, Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> In her postwar memoir, Peel wrote, "But this I think I know – revolution must come and it is right that it should come. The working people will no longer consent to be the beasts of burden

straight line, the wartime food crisis helped to force an important concession of principle – that liberalism in itself could not guarantee prosperity and security in all circumstances.

As with the commander of an army . . . so is it with the mistress of a house<sup>23</sup>

The historiography of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has concentrated on separate spheres ideology and the extent to which it contributed to class stratification and the evolution of an economically liberal, socially conservative middle-class identity.<sup>24</sup> Supposedly, separate spheres ideology dictated that men and women played different roles in society: men labored at the office or workshop for pay, while women stayed home to raise children and to provide for the family's comfort. In the 1970s, the first generation of feminist historians argued that separate spheres ideology relegated women to an inferior position to men, but, simultaneously, furthered the development of a modern, industrial society. According to Patricia Branca, the housework that so heavily burdened lower-middle-class women helped to ease their families' transition into city living during the rapid urbanization of the nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff's Family Fortunes claimed that the cultivation of separate spheres enabled an aspiring middle class to define itself as distinct from a corrupt, indolent aristocracy.<sup>26</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, Mary Poovey and Anne McClintock wove new variables such as class and race into this thread of feminist historiography. They de-emphasized the influence of economics on the formation of gender identities and attempted instead to chart that process through culture.<sup>27</sup>

More recently, historians have recast Victorian and Edwardian women as more active and independent despite constraining gender stereotypes. According to Patricia Hollis, women fought local government elections in the late nineteenth century on the basis of their domestic credentials. They portrayed themselves as better qualified than men to address education, health care, and other issues that fell into women's separate sphere.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, Lisa Tickner has shown that suffragists' own femininity helped them to win public sympathy. For example, their hand-

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that they were, to drudge throughout their lives in a never-ending struggle to earn just enough money to make existence possible. . . . And Labour asks for what? For nothing more than any human being has a right to ask – a wage which will enable him to afford a decent and healthy home, sufficient food, education, and a share of the pleasures of life, and these not won at such a price as makes him a bent and broken thing, old before his time." See Dorothy Peel, A Year in Public Life (London: Constable, 1919) 295.

<sup>23</sup> Isabella Beeton, Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management, ed. Nicola Humble (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2000) 7.

<sup>24</sup> For a concise review of the historiography of women, see the introduction to Kathryn Gleadle, British Women in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Patricia Branca, Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home (London: Croom Helm, 1975).

<sup>26</sup> Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850, revised ed. (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988), and Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> Patricia Hollis, Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government, 1865-1914 (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1987).

stitched banners earned widespread admiration and helped to dispel the criticism that extending the vote to women would harm domestic life.<sup>29</sup> According to Joanna Bourke and Judy Giles, women often preferred staying at home, where they exercised real authority over husbands and children, to working for pay.<sup>30</sup> M. Jeanne Peterson has even argued that separate spheres ideology had little influence on the lives of middle-class Victorian women. Her study of the Paget family has revealed that women could enjoy careers as satisfying as men's and that personal accomplishment may have mattered more than gender in the determination of social status.<sup>31</sup> In a critical review of the relevant historiography, Amanda Vickery admits that Victorian and Edwardian society imposed strict limitations on the aspirations of women, but also contends that the preoccupation with separate spheres ideology has oversimplified British family life and underestimated the ways in which the Paget sisters and others like them could play a meaningful role in contemporary society.<sup>32</sup>

In the case of early twentieth-century food reform, prevailing gender stereotypes did empower women on a generalized cultural level, but within narrow practical boundaries. As it so deeply involved domestic duties such as cooking and shopping, food reform fell within women's cultural ambit. Before the war, food reformers focused much of their effort on educating women to choose healthier foods and to cook them better. Unfortunately, prewar reformers often framed their arguments negatively, emphasizing the detriment caused by waste rather than the benefit that could accrue from economy. While genuinely sympathetic with the plight of the poor, they nonetheless cast British housewives, especially those from the working class, as ignorant spendthrifts. During the war, however, food reform became markedly more upbeat in order to draw in those it had previously pushed away. Both the private and public sectors began to celebrate British homemakers as "quartermasters of the kitchen," who could overcome the submarine menace by conserving the nation's food. At the height of the food economy campaign, the government itself embraced domesticity as a legitimate mode of active citizenship, integral to the nation's defenses, and averred openly that "victory now depends upon our women."<sup>33</sup> Suffragists quickly joined in the enthusiasm for food economy not only because it raised their own public profile, but also because it promised to create new job opportunities for women in the higher echelons of government and industry. However, food economy did not necessarily translate directly into improvement in women's economic and political position. Certainly, a few individual women capitalized on the cultural salience of food to energize their careers, but, on the whole, the new opportunities in public service were limited in number and duration. Suffragists' disappointment led them eventually to turn against food economy and the

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<sup>29</sup> Lisa Tickner, The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-1914 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987).

<sup>30</sup> Joanna Bourke, "Housewifery in working-class England 1860-1914," Past and Present 143 (May 1994): 167-197; Judy Giles, "A home of one's own: Women and domesticity in England 1918-1950," Women's Studies International Forum 16.3 (1993): 239-253; Judy Giles, Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain 1900-1950 (New York: St. Martin's, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> M. Jeanne Peterson, Family, Love, and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> Amanda Vickery, "Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history," Historical Journal 36.2 (June 1993): 383-414.

<sup>33</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, The Food Economy Campaign Handbook, (London: Argus, 1917) 1.

men who seemed to have managed it so poorly. Food economy was a triumph for women in principle, but not in fact.

### The making of the modern British diet

A third, smaller body of scholarship on the British diet has established the economic and cultural context in which the wartime food crisis took place. Historians have written extensively on the supply side of the British food trade in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially the increasing reliance on imports. E. J. T. Collins and M. E. Turner have described how cheap grain from Argentina, Russia, the United States and elsewhere drove British agriculture into depression from the 1870s onward.<sup>34</sup> Avner Offer has contended that poor labor relations, onerous taxes, and a top-heavy pattern of land ownership had as deleterious an effect on British farmers as did foreign competition.<sup>35</sup> According to David French and L. Margaret Barnett, agricultural weakness made British economic and military policy more complicated both before and during the war.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, Derek Oddy and Derek Miller have dedicated long careers to elaborating the demand side of the British food trade. For instance, they and their collaborators in The Making of the Modern British Diet determined that the working-class Victorian or Edwardian subsisted on plenty of white bread supplemented with a little meat and washed down with astonishing amounts of alcohol.<sup>37</sup> James Vernon has investigated the cultural implications of such a diet through the lens of nutrition science. In his account, ambitious nutritionists attempted over the course of nearly a century to bring socioeconomic problems like poverty under scientific control.<sup>38</sup> Together, these scholars depict the turn-of-the-century diet as a bland amalgamation of cheap imported grains and meats with questionable nutritional value, even by contemporary scientific standards.

### A recipe for reform

By August 1914, free markets and traditional domesticity had not delivered on their promise of universal prosperity and happiness. A century of industrial and financial supremacy had made Britain wealthy in the aggregate, but poverty persisted in urban slums and rural villages. Many women found fulfillment as homemakers, but others longed for the same opportunities afforded to men. The First World War did not solve these problems, but it did showcase them in the burning light of an existential struggle. In particular, the food reform movement revealed the inadequacies of old economic shibboleths and the flexibility of gender stereotypes. In telling this story, this dissertation relies primarily on sources generated by food

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<sup>34</sup> E. J. T. Collins, "Food supplies and food policy," and M. E. Turner, "Agricultural output, income and productivity," The Agrarian History of England and Wales, vol. 7, ed. H. P. R. Finberg, Joan Thirsk, and E. J. T. Collins (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2000) 33-71, 72-223.

<sup>35</sup> Avner Offer, The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 1989) 104-120.

<sup>36</sup> David French, British Economic and Strategic Planning, 1905-1915 (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1982).

<sup>37</sup> The Making of the Modern British Diet, ed. Derek Miller and Derek Oddy (London: Croom Helm, 1976), Diet and Health in Modern Britain, ed. Derek Miller and Derek Oddy (London: Croom Helm, 1985), and Derek Oddy, From Plain Fare to Fusion Food: British Diet from the 1890s to the 1990s (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2003).

<sup>38</sup> James Vernon, Hunger: A Modern History (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007).

reformers themselves, including annual reports of activities and finances as well as handbills and pamphlets. During the war, the government-sponsored food economy campaign superceded the private one, but left behind a similar range of sources. These sources from inside the movement spell out the tenets of food reformer itself, but offer few clues as to their veracity or popularity. Contemporary scholarship in dietetics, physiology, and sociology sheds some light on the scientific validity of food reform, at least by the standard of the time. In the absence of polling data, letters and memoirs of the war help to assess the public response to the food reform movement, as do participation rates in relevant classes and lectures. Periodicals also give some insight into popular perceptions while helping to verify basic facts, including dates and names.

Generally, the dissertation approaches food reform chronologically with tangents at the end about its popularity and its implications for women. In chapter one, science and economics cooperate to increase awareness of food's integral role in public welfare and in national security at the turn of the twentieth century. On the one hand, social scientists discover that a large proportion of the poor suffer from chronic undernutrition; on the other hand, Britain grows increasingly dependent on imports of cheap food. The combination of endemic hunger and trade imbalances singles out food as a sensitive moral and political issue in early twentieth-century Britain. In chapter two, a handful of activists attempt to alleviate poverty by reforming the working-class diet. They operate along traditionally liberal lines, educating the poor to help themselves by eating cheaper, but nevertheless healthier foods. Even though food reformers come slowly to realize that impersonal economic forces account for much of the hunger around them, they adhere more or less to this liberal strategy up to the First World War. In chapters three and four, Britain goes to war without effective institutions or policies to shore up its food insecurity and by default has to fall back on prewar reformers, who initiate a campaign to promote economical catering and cooking. Eventually, the government itself joins in the economy campaign in order to stave off the imposition of compulsory rationing. In both cases, the war forces food reformers to rethink their class prejudices, which cannot stand during a national crisis that requires all citizens, whether rich or poor, to cooperate with each other. Chapter five assesses the public response to food economy through the best direct and indirect measures available. While most Britons sympathize with the idea of food economy, few in the end actually change their dietary habits. Finally, in chapter six, food economy presents women with an opportunity to transform their domestic know-how into a public contribution to the war effort. The food economy campaign contributes to a reappraisal of women as citizens and, in some cases, enables them to exercise real leadership as civil servants or as officers in large philanthropic organizations. The common themes running throughout the dissertation include the resilience of individualism and liberalism and the refiguring of food and home life into serious military and political concerns.

## 1. What to Do with John Jones

Here is John Jones, a stout stalwart labourer in rags, who has not had one square meal for a month, who has been hunting for work that will enable him to keep body and soul together, and hunting in vain. There he is in his hungry raggedness, asking for work that he may live, and not die of sheer starvation in the midst of the wealthiest city in the world. What is to be done with John Jones?<sup>1</sup>

When William Booth published In Darkest England and the Way Out in 1890, nearly three centuries of British social policy had failed to resolve the question of John Jones's fate. Pauperism had persisted despite the Elizabethan workhouse, the Speenhamland system, and the New Poor Law of 1834. With the exception of Speenhamland, these policies had not aimed to alleviate poverty so much as to deter it. Moved by morality and social science, Booth and many of his contemporaries adopted a less fatalistic perspective on poverty that held out hope for its eventual elimination. They had inherited an ideal of individuals pulling themselves up by their bootstraps, but also began to recognize the larger, impersonal forces pressing down on the poor. Dieticians calculated what constituted a "square meal" while social scientists counted the surprisingly large numbers of Britons who, like John Jones, did not get enough to eat. Though these techniques did not necessarily point to a specific solution, they did dispel some of the mystery that had previously shrouded hunger in inevitability.

At the same time as this revolution in the social sciences, the British food trade underwent a profound structural change that put national security at risk. In the 1840s, Richard Cobden had attributed the hunger of John Jones and others like him to the duties on imported wheat imposed by avaricious landowners. The repeal of the corn laws in 1846 laid the cornerstone of the Victorian commitment to free trade. It towered so high over British politics that Cobden's biographer, John Morley, prophesied that "no English statesmen will ever revive a tax upon bread."<sup>2</sup> However, by the turn of the twentieth century, declining domestic agriculture had left Britain dangerously dependent on overseas trade just to feed itself. Certainly, cheap imported food had helped to sustain British industry and the working-class standard of living during the recession of the 1870s and 1880s. Yet could the British armed forces in fact guarantee the safety of international trade during a European war? After the debacle of the Boer War, some Britons had their doubts.

These developments in the social sciences and in international trade converged on the poor and unemployed – those like John Jones. How much responsibility did they bear for their own plight? Should the government help them out or not – and if so, in what way? What would happen to them if war with France or Germany suddenly cut off food imports? More ominously, would hunger drive them into the street to demand peace on unfavorable terms? These questions tested, but did not break public confidence in Victorian values. Britain's lack of food security did encourage new collectivist and protectionist thinking, which manifested itself most famously in the tariff reform debate, but, in the end, the old regime of individualism and free trade retained its pride of place.

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<sup>1</sup> William Booth, In Darkest England and the Way Out (London, 1890) 79.

<sup>2</sup> John Morley, The Life of Richard Cobden (Boston, 1881) 109.



### Heaven helps those who help themselves<sup>3</sup>

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Britain underwent several relatively rapid demographic and economic changes. Between 1871 and 1911, Britain became the world's first predominantly urban nation with more than 40 percent of its 45 million people living in cities of population greater than 100,000.<sup>4</sup> The majority of these city folk lived in squalor without modern conveniences or sanitation. Wide gaps in the standard of living separated the upper, middle, and working classes. In 1906, the economist Leo Chiozza Money determined that only 117,000 people owned nearly two-thirds of all British property. Nearly 90 percent of those who died left nothing to their heirs.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, alcoholism, gambling, prostitution and other vices corroded the moral foundations of a supposedly Christian nation.

The Victorians attempted to counter poverty and vice with individual responsibility and moral rectitude. Early nineteenth-century evangelical Christians had elevated the individual conscience to the pinnacle of their theology and understood success or failure as the often-predictable outcomes of personal choices.<sup>6</sup> Over the course of the Victorian period, these evangelical ideas became the secular mantra of a self-improving middle class eager to distinguish itself from a decadent aristocracy.<sup>7</sup> The market economy served as a convenient instrument of moral discipline by rewarding positive choices and punishing negative ones. Government intervention to alleviate distress simply sheltered people from the consequences of their own actions.<sup>8</sup> However, private philanthropists could cooperate with the market by associating freely to instruct the poor in living better. Also, individuals could improve themselves without any outside intervention through so-called "self-help." Either way, the poor remained subject to the discipline of the market economy, but now had the fortitude to succeed within it.<sup>9</sup> With the political ascendancy of the middle class, voluntary association became a fixture of political and popular culture.

By the mid-nineteenth century, this model of reform had inspired a substantial amount of literature, much of it directed at a working-class readership. For posterity, the aptly-named Samuel Smiles and his magnum opus Self-Help have come to embody the genre. The son of a Scottish Calvinist, Smiles never shed his evangelical fervor for the gospel of hard work and humility. As a journalist and itinerant lecturer, he emphasized equality of opportunity for self-improvement through mutual benefit societies and the wider availability of education.<sup>10</sup> In Self-

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel Smiles, Self-Help, ed. Peter Sinnema (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2002) 17.

<sup>4</sup> Jose Harris, Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914 (London: Penguin, 1994) 42.

<sup>5</sup> Harris 99.

<sup>6</sup> David Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London: Baker, 1989) 2-17.

<sup>7</sup> See particularly Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850, revised ed. (London: Routledge, 2002) 21, 25, 77-78, 83.

<sup>8</sup> Ian Packer, "Religion and the new liberalism: The Rowntree family, Quakerism, and social reform," Journal of British Studies 42 (Apr. 2003): 240.

<sup>9</sup> Not all evangelicals rejected government assistance for the poor. William Booth actively supported a variety of government welfare programs. See Packer 241.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Sinnema, introduction, Self-Help xv; H. C. G. Matthew, "Smiles, Samuel (1812-1904)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004), online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Sept. 2004, Oxford University Press, 4 Dec. 2006 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36125>>.

Help, published in 1859, Smiles celebrated a pantheon of heroes who had risen above their humble origins to achieve greatness through their own merit. Of course, any success story owed a debt of gratitude to the supporting cast of parents or spouses who had played a role in it, but nonetheless whatever "the wise and good may [have owed] to others, they themselves [had] in the very nature of things [to] be their own best helpers."<sup>11</sup> If a large enough number of individuals chose to pursue it, self-help could even strengthen the moral fiber of entire nations:

Even the humblest person, who sets before his fellows an example of industry, sobriety, and upright honesty of purpose in life, has a present as well as a future influence upon the well-being of his country; for his life and character pass unconsciously into the lives of others, and propagate good example for all time.<sup>12</sup>

The propagation of good example could begin with a single upright individual exercising a positive influence on his friends and neighbors. In emulating him, they in turn would serve as models to others, such that industry, sobriety, and honesty would ripple outward in society and forward in time. Countless such ripples could mount into a mighty wave carrying the nation forward into a future of probity and prosperity.<sup>13</sup>

As the cultural preponderance of Victorian individualism mounted, however, statistics and social science began to undermine it. In the 1820s and 1830s, a small cadre of bureaucrats and hobbyists had pioneered the collection and analysis of large amounts of quantitative data.<sup>14</sup> A half-century or more later, amateur social scientists such as Charles Booth, Martha Loane, Maude Pember Reeves, and Seebohm Rowntree applied these statistical techniques to the study of poverty. A confectioner by trade, Rowntree arrived at his interest in social science through his Quaker faith. Like many of his contemporaries, Rowntree envisioned peace and prosperity as an aggregate of individual spiritual conversions:

Religion itself exists for the production of men and women of high moral character, strong to resist temptation, strong in their desire after the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. We want, in our churches, to develop persons with a vigorous faith, who fully realise the social as well as the spiritual character of this Kingdom. To this end let us keep the spiritual flame burning. For a vital religious faith – the faith that worketh by love – is at the root of all true and permanent social reform.<sup>15</sup>

Rowntree's belief that faith underlay a just society never waned: in the last decade of his life, he attempted to reinvigorate British spiritual life amid the secularization that followed the Second

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<sup>11</sup> Smiles 36.

<sup>12</sup> Smiles 20.

<sup>13</sup> Many other Victorians also charted the path to national greatness through the moral improvement of individuals. For instance, Eliza Cook's Journal asserted in 1849, ten years prior to the publication of Self-Help, that "the greatest of all reform – the reform of a nation – must be effected through individuals, – through individual improvement, individual reform, individual elevation." See "Providence and self-help," Eliza Cook's Journal 4 (26 May 1849): 1.

<sup>14</sup> Patrick Joyce, The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City (London: Verso, 2003) 26-27.

<sup>15</sup> Seebohm Rowntree, "The repression of gambling," Betting and Gambling: A National Evil, ed. Seebohm Rowntree (London: Macmillan, 1905): 188.

World War.<sup>16</sup> However, as a businessman and a chemist, Rowntree also valued scientific precision. In the late 1890s, he undertook a study of the poor in his hometown of York, published as Poverty: A Study of Town Life. On the one hand, Rowntree discovered that some poverty did result from bad behavior: those living in what he termed "secondary poverty" earned enough to get by, but wasted much of their income on drink or gambling.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, he also discovered that as much as a third of poverty resulted from insufficient wages: those living in "primary poverty," whether they drank or gambled or not, simply lacked the money even to feed themselves adequately.<sup>18</sup> He coined the term "poverty line" to refer to the demarcation between those who could and those who could not afford enough food. While not a categorical rejection of the old Victorian view of poverty, Rowntree's study cast doubt on its essential principle – that industry and sobriety could overcome low wages. Though he never completely forsook his Victorian heritage, Rowntree came to believe that economics played as significant a role in poverty as did character flaws.<sup>19</sup>

Awakened by the findings of Rowntree and his colleagues, some British policymakers contemplated a more active role for government in correcting the structural deficiencies that exacerbated poverty. Many of these identified themselves with a school of thought dubbed the "new liberalism" by contemporaries and most often associated with the thinkers J. A. Hobson and L. T. Hobhouse and the politicians Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George. Though generally scientific and secular in its outlook, new liberalism retained a moralistic edge that hearkened back to older Victorian values. Moreover, according to the historian Ian Packer, the public accepted new liberalism as a religious mandate despite its roots in the humanities and social sciences.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, most of the new liberal reforms pushed through Parliament in the early twentieth century shied away from unqualified material assistance to the poor. Rather, they often required an individual contribution – as with national insurance or school meals – or simply aimed to facilitate better decision-making – as with labor exchanges. Of course, the workhouse, the ultimate symbol of Dickensian England, continued to cast its shadow over the provision of public assistance in Britain for several more decades.

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<sup>16</sup> In the early 1950s, Rowntree and a collaborator, G. Russell Lavers, carried out an unpublished social survey they intended to title "Britain's spiritual life: How can it be deepened?" In particular, Rowntree hoped that Christianity could strengthen Britain against the threat of communism. See Mark Freeman, "'Britain's spiritual life: How can it be deepened?': Seebohm Rowntree, Russell Lavers, and the 'crisis of belief,' ca. 1946-54," Journal of Religious History 29.1 (Feb. 2005): 25-42.

<sup>17</sup> Rowntree also recognized that some working-class households fell into secondary poverty not through drink or gambling, but through debt – perhaps incurred when the primary wage-earner lost his job – or medical expenses. Moreover, he did not condemn working-class drinkers and gamblers, but almost sympathized with them. See Seebohm Rowntree, Poverty: A Study of Town Life (Bristol, UK: Policy, 2000) 140-145.

<sup>18</sup> Rowntree 2000 119-140.

<sup>19</sup> Brian Harrison, "Rowntree, (Benjamin) Seebohm (1871–1954)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004), online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Sept. 2004, Oxford University Press, 20 Dec. 2006 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35856>>; Packer 247.

<sup>20</sup> Packer 240.

As these developments in social science and politics unfolded, Britain's declining geopolitical fortunes aroused a separate set of concerns about poverty and public health. Between the Great Depression and the Boer War, Britain faced several challenges to its global predominance. First, Germany and the United States surpassed Britain as the world's foremost industrial economies in the late nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Then, though Britain won the Boer War, its armed forces did not perform well and the health of potential recruits did not measure up to expectations.<sup>22</sup> These setbacks alarmed an informal group of intellectuals and policymakers that revolved around Lord Rosebery, R. B. Haldane, and Sidney and Beatrice Webb. Though it leaned to the left, the group nevertheless included members from both ends of the political spectrum. It lobbied for government action to reduce poverty not merely out of compassion, but also to increase so-called "national efficiency." Its proposals ranged from expanded technical training to universal military service.<sup>23</sup> Improved education, administration, and public health would lighten the burden that ignorance and want imposed on Britain's economy and military.<sup>24</sup> Rosebery, Haldane and the others tended to admire the same nations that they feared, particularly Germany and Japan, whose centralized administrative and economic structures seemed so ruthlessly efficient.

At bottom, the various models of social reform in Britain at the turn of the century shared the common goals of improving individual lives and strengthening the nation. Few firm ideological or methodological boundaries separated them from each other. Most reformers adhered to Britain's longstanding individualistic tradition, even if they bracketed it with mild collectivism. Moreover, they often traveled in the same professional and social circles. For instance, Haldane served in the cabinet alongside new liberals like Churchill and Lloyd George by day; he dined with the Fabian socialists Beatrice and Sidney Webb by night.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, apparent conflicts between different schools of thought often masked considerable similarities. A. M. McBriar has contended that Beatrice Webb and Helen Bosanquet fundamentally agreed with each other even though their rivalry precipitated an infamous schism in the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws in 1909.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, both the commission's majority and minority reports reaffirmed the Victorian truism that bad character played a part in poverty and that a bit of moral discipline should accompany any material relief.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> By 1913, Germany produced nearly 7 million metric tons more iron and 10 million metric tons more steel than Britain annually. B. R. Mitchell, International Historical Statistics: Europe 1750-2000, 5th ed (New York: Palgrave, 2003) 460-473.

<sup>22</sup> G. R. Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1971) 34-53.

<sup>23</sup> Searle 60-100.

<sup>24</sup> Searle has qualified the social Darwinist tendencies of national efficiency: "The fact that certain M.P.s [sic] were prepared to advocate social reform on hard-headed, 'practical' grounds does not mean that they were not also moved by humanitarian concern" (236).

<sup>25</sup> Searle 165, 232.

<sup>26</sup> A. M. McBriar, An Edwardian Mixed Doubles: The Bosanquets Versus the Webbs: A Study of British Social Policy, 1890-1929 (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1987).

<sup>27</sup> Harris 240-241.

Defective nutrition stands in the forefront as the most important of all physical defects from which school children suffer<sup>28</sup>

Science and statistics helped to reframe the discussion not only of poverty in general, but also of its most pernicious consequence: hunger. Even as late as the mid-nineteenth century, hunger seemed like an inevitable fact of human existence. Paternalistic aristocratic and religious institutions attempted to mitigate its worst effects, but expected that it would continue indefinitely. Malthusians even championed hunger as the most effective remedy for laziness. However, as the historian James Vernon has described in detail, the burgeoning science of nutrition seemed to bring hunger under human control in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Dieticians believed that they could calculate precisely how much food each person needed and then, with the aid of enlightened private philanthropy or government policy, ensure that he or she actually received it.<sup>29</sup>

Scientists began to apply the increasingly sophisticated tools of chemistry and physiology to nutrition in the mid-1800s.<sup>30</sup> In the late 1840s, the German chemist Justus von Liebig laid the foundation of modern nutrition science by differentiating between body-building and body-heating nutrients. On the one hand, the nitrogenous constituents of food – "proteins" to a later generation of scientists – served as building blocks of the body itself. On the other hand, the non-nitrogenous constituents – carbohydrates and fats – served as the body's fuel.<sup>31</sup> By the 1870s, Liebig's successors had determined the chemical formulae of many key nutrients.<sup>32</sup> In the 1880s and 1890s, separate experiments in the United States and Germany verified that an inexpensive bomb calorimeter could measure the energy content of food.<sup>33</sup> The erstwhile

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<sup>28</sup> England, Board of Education, Annual Report for 1910 of the Chief Medical Officer of the Board of Education (London: HMSO, 1911) 26, B. S. 10/26, British Library, London.

Subsequently, referred to simply as "Annual Report" with the year of publication.

<sup>29</sup> See the summary of changing attitudes toward hunger in James Vernon, "The ethics of hunger and the assembly of society: The techno-politics of the school meal in modern Britain," American Historical Review 110.3 (June 2005): 693-725, and, of course, Hunger: A Modern History (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> For instance, Andrew Combe's The Physiology of Digestion Considered with Relation to the Principles of Dietetics, published in 1836, glossed over the organic chemistry of food, about which he and his colleagues knew little anyway. However, a decade later, the ailing Combe urged his nephew, James Coxe, to revise the book to include the most current chemistry. Two years after Combe's death, Coxe published another edition of The Physiology of Digestion that included a new chapter on the chemical composition of food. See Andrew Combe, The Physiology of Digestion Considered with Relation to the Principles of Dietetics, 9th ed., ed. James Coxe (Edinburgh, 1849).

<sup>31</sup> F. W. Pavy, A Treatise on Food and Dietetics (Philadelphia, 1874) 38; W. A. Shenstone, Justus von Liebig: His Life and Work (New York, 1895) 134-144. Von Liebig's earliest publications date to the 1840s. His Researches on the Chemistry of Food appeared in English in 1847. See Justus Liebig, Researches on the Chemistry of Food, trans. William Gregory (London, 1847).

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Pavy 98, 114-122.

<sup>33</sup> See Graham Lusk, The Elements of the Science of Nutrition, 3rd ed. (London: Saunders, 1917) 56-68 and Max Verworn, General Physiology: An Outline of the Science of Life, trans. Frederic Lee (London, 1899) 548-549. For instance, John Milner Fothergill's A Manual of Dietetics, published in 1886, never mentioned "calories" or any precise measurement of the energy content

mystery of metabolism became a simple matter of numbers of calories and grams of protein – much like, in the words of the American physiologist Graham Lusk, a machine:

The American Indian when first shown a watch thought it was alive. We, on the other hand, have come to look upon the living as a machine.<sup>34</sup>

From this point of view, hunger no longer hung on fate, but instead on design. As human ingenuity could improve the mechanism of a clock, so could it improve public health through better diet.

By the early twentieth century, well-known physicians began to muse publicly about the potential of nutrition science to remake society. In Modern Theories of Diet and Their Bearing upon Practical Dietetics, published in 1912, the physician Alexander Bryce treated most of the fad diets of his time with skepticism or even cynicism. However, he also extolled dietetics as "incomparably important" to future health:

In no branch of this vast subject has greater advance been made than that of dietetics, until it has now attained such proportions that there are not wanting those who exalt its practice as the only necessity of health. . . . I can scarcely subscribe to such a Utopian faith. Nevertheless, I consider the subject of dietetics of incomparable importance, and pregnant with possibility for the future regeneration of the human body.<sup>35</sup>

George Newman, chief medical officer of the Board of Education, invested even more faith in food than Bryce:

Good nutrition stands therefore . . . not only for a body of fair growth, plumpness and physique, but a body the various parts and functions of which are working together in harmony and precision, with due regard to the preservation of an even balance between in-take and out-put, maintained with a fair degree of stability and coincident with good health and high efficiency.<sup>36</sup>

For Newman, eating right not only maintained a normal body weight, but more importantly underlay all good health. It modulated the function of the circulatory, digestive, and nervous systems, bringing the three into harmony with one another and thereby boosting the body's efficiency. For Bryce and Newman both, dietetics held out hope for the regeneration of health for each individual as well as, by extension, for society as a whole. In other words, the prosperity and well-being of nations could well depend on the foods their citizens ate.

Unfortunately, industrialization and urbanization seemed to have greatly reduced the standard of nutrition for many Britons. Between 1886 and 1906, one-fourth of adult men earned fewer than 20s. per week. By 1911, one-third of adult men still earned fewer than 25s. per week.<sup>37</sup> Food ate up at least 60 percent of the working-class household budget.<sup>38</sup> Hemmed in by

of foods. See John Milner Fothergill, A Manual of Dietetics (London, 1886). Robert Hutchison's Food and the Principles of Dietetics, published in 1902, included elaborate charts of the "fuel value" of common foods, measured in kilocalories. See Hutchison 4-7.

<sup>34</sup> Graham Lusk, The Elements of the Science of Nutrition (London: Saunders, 1906) 42.

Though an American, Lusk belonged to the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

<sup>35</sup> Alexander Bryce, Modern Theories of Diet and Their Bearing upon Practical Dietetics (London: Arnold, 1912) vii.

<sup>36</sup> Annual Report for 1908 43.

<sup>37</sup> Derek Oddy, "A nutritional analysis of historical evidence: The working-class diet 1880-1914," The Making of the Modern British Diet, ed. Derek Oddy and Derek Miller (London:

low pay and the relatively high cost of food, much of the working class could not feed itself properly. In his study of York, Rowntree drew his famous poverty line at the income required for a diet consistent with "physical efficiency." Drawing on the latest nutrition science, he calculated the minimum caloric intake as 3478 for a man, 2923 for a woman, and between 1824 and 2634 for a child.<sup>39</sup> Of the working-class families he surveyed, 15.5 percent simply could not afford to buy enough food no matter how carefully they budgeted. A further 28.9 percent could theoretically afford enough food, but diverted money elsewhere. On average, working-class families earning fewer than 26s. per week ate 2685 calories per man per day, 815 fewer than they required according to Rowntree's reference diet.<sup>40</sup> Extrapolating from his findings in York, Rowntree estimated that between 25 and 30 percent of Britain's urban population lived below his poverty line and the minimum standard of nutrition it represented.<sup>41</sup>

Within a decade of the publication of Rowntree's Poverty, the British government substantiated his findings through the medical inspection of schoolchildren. Though social scientists like Booth, Pember Reeves, and Rowntree had studied malnutrition in particular cities and neighborhoods, aggregate statistics for the entire nation did not exist before the establishment of the school medical service in 1907.<sup>42</sup> Thereafter, the medical officers in each local education authority began to track malnutrition in children, though with limited central direction. Without standard, reproducible criteria for diagnosing undernutrition, school doctors and nurses fell back on a variety of proxies, including the ratio of height to weight, the redness of mucous membranes, the condition of the skin and hair, and even general impressions of "stoutness" or "thinness."<sup>43</sup> By their measure, up to 25 percent of schoolchildren in some local education authorities suffered from malnutrition in the 1909-1910 academic year. Little had improved by 1913-1914, when 500,000 schoolchildren, or 10.9 percent, in a representative

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Croom Helm, 1976) 215. Standards of living may have improved over the course of these two decades, but generally as a result of falling prices not rising wages. Refer to E. J. Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1968) 159-164.

<sup>38</sup> Oddy 216.

<sup>39</sup> Rowntree 88-103. Rowntree deferred to nutritive standards defined by prominent American and British physiologists: W. O. Atwater at the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Diarmid Noël Paton at the research laboratory of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, and James Dunlop, another Scottish physician.

<sup>40</sup> Rowntree 235.

<sup>41</sup> Rowntree 301. As have modern historians, Rowntree's contemporaries cast doubt on his claim that 25 to 30 percent of Britain's urban population lived in poverty. The Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration did not consider his findings in York representative of all of Britain. Apparently to distance himself from Rowntree, Charles Booth insisted publicly that his own findings applied only to London. See E. P. Hennock, "The measurement of urban poverty: From the metropolis to the nation, 1880-1920," Economic History Review 40.2 (1987): 214-216.

<sup>42</sup> The statistician William Farr, who worked at the General Register Office from 1839 to 1880, did publish the annual number of deaths due to starvation in his annual reports. However, these statistics lend limited insight into the number of Britons living in a condition of chronic hunger, many of whom may have died of other immediate causes. See Vernon, "The ethics of hunger and the assembly of society," 698.

<sup>43</sup> Annual Report for 1908 42.

sample of local education authorities fell below minimal standards of nutrition.<sup>44</sup> In his report to the Board of Education in 1910, George Newman singled out malnutrition as the most significant health problem confronting schoolchildren:

[I]t is clear that one of the greatest physical handicaps of school children as a class is that of malnutrition. It is certain that malnutrition and physical defects are closely associated and react upon each other, but it is difficult to determine their exact relation in each child, or to say in what degree malnutrition causes the other physical evils. Merely to increase the supply of food would in many cases not solve the complex problem of the individual child, although in many cases lack of food lies at the root of the mischief.<sup>45</sup>

The catalog of "physical defects" associated with hunger ranged from tooth decay to poor eyesight to enlarged adenoids and tonsils and told a heart-wrenching tale of widespread suffering among the young and vulnerable.<sup>46</sup>

Alcoholism exacerbated the poor nutrition of working men and their families. In his Wages and Earnings of the Working Classes, published in 1885, Leone Levi calculated that the working class as a whole purchased 75 percent of all beer and spirits sold in Britain.<sup>47</sup> According to George Sims and Charles Booth, the average wage-earner spent one-fourth of his income at the local pub.<sup>48</sup> Rowntree himself estimated just one-sixth.<sup>49</sup> Working from contemporary estimates of working-class income and expenditure, the historian A. E. Dingle has quantified the caloric penalty a working-class family incurred for the sake of drink. In 1880, the median working-class family, composed of father, mother, and three children, earned 26s. 6d. per week, of which 16s. ¾d., or 61 percent, went toward food and at least 3s. 8½d., or 14 percent, toward drink.<sup>50</sup> At contemporary prices, each penny spent on food bought 488 calories for a total of slightly less than 2700 calories per person per day – more than adequate for a child, but not for a working man or woman. Each penny spent on beer bought 115 calories, or another 730 calories per day. As the man of the house likely had all of the alcohol to himself, he consumed a total of 3430 calories per day to his wife and children's 2700 each. However, the same 3s. 8½d. spent on

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<sup>44</sup> Annual Report for 1914 67-69. For reference, approximately 5.4 million children attended school regularly in England and Wales in 1909-1910; attendance declined slightly to 5.2 million by 1917-1918 and to 4.9 million by 1924-1925 (Annual Report for 1910 5, Annual Report for 1918 1, Annual Report for 1925 12).

<sup>45</sup> Annual Report for 1910 258.

<sup>46</sup> Annual Report for 1916 256.

<sup>47</sup> As quoted in A. E. Dingle, "Drink and working-class living standards in Britain, 1870-1914," The Making of the Modern British Diet, ed. Derek Oddy and Derek Miller (London: Croom Helm, 1976) 120.

<sup>48</sup> Dingle (1976) 120. The journalist George Sims wrote a series of articles for the Sunday Dispatch, Pictorial World, and Daily News from 1879 to 1883 on conditions in London's slums. They later appeared as books. See Philip Waller, "Sims, George Robert (1847-1922)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004) May 2006, 31 Dec. 2006 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37964>>.

<sup>49</sup> Rowntree 143.

<sup>50</sup> In 1880, alcohol accounted for 14 percent of all consumer expenditure in Great Britain. See A. E. Dingle, "Drink and working-class living standards in Britain, 1870-1914," Economic History Review 25.4 (Nov. 1972): 608-622.



beer could have bought 620 extra calories of food per day for every family member. Altogether, beer cost the median working-class family 16,600 calories per week – perhaps the difference between chronic hunger and relative plenty. By 1914, the caloric penalty remained substantial, but it had declined to 10,600 calories per week.<sup>51</sup> Dingle probably underestimated the calorie costs of alcoholism by assuming the median working-class family spent only 14 percent of its income on drink as opposed to Rowntree's 17 percent or Booth and Sims' 25 percent.

Hungry, drunk, and destitute, the turn-of-the-century working class exhibited all of the symptoms of chronic ill health, including high mortality. After hovering between 130 and 150 per 1000 live births in the 1880s, the infant mortality rate edged up to 163 in England and Wales in 1899.<sup>52</sup> By 1911, it had declined again to 130 on average, but lingered stubbornly at 157 in the industrial north.<sup>53</sup> Many infants died of diarrhea resulting from a diet of condensed skim milk, the only age-appropriate food that their mothers could afford.<sup>54</sup> Working-class children who survived into young adulthood often suffered from small stature, decayed teeth, impaired vision, or other debilities attributable to undernutrition. In the 1880s, some of Britain's sagest voices, including Charles Booth, Alfred Marshall, and G. B. Longstaff, began to worry about the "degeneration" of the urban poor.<sup>55</sup> In apparent confirmation of their worst fears, an unsettlingly high proportion of volunteers for the Boer War failed to meet minimum physical standards for military service. The War Office's medical inspectors rejected 33 percent of volunteers as physically unfit in 1899, 28 percent in 1900, and 29 percent in 1901.<sup>56</sup> Of 11,000 volunteers from Manchester, only 3000 passed their medical inspections, of whom only 1000 qualified for active duty.<sup>57</sup> Appointed in the wake of the Boer War, the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration attempted to allay the worst fears about British public health by noting that army volunteers did not necessarily represent the population at large. In fact, the committee found that public health on the whole had improved slightly in the recent past.<sup>58</sup> However, despite any small relative gains, the absolute physical fitness of the British working class remained pitifully low.

In the century since the first scientific studies of working-class nutrition, modern historical scholarship has largely confirmed their findings. The historian Derek Oddy compiled and compared 2500 family budgets, derived from 17 studies from 1887 to 1913 from across England. Regardless of their geographic origin, the budgets reflected broadly similar patterns of

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<sup>51</sup> W. A. MacKenzie, "Changes in the standard of living in the United Kingdom 1860-1914," Economica 3 (1921); as quoted in Dingle (1976) 123.

<sup>52</sup> Mitchell, International Historical Statistics: Europe 1750-2000 122.

<sup>53</sup> J. M. Winter, "The impact of the First World War on civilian health in Britain," Economic History Review 30.3 (Aug. 1977): 493-495.

<sup>54</sup> Deborah Dwork, War Is Good for Babies and Other Young Children: A History of the Infant and Child Welfare Movement in England 1898-1918 (New York: Tavistock, 1987) 36, 93.

<sup>55</sup> For example, Marshall observed that rural migrants lost their former health and strength after moving to the London slums. See Alfred Marshall, Principles of Economics (London, 1890) 2-4 and Alfred Marshall and Mary Paley Marshall, The Economics of Industry (London, 1888) 26. See also Gareth Stedman Jones, Outcast London (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 127-129.

<sup>56</sup> Stephen M. Miller, "In support of the 'imperial mission'? Volunteering for the South African War, 1899-1902," Journal of Military History 69 (July 2005): 699.

<sup>57</sup> Searle 60.

<sup>58</sup> Searle 60-61.

food consumption and expenditure, which lends them a degree of credibility. Dividing the budgets into two groups by date, Oddy calculated the average weekly consumption per capita of staple foods and the corresponding amounts of key nutrients.

Table 1.1: Weekly per capita food consumption based on household surveys

	Bread (lb.)	Potatoes (lb.)	Sugar (oz.)	Fat (oz.)	Meat (lb.)	Milk (pt.)
1887-1901	6.7	1.6	14.4	5.2	1.4	1.4
1902-1913	6.6	3.0	15.5	7.6	1.2	1.8

Table 1.2: Daily nutrient intake from diet based on household surveys

	Calories	Protein (gm.)	Fat (gm.)	Carbohydrates (gm.)	Iron (mg.)	Calcium (mg.)
1887-1901	2099	57	58	336	10.0	310
1902-1913	2398	71	65	375	12.1	460

Source: Derek Oddy, "A nutritional analysis of historical evidence: The working-class diet 1880-1914," The Making of the Modern British Diet, ed. Derek Oddy and Derek Miller (London: Croom Helm, 1976) 221, 224.

He found that the 2100 to 2400 calories available on average to working-class men fell significantly below the 3000 they would require if engaged in strenuous physical labor. If they did eat up to the 3000-calorie standard, the extra 600 to 900 calories necessarily came at the expense of their wives and children. Oddy could not "envisage how the diverse physiological needs of a manual worker, his wife, and growing children could be met adequately" with such a diet.<sup>59</sup> Carrying his analysis slightly further, the American Food and Nutrition Board recommends a daily allowance of 1000 mg of calcium for adults, or more than twice what working-class Britons at the turn of the century consumed. (This calcium deficit may help to explain the high incidence – up to 40 percent – of tooth decay among British schoolchildren.<sup>60</sup>) A diet low in calories and in minerals most likely fell short in vitamins as well, although Oddy did not include them in his calculations.

#### The skeleton in the national cupboard

Ironically, all of this misery occurred in the context of a trade regime that had decreased the cost of food. Due in part to the repeal of the corn laws, the price of wheat had fallen from a high of 77.1s. per quarter in 1855 to a low of 23.5s. in 1894.<sup>61</sup> Cheap bread had no doubt helped to minimize the hunger and poor health that afflicted the turn-of-the-century working class. In 1904, Jane Cobden Unwin – the daughter of Richard Cobden himself – and her husband Thomas

<sup>59</sup> Oddy 225. The United States Department of Agriculture's MyPyramid nutrition planning software recommends that an active man, woman, and child of average height and weight consume 3000, 2400, and 2200 calories daily, respectively. Refer to <http://www.mypyramid.gov>.

<sup>60</sup> Annual Report for 1916 256.

<sup>61</sup> These prices reflect the records of the Willich Board of Agriculture. See Abbott Payson Usher, "Prices of Wheat and Commodity Price Indexes for England, 1259-1930," Review of Economics and Statistics 13.3 (Aug. 1931): 107.

Unwin published a volume of harrowing firsthand accounts of life among the rural poor before the advent of free trade.<sup>62</sup> However great the suffering of the urban poor in the 1890s, their rural counterparts in the 1830s and 1840s fared worse. However, free trade had its dark side as well. As early as the 1880s, Britain's addiction to foreign food began to provoke anxieties about national security. Indeed, the exigencies of imperial defense did as much as working-class poverty to boost food into the forefront of Edwardian politics.

By most historical accounts, a combination of foreign competition, technological innovation, and social strictures brought British agriculture low in the second half of the nineteenth century. Prior to the 1870s, domestic farmers had by necessity supplied most of Britain's food because sluggish seaborne transportation and poor refrigeration limited imports. P. K. O'Brien has estimated that through a combination of enclosure and better farming techniques, British agricultural output increased by at least 265 percent between 1701 and 1815.<sup>63</sup> In the 1830s and 1840s, the anti-corn law movement pushed for more foreign competition to drive down the cost of living, but, in reality, the importation of large amounts of food remained impractical for another quarter century. Even as late as 1868, Britain grew 80 percent of its own food. Only a few years later, though, the steam engine and the vapor compressor revolutionized transoceanic shipping. Rather than fight against an onslaught of cheap foreign grain, British farmers shifted away from tillage toward dairying, market gardening, and pasturage. Agriculture's contribution to national income shrank from 17.4 percent in 1870 to 6.7 percent in 1913.<sup>64</sup> By 1914, Britain imported 53.6 percent of its cereals and pulses, 39.3 percent of its beef, 71.2 percent of its bacon and ham, 61.2 percent of its butter, and 75.3 percent of its cheese.<sup>65</sup> Traditionally, historians have argued that, without the protection of the corn laws, British farmers simply could not compete with lower labor and land costs overseas and had to give up grain-growing.<sup>66</sup> However, the average yield of wheat per acre in Britain and Ireland ranked among the highest in the world before the First World War – proof of the skill of domestic farmers and the fertility of their soil. On this basis, Avner Offer has blamed the plight of British agriculture on the quirks of rural society, including the class pretensions of farmers who would not work with their own hands.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> James Vernon has argued that the Unwins essentially resurrected the memory of the "hungry forties" to combat tariff reform in the early 1900s. See The Hungry Forties: Life Under the Bread Tax (London: Unwin 1904) and Vernon 2007 256-257.

<sup>63</sup> P. K. O'Brien, "Agriculture and the industrial revolution," Economic History Review 30.1 (Feb. 1977): 176.

<sup>64</sup> William Arnstein, Britain Yesterday and Today, 7th ed. (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1996) 134-135.

<sup>65</sup> William Beveridge, British Food Control, Economic and Social History of the World War: British Series, ed. James Shotwell (London and Oxford: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Oxford UP, 1928) 359.

<sup>66</sup> See, for instance, E. J. T. Collins, "Food supplies and food policy," and M. E. Turner, "Agricultural output, income and productivity," The Agrarian History of England and Wales, vol. 7, ed. H. P. R. Finberg, Joan Thirsk, and E. J. T. Collins (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2000) 33-71, 72-223.

<sup>67</sup> Avner Offer, The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 1989) 119-120.

By the 1880s, even stalwart liberals started to question the wisdom of leaving domestic agriculture to decay. At the inaugural meeting of the Bread Reform League in 1880, the famous physician Benjamin Ward Richardson wondered how Britons could "sleep in their beds" with their country "on [its] knees to America for wheat."<sup>68</sup> In an 1886 essay, Richardson compared the deepening trade deficit in food to a "skeleton in the national cupboard." In the event of war, even a temporary disruption in food imports would precipitate "political convulsion," forcing Britain to surrender before its soldiers fired a shot on the battlefield. While clearly concerned about the insecurity of the nation's food supply, Richardson hesitated to prescribe a protectionist solution. Perhaps a royal commission could survey the productive capacity of British agricultural lands. Perhaps the grain wasted in the fermenting of beer and liquor could go instead into the baking of bread. Perhaps individuals could eat less, substitute vegetable for animal proteins, and more carefully husband the foods that they did have. Perhaps so-called "public kitchens" could undertake the instruction of Britons in cooking and shopping economically.<sup>69</sup> In all of these schemes, Richardson trusted the imperatives of national security alone to motivate concerned citizens to grow more, eat and drink less, and, most importantly, to spread the wisdom of economy and temperance to their neighbors. If individuals operating freely in open markets could push Britain into food insecurity, perhaps they could pull it back to safety as well.

Though Richardson could not countenance a tariff on imported grain, many British farmers and politicians certainly could. Agitation for a return to protectionism increased in the early 1880s, but initially met with little encouragement. In 1881, the Central Chamber of Agriculture, the most prominent farm lobby in Britain, rejected a resolution calling for tariffs on imported food and manufactures. Many of the resolution's opponents objected not on economic principle, but instead on political calculation, fearing that the poor would "riotously resist . . . taxes on food."<sup>70</sup> Indeed, the repeal of the corn laws thirty years before had enjoyed widespread popular support because working families spent such a large proportion of their household budgets on food. Most of the chamber's members brazenly walked out of a meeting in November 1883 rather than debate a resolution moved by the still relatively small faction in favor of protection.<sup>71</sup> However, in the ensuing two years, the price of grain collapsed, falling 13.4 percent from 40s. 4d. to 34s. 11d. per quarter; in 1885, food cost 26 percent less than it had between 1867 and 1877.<sup>72</sup> As farm income declined, so did enthusiasm for free trade and respect for public opinion. In December 1884, protectionists moved a resolution before the Central Chamber of Agriculture calling for a Parliamentary inquiry into the causes of the ongoing depression and it passed comfortably. A little over a year later, the chamber nearly passed a resolution calling for tariffs on imported food, but ultimately held back so as not to upstage a

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<sup>68</sup> Bread and Food Reform League, Bread of Olden Days and Fifty Years of Bread Reform (Norwich, UK: Jarrold, 1930) 6.

<sup>69</sup> Benjamin Ward Richardson, "The skeleton in the national cupboard," The Asclepiad, vol. 3 (London, 1886) 218-219.

<sup>70</sup> "The Central Chamber of Agriculture," Times 9 Nov. 1881: 8.

<sup>71</sup> The resolution itself vaguely lamented the ongoing depression without prescribing any particular remedy, but its mere association with protectionists doomed it. See "The Central Chamber of Agriculture," Times 7 Nov. 1883: 7.

<sup>72</sup> "Prices in Great Britain," The Quarterly Journal of Economics 1.3 (Apr. 1887): 391-392.

royal commission on agriculture that had yet to publish its findings.<sup>73</sup> Momentum decisively shifted in the direction of protection at a National Agricultural Convention in December 1892. Though free traders conjured the specter of popular discontent at "dear bread," the convention carried a resolution in favor of protection to a chorus of loud cheers.<sup>74</sup>

The triumph of protectionism among farmers anticipated a movement for tariff reform more broadly. Increased foreign competition impinged not only on agriculture, but indeed on the whole British economy. As they closed the technological gap with Britain, American and European manufacturers captured a larger proportion of world trade. Moreover, they could hide behind customs barriers erected by protectionist governments while the British – at least theoretically – had to brave the hazards of the market on their own. The ham-handed imposition of retaliatory tariffs would not necessarily help as Britain itself depended on imports of industrial feedstock. To escape unfair competition while ensuring a cheap supply of raw materials, a subset of predominantly Conservative businessmen and politicians envisioned a customs union between Britain and its overseas colonies. In this neo-mercantilist arrangement, the colonies would supply the mother country with raw materials in exchange for its manufactures. The movement had its origins in the 1880s with the foundation of the Fair Trade League and the Imperial Federation League, but seemed to fizzle out in the early 1890s when both organizations disbanded.<sup>75</sup> However, its fortunes recovered in 1895 with the appointment of Joseph Chamberlain as colonial secretary. An enthusiastic imperialist, Chamberlain had left the Liberal Party in 1886 over his opposition to "home rule" for Ireland. He had longed mulled the possibility of fostering a closer cultural and political union of the empire through commercial means. Though a more or less orthodox free trader in his early political career, Chamberlain revived the core arguments of fair trade in his proposal for an "imperial Zollverein," which he first made public in June 1896.<sup>76</sup> Soon, the awkward German term "Zollverein" gave way to simpler English alternatives like "imperial preference" or "tariff reform."

Logically, agricultural protection and imperial preference could not coexist easily. On the one hand, Australia and Canada would not accept any arrangement that excluded their grain from British markets. On the other hand, British farmers would not compete more effectively against Australians and Canadians than against Americans and Russians. Even if they favored some degree of protection for themselves, British manufacturers tended to reject tariffs on food as they put upward pressure on wages.<sup>77</sup> Many of the colonies worried that, if they agreed to an imperial customs union, their own infant industries would drown in a flood of cheap British manufactured goods. Sentimentally, though, these disparate protectionist movements shared a mistrust of open markets and could sympathize with one another. For instance, a resolution

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<sup>73</sup> "Central Chamber of Agriculture," Times 3 Feb. 1886: 10.

<sup>74</sup> "The National Agricultural Conference," Times 8 Dec. 1892: 7.

<sup>75</sup> The Fair Trade League was founded in 1881 and disbanded in 1892. The Imperial Federation League was founded in 1884 and disbanded in 1893, though its rump persisted in London as the British Empire League. See Sydney H. Zebel, "Joseph Chamberlain and the genesis of tariff reform," Journal of British Studies 7.1 (Nov. 1967): 135-138.

<sup>76</sup> Zebel 131-132, 139.

<sup>77</sup> Frank Trentmann, "The transformation of fiscal reform: Reciprocity, modernization, and the fiscal debate within the business community in early twentieth-century Britain," Historical Journal 39.4 (Dec. 1996): 1005-1048. See E. H. H. Green, "Radical conservatism: The electoral genesis of tariff reform," Historical Journal 28.3 (Sept. 1985): 667.

moved at the February 1886 meeting of the Central Chamber of Agriculture called for duties on "corn, sugar, and manufactured articles from foreign countries, but not from our own colonies and dependencies."<sup>78</sup> Chamberlain and his allies must have seen in these moments of sympathy the foundation on which they could construct a practical compromise.

The issues of food security and agricultural protection first came together on the floor of the House of Commons under the unlikely auspices of a wealthy investor with extensive foreign entanglements. In April 1897, Henry Seton-Karr, the Conservative member for St. Helens, introduced a motion calling attention to "the dependence of the United Kingdom on foreign imports for the necessities of life, and the consequences that might arise therefrom in the event of war."<sup>79</sup> To British farmers, Seton-Karr may have seemed like an odd spokesperson against food imports. He had invested in a cattle company in Wyoming as early as 1883, when 93.8 percent of all chilled and frozen beef imports to the United Kingdom originated in the United States.<sup>80</sup> Over the next decade, he acquired stakes in an enormous cattle ranch in Texas and in grain elevators in Minnesota, the Dakotas, and Montana.<sup>81</sup> In 1900, three-quarters of Britain's beef and half of its wheat imports still came from the United States.<sup>82</sup> At least in part, the return on Seton-Karr's American investments hinged on his own country's continued dependence on foreign sources of food. Moreover, Seton-Karr's own constituents in heavily industrialized St. Helens favored cheap bread, whether to feed their families in the case of employees or to keep down wages in the case of employers.<sup>83</sup> With much to lose both financially and politically, Seton-Karr must have genuinely feared the prospect of a hungry Britain at the mercy of its enemies.

In a speech to defend his own motion, Seton-Karr proposed an imperial customs union on the assumption that Britain could trust its own colonies more than Russia or the United States in wartime. Though he did not openly endorse a tariff on imported food, he did remark ambiguously that Britain could probably feed itself if its fiscal policy did not discriminate against

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<sup>78</sup> "Central Chamber of Agriculture," 3 Feb. 1886. This particular resolution was ultimately deferred. Further examples of sympathy between agricultural protection and imperial customs union include: an anonymous corn dealer proposed the failed protectionist resolution of 1883 to the Central Chamber of Agriculture under the banner of fair trade. The Monmouthshire Chamber of Agriculture also qualified its own protectionist resolution with the proviso that "an effort should be made to draw the colonies nearer to the mother country by arranging for perfect freedom of trade in them." See "The Central Chamber of Agriculture," 7 Nov. 1883 and "Duty on corn," Times 29 Jan. 1886: 4.

<sup>79</sup> "House of Commons: Food supplies of the United Kingdom," Times 7 Apr. 1897: 8-9.

<sup>80</sup> Henry Seton-Karr, My Sporting Holidays (London: Arnold, 1904): 283-307; Richard Perren, "The North American beef and cattle trade with Great Britain, 1870-1914," Economic History Review 24.3 (Aug. 1971): 432.

<sup>81</sup> Dod's Parliamentary Companion, 72nd ed. (London, 1896) 344 and The New House of Commons, July 1892 (London, 1892) 174. Regarding the Chicago and Northwest Granaries Company, see Lance E. Davis and Robert J. Cull, International Capital Markets and American Economic Growth, 1820-1914 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1994) 36.

<sup>82</sup> G. B. L. Arner, "The market for American agricultural products in the United Kingdom," Journal of Farm Economics 6.3 (July 1924): 283.

<sup>83</sup> Due to its convenience to Liverpool and to several rich coal seams, St. Helens grew into a center of heavy industry in the nineteenth century.

domestic agriculture. Despite Seton-Karr's careful choice of words, Sir Charles Dilke pointed out the "strong flavour of protection" in the motion, earning a hearty "hear, hear" from the Liberal benches. However, Dilke inadvertently lowered the tone of the debate by contending that home-grown lentils and peas could substitute for foreign grain delayed by an enemy blockade. To a chorus of laughs, the arch-protectionist James Lowther wondered "how long . . . this country would allow warlike operations to go on if . . . driven to food of that kind?" When Arthur Balfour, the government's leader in the House of Commons, eventually interceded, the debate had long since strayed from the original question of food security:

My hon. friend has so contrived the terms of his motion that he has made it a suitable text apparently for almost every gentleman who wishes to agitate and is in the habit of agitating some special views in the House . . . be those views what they may.<sup>84</sup>

The motion did ultimately pass, but the whimsical, disjointed character of the debate indicated the lack of enthusiasm for pursuing the underlying issue seriously. As Balfour had joked, the motion lent itself to both liberal and protectionist interpretations, so voting for it did not represent much of an ideological commitment. Balfour himself supported the motion because it dovetailed neatly with his government's interest in expanding the Royal Navy. If the Conservative Party could not yet embrace imperial federation, let alone outright protection, it could still celebrate the navy as the guarantor of British commerce on the high seas.

Six years later, the Boer War gave rise to a better organized, more insistent interest in food security. The armed forces' lackluster performance in South Africa cast doubt not only on public health, but also on the safety of international trade and on Britain's chances of winning a European war. After the siege of Mafeking, Seton-Karr's concerns about the food supply no longer seemed so laughable. On 2 February 1903, just nine months after the war had ended, the awkwardly-named Association to Promote an Official Enquiry into the Security of Our Food Supply in Time of War was established. It counted forty-three members of Parliament in its ranks – twenty-eight Conservatives, ten Liberal Unionists, and five Liberals – as well as a smattering of prominent businessmen and labor activists. Though the association leaned to the right, it could reasonably claim to represent most elements in British politics. On 5 March, a deputation headed by the duke of Sutherland himself formally presented the association's concerns to then Prime Minister Balfour.<sup>85</sup>

Inconveniently for Sutherland and his deputation, a volatile mixture of outsized egos and trade policy sparked a nasty dispute in the cabinet at precisely the same time that they tried to revive the food security issue. After the fighting stopped in South Africa, Chamberlain had traveled there to soothe any lingering animosities with the Boers and with their European sympathizers. The apparent generosity of Chamberlain's diplomacy – a dramatic change from his bellicosity in 1899 – had impressed his allies in the press. In October 1902, a month before his departure to South Africa, the Times had declared Chamberlain "the member of the Cabinet who attracts most attention among foreigners."<sup>86</sup> In February 1903, just three weeks before the

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<sup>84</sup> "House of Commons: Food supplies of the United Kingdom," Times 7 Apr. 1897: 8-9.

<sup>85</sup> Dod's Parliamentary Companion, 81st ed. (London: Whittaker, 1905). For a complete list of all members of the deputation, see "Food supply in time of war: Speech by Mr. Balfour," Times 6 Mar. 1903: 10.

<sup>86</sup> "Latest intelligence: Mr. Chamberlain's visit to South Africa," Times 29 Oct. 1902: 3.

food security deputation met with Balfour, Chamberlain returned to Britain as a hero, lauded for his diplomatic savvy and oratorical brilliance:

No man is better qualified than he to get . . . to the matter of the subject that he is investigating. He has, like all real orators, an instinctive feeling of the real temper and wishes of his audiences, and he is endowed with a power of putting searching questions to his individual visitors which speedily reveal to him their capabilities, their acquirements, and their characters. His intellect is large enough, and his judgment is sure enough, to enable him . . . to draw . . . broad practical conclusions on which to build his policy.<sup>87</sup>

However, in Chamberlain's absence, C. T. Ritchie, the chancellor of the exchequer, had gone back on an agreement within the cabinet to retain a small duty on imported grain that had helped to pay for the war. Chamberlain had intended to adapt the duty into an experiment in imperial preference. Emboldened by his success in South Africa, angered and embarrassed by Ritchie's betrayal, Chamberlain contemplated quitting the government and taking tariff reform directly to the voters.<sup>88</sup>

Chamberlain and Ritchie's feud left Balfour little room for maneuver around the question of food security. According to the historian Neal Blewett, Balfour valued first and foremost the integrity of the Conservative Party; he would not split it on principle, as Robert Peel had done during the 1840s, and risk weakening its standing in British politics.<sup>89</sup> However, an official inquiry into food security could upset the precarious balance between Chamberlain and Ritchie. If it recommended protection or imperial federation, it could destabilize the cabinet and the party by further strengthening Chamberlain at Ritchie's expense. If it recommended free trade, it would vindicate the party's pre-existing policy, but potentially alienate Chamberlain. Either outcome would aggravate the internecine struggle over tariff reform and accelerate a split between the two sides. Meanwhile, outside of Parliament, the popularity of the Conservative Party had already started to slide over its sectarian education policy.<sup>90</sup> Taxing food would probably make matters worse, as the free traders in the Central Chamber of Agriculture had argued fruitlessly for more than two decades.

In his speech to the food security deputation, Balfour attempted to maintain a semblance of neutrality on tariff reform while subtly tipping his hand toward free trade. He began by validating the deputation's concerns about the high volume of food imports:

We are dependent on foreign nations for the greater part of our food supply. We are dependent, as the deputation has not said, but as you are all aware, on foreign countries, not only for corn, but also for the raw materials required for our

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<sup>87</sup> "Mr. Chamberlain in Cape Colony," editorial, *Times* 19 Feb. 1903: 7.

<sup>88</sup> Zebel 145-147. See also A. W. Coats, "Political economy and the tariff reform campaign of 1903," *Journal of Law and Economics* 11.1 (Apr. 1968): 182 and Jane Ridley, "Ritchie, Charles Thomson, first Baron Ritchie of Dundee (1838-1906)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 24 June 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35762>>.

<sup>89</sup> Neal Blewett, "Free fooders, Balfourites, whole hoggers: Factionalism within the Unionist Party, 1906-10," *Historical Journal* 11.1 (1968): 102.

<sup>90</sup> The Education Act of 1902 had directed property taxes to schools administered by the Church of England, thus seeming to violate the taxpayers' freedom of conscience. The act irked many Liberal Unionists, without whose support Balfour's government would have collapsed.



manufactures, and it is not going too far to say that if we can conceive this country absolutely excluded from all commercial intercourse with our neighbours for a very brief period our national existence, as well as our commercial supremacy, and our very means of supporting our people, would come to an end.<sup>91</sup>

However, having cultivated the deputation's sympathies, Balfour then cannily hedged its expectations of the outcome of an official inquiry. He reminded the deputation that neither his nor any future government could alter the verdict of geography. As an island nation of limited natural resources, Britain would always depend on overseas trade. At the same time, this dependence did not necessarily spell disaster. As the deputation itself no doubt knew, no enemy could ever overpower the Royal Navy and achieve a complete blockade of British ports. Nevertheless, a commission or investigation into food security could recommend mitigations for public panic and rising prices at the outset of a war. Superficially, Balfour had simply reiterated the common sense that many Britons – the deputation itself notwithstanding – took for granted. Implicitly, he had laid down firm guidelines for an official investigation into food security: it, too, would have to respect the verdict of geography with all its implications for the openness of trade and for the size and strength of the navy. With this proviso, Edward VII approved the appointment of a Royal Commission on Supply of Food and Raw Materials in Time of War at the end of April 1903.<sup>92</sup>

#### Beyond the power of any naval force to prevent the importation of supplies

Though it seemed ecumenical to contemporaries, the composition of the commission itself ensured the outcome Balfour intended. In 1905, a reviewer in the Economic Journal commented that the commission represented "every political party and every interest concerned."<sup>93</sup> It included ten MPs, an admiral, a banker, three civil servants, a grain merchant, an insurer, and a law professor, of whom seven were Conservatives, five Liberals, and five nonpartisans. Three of the MPs were also farmers and two had served as president of the Board of Agriculture. However, a strong majority of the group had free trade sympathies. The chairman, Lord Balfour of Burleigh, boasted a unique combination of personal qualities, professional experience, and political beliefs that neatly fit the delicate circumstances in which the commission undertook its investigation. A Conservative with twenty-seven years of service in the House of Lords, Balfour of Burleigh commanded the respect of both of the factions in his own party and could mediate between them. As a consistent free trader, he would wield this paternal influence on behalf of the status quo. In his long career, Balfour of Burleigh had chaired six other commissions of inquiry and earned a reputation for acuity and competence. However, his commissions had tended to make cautious policy recommendations. He would not likely break with this precedent and his own free trade convictions just to enflame the smoldering conflict within his party.<sup>94</sup> Balfour of Burleigh had a strong ally in John Wharton, a

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<sup>91</sup> "Food supply in time of war: Speech by Mr. Balfour," Times 6 Mar. 1903: 10.

<sup>92</sup> For a brief overview of the commission, its members, and its findings, see David French, British Economic and Strategic Planning 1905-1915 (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982).

<sup>93</sup> Rev. of The Report of the Royal Commission on Supply of Food and Raw Material in Time of War, Economic Journal 15.60 (Dec. 1905): 609.

<sup>94</sup> W. F. Gray, "Bruce, Alexander Hugh, sixth Lord Balfour of Burleigh (1849–1921)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 26 May 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32129>>.

fellow Conservative MP and advocate for "free food."<sup>95</sup> Moreover, six Liberal or nonpartisan members of the commission had reliable records on free trade: the former president of the Board of Agriculture Lord Burghclere,<sup>96</sup> the three MPs Alfred Emmott,<sup>97</sup> Edmund Robertson,<sup>98</sup> and John Wilson,<sup>99</sup> the banker A. S. Harvey,<sup>100</sup> and the shipping magnate J. E. Street.<sup>101</sup> As a civil servant, the assistant under-secretary of state Henry H. Cunynghame tended to play his political cards close to his vest, but he had studied at Cambridge under Alfred Marshall, the most eminent

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<sup>95</sup> In March 1904, Wharton played the starring role in a political drama that brought the Balfour's government to the brink of defeat. The Liberal opposition moved a resolution condemning "preferential and protective tariffs" that Balfour had to oppose so as not to alienate tariff reformers on his own backbench. However, many Conservatives still sympathized with free trade. Wharton attempted to split the difference with an amendment that limited the scope of the resolution just to food. More than a hundred tariff reformers rallied against the amendment – enough to bring down Balfour's government. In the end, the government voted down the original resolution with a reduced majority. See Henry William Lucy, The Balfourian Parliament, 1900-1905 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906): 300-301 and "House of Commons," Times 10 Mar. 1904: 11-12.

<sup>96</sup> On Lord Burghclere, see "Parliament: House of Lords," Times 30 June 1896: 6; Augustine Birrell, Eight Years of Tory Government, 1895-1903: Home Affairs (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1903) 46, and Lord Burghclere, letter to the editor, Times 10 Mar. 1904: 12. For Lord Burghclere's career in the House of Lords, see his obituary in the Times: "Death of Lord Burghclere: A man of many gifts," obituary, Times 7 May 1921: 13.

<sup>97</sup> John Singleton, "Emmott, Alfred, Baron Emmott (1858–1926)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 27 Mar. 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33022>> and "Lord Emmott: Politician and industrialist," Times 14 Dec. 1926: 19.

<sup>98</sup> Robertson publicly rejected imperial preference in a speech on 3 March 1903 against a supplementary appropriation for the Colonial Office. See "House of Commons," Times 4 Mar. 1903: 6.

<sup>99</sup> Tony Mason, "Wilson, John (1837–1915)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 27 Apr. 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47376>>.

<sup>100</sup> Harvey, a principal of Glyn, Mills, Currie and Company, died in March 1905, several months before the commission published its report. The Economic Journal, Bankers' Magazine, and Spectator all remembered him as an uncompromising advocate for free trade. See "Alfred Spalding Harvey," obituary, Economic Journal 15.58 (June 1905): 290 and Alfred Spalding Harvey, 1840-1905: Contributions to Magazines, Speeches, Etc. (London, 1907) 18, 21. See also "Discussion on Mr. Schuster's Paper," Journal of the Institute of Bankers 25.2 (Feb. 1904): 92.

<sup>101</sup> Perhaps the least well-known of the commission's members, Street had a short public record. He appeared more often in the pages of the Musical Times as president of the Madrigal Society than he did in the Times in his capacity at Lloyd's Registry. However, at the height of the tariff reform movement, he did sign a petition for a meeting at the Guildhall to defend free trade. See "Joseph Edward Street," obituary, Musical Times 49.783 (1 May 1908): 321, "Fiscal policy: The proposed Guildhall meetings," Times 9 Dec. 1903: 10, and "The Guildhall meeting," Times 9 Feb. 1904: 14.

economist and free-trader in British academia at the turn of the century.<sup>102</sup> Robert Montgomery, president of the Liverpool Corn Trade Association, bought and sold imported grain professionally and would not have favored tariffs on his own business.<sup>103</sup> Against these ten free-traders stood only four protectionists or tariff reformers: the duke of Sutherland,<sup>104</sup> the former president of the Board of Agriculture Henry Chaplin,<sup>105</sup> and the two Conservative MPs John Colomb<sup>106</sup> and Henry Seton-Karr.<sup>107</sup> The remaining four members of the commission left little record of their position on tariff reform. Each represented a different practical interest in the food security debate and may have served more as independent experts than as political partisans.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Just a month after the commission concluded its investigation, Cunynghame published a paper in the Economic Journal in which he tacitly opposed imperial preference. See Henry H. Cunynghame, "The effect of export and import duties on price and production examined by the graphic method," Economic Journal 13.51 (Sept. 1903): 322-323.

<sup>103</sup> "Colonel Montgomery," obituary, Times 20 Sept. 1927: 16.

<sup>104</sup> In 1903, Chamberlain invited Sutherland to serve as president of the Tariff Reform Association. The duke also had a personal financial interest in agricultural protection: he died in possession of more than 1.5 million acres, making him perhaps the largest landowner in Britain. See "Death of the duke of Sutherland: A great landowner," obituary, Times 27 June 1913: 73.

<sup>105</sup> Chaplin represented agriculture on Chamberlain's Tariff Reform Commission. See R. J. Olney, "Chaplin, Henry, first Viscount Chaplin (1840–1923)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004) 20 Apr. 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32363>>.

<sup>106</sup> John F. Beeler, "Colomb, Sir John Charles Ready (1838–1909)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 21 Apr. 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32510>>.

<sup>107</sup> Seton-Karr apparently stumped for the Tariff Reform League in its early months. See Frans Coetzee, For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 1990) 55 and "Fiscal policy: Tariff Reform League," Times 7 Dec. 1904: 7.

<sup>108</sup> Vice Admiral Gerard H. U. Noel commanded the naval reserves and the Home Fleet, which would presumably play primary roles in defending Great Britain from a blockade. In 1904, Noel resigned from the commission; Vice Admiral D. H. Bosanquet replaced him. See "Death of Sir Gerard Noel: A strong hand in Crete," obituary, Times 24 May 1918: 8. T. E. Holland taught international law and diplomacy at Oxford and could advise the commission on Britain's legal commitments to its trading partners. See Richard A. Cosgrove, "Holland, Sir Thomas Erskine (1835–1926)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 26 May 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33944>>. Sir Alfred Bateman, a senior civil servant at the Board of Trade, had helped to negotiate several international trade agreements and could supplement Holland's theoretical perspective with practical experience. See "Sir Alfred Bateman: The old civil service," obituary, Times 8 Aug. 1929: 12. Finally, W. H. Clark, a young civil servant at the Board of Trade, served as the commission's secretary. His enthusiasm for trade both at the time of the commission and later in his career suggest that he probably favored a liberal rather than protectionist solution to the problem of food security. See Peter Lyon, "Clark, Sir William Henry (1876–1952)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 5 June 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32421>>.

In light of the biases of its members, the commission unsurprisingly vindicated free trade and played down the possibility of a food crisis in the event of a war. According to the commission's report, published in August 1905, Britain stocked between seven and seventeen weeks' worth of wheat throughout the year with a nadir in August and a peak in September. In addition, three to seven weeks' supply lay in the holds of merchant ships en route to Britain. At any given time, a fifth of this floating reserve was only a week away from port. At the outbreak of war, Britain would have at least seven weeks' supply of wheat on hand and likely much more. Long before the depletion of those stocks, the combined forces of the fleet and the market would replenish them regardless of an enemy blockade:

We believe it to be beyond the power of any naval force which would be at the disposal of any possible combination against us altogether to prevent the importation of our supplies, while any increase in price would be a considerable stimulus to induce shippers abroad to run the necessary risks.<sup>109</sup>

The globalization of the grain market further complicated the task of a blockading navy. Britain imported its wheat from an ever wider variety of countries, including Argentina, Russia, and the United States.<sup>110</sup> A blockader would have to fight off the Royal Navy while intercepting cargo ships steaming from many different directions. Even then, he would succeed only in alienating Britain's trading partners, some of them military powers in their own right. According to this logic, tariff reform would actually undermine Britain's economic security. On the one hand, the colonies would side with Britain in a war out of loyalty whether the enemy attacked them directly or not. On the other hand, neutral countries by definition would likely stay out of a war unless attacked by one of the belligerents. So, unless he wanted to widen the conflict, a blockader would stop all ships from Britain or its colonies and let those from neutral countries pass. In other words, the more neutral countries with which Britain traded, the less likely that an enemy could impose an effective blockade.

However, even if a blockade would ultimately fail, the commission conceded that food prices would spike temporarily at the outset of a war. The mere threat of a disruption in trade would likely trigger a panic among British consumers, who would rush to stockpile food. As demand surged, so would prices. However, the government could probably restore calm simply by reassuring the public that the country had plenty of food. Over the long-term, prices would increase only slightly due to higher insurance premiums for shipping. In addition, Britain had plenty of slack for belt-tightening. Consumers could manage higher prices by reducing consumption and waste and by substituting cheaper alternatives for expensive foods. For instance, barley, maize, and oats could all take the place of wheat. Even in the middle of a war, the government did not need to interfere with the natural operation of food markets; if it modeled confidence in current and future supplies, Adam Smith's invisible hand would push demand back down to a sustainable level.

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<sup>109</sup> "Food supply in time of war: Report of royal commission," Times 9 Aug. 1905: 9. See also "Food supply in time of war," rev. of The Report of the Royal Commission on Supply of Food and Raw Material in Time of War, Quarterly Review Oct. 1905: 572-598.

<sup>110</sup> This diversification in the sourcing of wheat had developed relatively recently. See Arner 283, 287-288. By contrast, the sourcing of other raw materials too often fell to single countries. See rev. of The Report of the Royal Commission on Supply of Food and Raw Material in Time of War 610.

On the same token, the market would likely frustrate any scheme to build up food supplies during peacetime. When he raised the issue of food security in the Commons in 1897, Seton-Karr posited the construction of a network of granaries as insurance against wartime shortages. In theory, a large reserve of grain would ease public anxiety about the food supply and smooth over any price spikes at the outbreak of a war. If, against all odds, the fleet could not immediately breach an enemy blockade, an emergency stockpile of food would buy Britain time before the onset of real hunger. However, the commission argued that war would disrupt the entire British economy, not just the food sector. An expensive system of granaries would provide little protection against defaulted loans, depreciated currency, lost jobs, and so on.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, granaries posed a conundrum for a free-trading government. On the one hand, it could not fill them without either purchasing large quantities of wheat itself or subsidizing private businesses to do so. After all, what businessman would on his own initiative idle a large amount of a perishable commodity at significant immediate cost with no guarantee of any future profit? On the other hand, government subsidies would likely reduce domestic grain prices and hence the return on investment for private-sector importers. The government might fill its own granaries while importers emptied theirs, leaving the nation as a whole no better off. The commission could only tentatively endorse a small-scale experiment with subsidized rent for privately owned and operated granaries, though it worried that such a scheme would simply encourage bakers and millers to shift their grain stocks into cheaper storage without attracting any additional supplies from abroad.<sup>112</sup>

The report's insouciance about wartime food shortages and firm endorsement of free trade belied the degree of disagreement between the commissioners themselves. Though all seventeen commissioners signed the report, fourteen did so with some reservation. The two most vocal dissenting factions included strange bedfellows and had essentially opposite points of view. The free traders Cunynghame and Wharton and the tariff reformers Sutherland, Chaplin, and Seton-Karr criticized the report as too liberal and naive:

In the event of war between the United Kingdom and one or more of the Great Powers, the rise in the price of bread is certain to be great, and very possibly immense; and for how long a period it may continue no one with any accuracy can foretell. . . . The suffering in consequence among the poor . . . would lead to the danger of pressure being placed upon the Government, and add to their embarrassment at moments of great crisis.<sup>113</sup>

The frightening possibility of military defeat at the hand of hunger demanded a firmer response than the report envisaged. They proposed a mix of protectionist and liberal measures to encourage the stockpiling of grain. The government would impose a temporary tariff on wheat

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<sup>111</sup> Rev. of The Report of the Royal Commission on Supply of Food and Raw Material in Time of War, Economic Journal 609-610.

<sup>112</sup> In lieu of an expensive grain stockpile of dubious benefit, the commission suggested a program of "national indemnity" to offset shippers' elevated wartime risks. In a national "insurance" scheme, shippers would pay premiums to the exchequer and pass the cost on to consumers. By contrast, in the national "indemnity" scheme, shippers would pay no premiums, but the exchequer would still cover any losses due specifically to a war. The costs of shipping and of food would stay low – though, as the commission neglected to mention, taxes and government debt might go up.

<sup>113</sup> "Food supply in time of war: Report of royal commission" 9.

imported into Britain. If that wheat remained in storage for four months, the government would reimburse the importer for the full value of the tariff. If the importer chose to sell his wheat before four months had passed, he would lose his money. Theoretically, this scheme would not distort the market as much as a traditional tariff, but would nevertheless increase grain stocks. By contrast, the imperial federalist Colomb and the free traders Burghclere, Montgomery, Robertson, Street, and Wilson criticized the report as too alarmist, objecting even to the experiment with rent-controlled grain storage. They expected the navy to guarantee adequate supplies of grain even during wartime, so subsidized storage would have no tangible benefit.

For the beleaguered Conservative Party, the report arrived too late to have much effect on the messy split between its free trade and tariff reform contingents. Balfour had succeeded in biasing the commission toward free trade by his remarks on the eve of its formation and by his careful selection of its members. Moreover, he had managed to conceal these machinations behind a veil of bipartisanship. If the commission had submitted its report in 1903, it may have assisted Balfour in managing the dispute over tariff reform. However, by that summer, Balfour's neutrality threatened to alienate both Chamberlain and Ritchie. In August, Balfour attempted to compromise between the two by proposing retaliatory tariffs against protectionist trade partners without favoring Britain's self-governing colonies.<sup>114</sup> He circulated a paper arguing the case for retaliation with apparent sincerity, but without convincing Ritchie or Chamberlain, both of whom resigned from the cabinet in early September.<sup>115</sup> On 6 October, Chamberlain inaugurated an election-style campaign to win over the voters to imperial preference with a speech before a packed St. Andrew's Hall in Glasgow. The Unionist Free Food League followed suit on 24 November at the Queen's Hall in London with Ritchie on the platform. The schism within the Conservative Party at large extended to the members of the food security commission: Sutherland became the first president of the Tariff Reform League in July with Chaplin and Seton-Karr joining him as members; Balfour of Burleigh resigned as secretary for Scotland in sympathy with Ritchie.

As Balfour had correctly anticipated, food immediately came to dominate the public debate about tariff reform. Chamberlain himself emphasized that a customs union would cultivate closer cultural and political ties between the colonies and their mother country.<sup>116</sup> In his speech in Glasgow, he waxed most eloquent in connecting economic nitty-gritty with imperial grandeur:

I have come here as a man of business, I have appealed to the employers and the employed alike in this great city. I have endeavoured to point out to them that

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<sup>114</sup> Arthur James Balfour, Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade (London: Longmans, Green 1903) 9, 23 and "Mr. Balfour on 'insular free trade,'" Times 16 Sept. 1903: 5.

<sup>115</sup> Though the paper had the predominantly political purpose of striking a compromise between Chamberlain and Ritchie, Balfour nevertheless dealt earnestly with the underlying economic issues. As a vice president of the Royal Economic Society, Balfour had a well informed interest in economics. See Coats 191-193. The Times announced Chamberlain and Ritchie's resignations on 18 September. See Zebel 155-156 and "The cabinet: Resignation of Mr. Chamberlain, Mr. Ritchie, and Lord George Hamilton," Times 18 Sept. 1903: 7-8.

<sup>116</sup> Andrew S. Thompson has contended that Chamberlain and the Tariff Reform League prioritized imperial unity over any economic benefits that might accrue from higher tariffs. See Andrew S. Thompson, "Tariff reform: An imperial strategy, 1903-1913," Historical Journal 40.4 (Dec. 1997): 1037-1038.

their trade, their wages, all depend on the maintenance of this Colonial trade. . . . But now I . . . appeal to something higher, which I believe is in your hearts as it is in mine. I appeal to you as fellow-citizens of the greatest Empire that the world has ever known; . . . I say to you that all that is best in our present life, best in this Britain of ours, all of which we have the right to be most proud, is due to the fact that we are not only sons of Britain, but we are sons of Empire. . . . Others have founded the Empire; it is yours to build firmly and permanently the great edifice of which others have laid the foundation.<sup>117</sup>

However, Chamberlain may not have fully appreciated the complicated economic and political implications of tightening the bonds between Britain and its empire.<sup>118</sup> An imperial customs union like he proposed would require the exchange of equivalent trade preferences between the mother country and its colonies. Of course, Britain wanted the colonies to prefer its finished goods, but what could it give to them in return? A preference for industrial feedstock would likely do more harm than good to British manufacturers who imported much of their cotton from the United States and their iron ore from Europe. A preference for food would likely increase the cost of living for the poor. At the same time, though, a duty on foreign grain and meat would win Chamberlain the allegiance of British farmers. A compensatory reduction in duties on cocoa, coffee, sugar, and tea could offset any negative effects on the poor. Caught between irking business and labor, Chamberlain chose the latter even though sixty years of anti-corn law orthodoxy stood in his way.

Predictably, the plan drew swift condemnation even from within Chamberlain's own political party specifically because it threatened to increase the cost of food. Balfour remarked that any talk of food taxes, no matter how articulate, immediately called to mind the hunger of the 1830s and 1840s:

The memory of the misery endured by our working classes . . . in the days when wheat was at 70s., 80s., or 100s. a quarter, has become associated . . . with the question of the abolition of the corn tax. It has burnt into the historic imagination of the people. It cannot be eliminated by the best logic, the most conclusive reasoning, or the most eloquent speeches.

In a speech for the Unionist Free Food League, the duke of Devonshire did not reject out of hand a reform of fiscal policy that included higher duties on some foreign imports. Nevertheless, he promised "to resist to the best of his ability the imposition of any protective taxes on the food of the people." Like Balfour, Devonshire objected not only on economic, but also on political grounds, noting the Liberals' glee at Chamberlain's proposal:

There is nothing which they would like better than an election which should turn on the question of free trade versus protection, of free imports versus protective tariffs, and, above all, of free food against taxed food.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> "Mr. Chamberlain's campaign: The meeting in St. Andrew's Hall," *Times* 7 Oct. 1903: 4-5.

<sup>118</sup> According to Coats, Chamberlain privately confessed a lack of knowledge in economics and leaned heavily on two advisors, W. A. S. Hewins of the London School of Economics and W. J. Ashley of the University of Birmingham. At the same time, Chamberlain would ignore Hewins and Ashley's advice if it seemed too abstract or complicated for his primarily working-class audiences. See Coats, especially 187-190.

<sup>119</sup> "Free Food League: Meeting in Queen's Hall: Speeches by the duke of Devonshire and Lord Goschen," *Times* 25 Nov. 1903: 10.

As Devonshire predicted, Liberals quickly consolidated behind a policy of unrestricted importation of food. Liberal hatchet men dismissed Chamberlain's sincere, but jingoistic paeans to empire as disingenuous. On the same evening that Devonshire spoke in the Queen's Hall, H. H. Asquith warned the Devon Liberal Federation against "fallacies" dressed in the "guise of patriotic or Imperial sentiment" that threatened to "[undermine] the very foundations of our national wealth and strength."<sup>120</sup> Three weeks later at a smaller meeting in Fife, Asquith denounced Chamberlain's patriotism as "narrow, insular, and perverted."<sup>121</sup> In a speech near Birmingham, the Liberal stalwart Lord Carrington marveled that a supposedly "disinterested patriot" would cap a career of "wrecking" political parties by proposing to "raid . . . the food cupboards of the poorest of the very poor."<sup>122</sup> Soon thereafter, the Unwins published their account of rural English life in the 1840s.<sup>123</sup> Not only did the book sell well, it also helped to revive one of the most effective rhetorical devices of the original anti-corn law campaign: the "great" loaf of free trade and the "little" one of protection.<sup>124</sup> When Balfour finally called an election in December 1905, the Liberals campaigned in large part on a contrast between these "big and little loaves."

### In the cradle of free trade

After the polls had closed in February 1906, the Conservatives had not simply lost – they had suffered among the greatest reversals in electoral fortunes in British political history. The voters returned 401 Liberals against 157 Conservatives and Unionists. The historian John Ramsden has attributed the Conservatives' defeat to a failure of party organization.<sup>125</sup> E. H. H. Green has countered that their late nineteenth-century electoral success depended on disarray among the Liberals and on low voter turnout, the latter achieved by manipulating registration rolls in urban districts and by timing elections to coincide with the fall harvest.<sup>126</sup> By 1906, the Liberals had recovered from the setback of the Home Rule crisis while the Taff Vale decision had energized the working-class electorate, threatening the largely illusory Conservative hegemony. Both interpretations emphasize the structural deficiencies of the Conservative Party and its electoral coalition in 1906. However, the campaign played out in the press not as a contest between party agents, but as one between ideas and personalities. The publisher John

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<sup>120</sup> "Mr. Asquith at Barnstaple," Times 25 Nov. 1903: 11.

<sup>121</sup> "Mr. Asquith in Fife," Times 14 Oct. 1903: 5.

<sup>122</sup> "Fiscal policy," Times 8 Oct. 1903: 4. Carrington spoke in Brierley Hill, a town west of Birmingham.

<sup>123</sup> The Hungry Forties: Life under the Bread Tax, ed. Jane Cobden Unwin (London: Unwin, 1904) 21-22.

<sup>124</sup> Hungry Forties 14-15; see also A. C. Howe, "Unwin, (Emma) Jane Catherine Cobden (1851–1947)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 21 June 2006 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/38683>>. As early as September 1903, Liberals festooned a rally for by-elections in Accrington and Sowerby with caricatures of their own "big loaf" and of Balfour and Chamberlain's "little" one. See "Fiscal policy," Times 1 Oct. 1903: 5.

<sup>125</sup> See John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin: 1902-1940 (London: Longman, 1978).

<sup>126</sup> At harvest time, many agricultural laborers would not have the opportunity to go to the polls while their employers would.



Murray neatly framed the central question of the election in an advertisement in the Times: "Do you know all about the respective merits of Free Trade and Tariff Reform [sic]?"<sup>127</sup>

Whatever the structural factors influencing the election results behind the scenes, the voters seemed to weigh the cost of food particularly heavily in their calculations. The staunchly Conservative Times bitterly lamented the election results, but nevertheless admitted the conventional wisdom that working-class voters cleaved to cheap food:

It has always been understood that in the cradle of free trade the Cobdenite views . . . are somewhat rigidly adhered to. Cheap food in order that labour may be cheap is still the motto of the employers, and cheap food lest employment be driven away has become the motto of the workmen. . . . Alarm at the mere possibility that a small duty upon corn may raise the price of bread is stronger than all Mr. Chamberlain's economic or Imperial [sic] arguments.<sup>128</sup>

Chamberlain intended tariff reform to broaden the Conservative Party's electoral base by appealing to the working class with higher wages and stable employment. Ironically, Balfour with his aristocratic sophistication appeared to judge the popular mood more accurately than Chamberlain with his man-in-the-street sensibility.

At the same time, Balfour may have misread the fundamental causes of the electorate's attachment to cheap food. He attributed it to unpleasant memories of the hard times of the past – as if in 1905 hunger existed primarily in the mind. However, as contemporary social scientists had discovered, similar conditions still prevailed within a few minutes' walk of Parliament itself. Admittedly, few of the very poor actually voted; even if they qualified, they may not have had the wherewithal to register properly. Yet many working-class men who did vote lived frighteningly close to the poverty line. Growing up in a Salford slum, the memoirist Robert Roberts had enough to eat himself, but he encountered hunger every day in his classmates at school and in the customers at his parents' shop.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, even families like his could easily find themselves in the same predicament due to sheer bad luck – perhaps an illness or injury to the principal wage-earner. In these precarious circumstances, why would the Roberts family or others like them trade the certainty of cheap food for the abstraction of imperial unity? True, Chamberlain did promise to offset the higher cost of food with other tax cuts and with additional social spending. However, this budgetary slight-of-hand lacked the simple rhetorical power of the Liberals' little and big loaves. Also, the promise of more social spending sounded less than sincere in the mouth of a tariff reformer who wanted to raise the cost of living.

The Conservatives learned the lessons of 1906 slowly, but did in the end reconcile themselves to free trade in food. According to Neal Blewett, Chamberlain's point of view prevailed only between 1906 and 1910. By co-opting local party associations and, ultimately,

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<sup>127</sup> The Empire and the Century, ed. C. S. Goldman, advertisement, Times 15 Jan. 1906: 12. A Conservative in politics, Murray earned his reputation in business by editing and publishing Edward Gibbon's Autobiography and the correspondence and journals of Lord Byron. See William Zachs, Peter Isaac, Angus Fraser, and William Lister, "Murray family (per. 1768–1967)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 22 June 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/64907>>.

<sup>128</sup> "The Liberals are fully entitled to the satisfaction," editorial, Times 15 Jan. 1906: 9.

<sup>129</sup> See Robert Roberts, A Ragged Schooling (Manchester, UK: Manchester UP, 1976) and The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century (Manchester, UK: Manchester UP, 1971).

the Conservative Party Central Office, tariff reformers squeezed out most free traders. Unfortunately, this re-alignment of the Conservative establishment continued to rub against the grain of popular opinion. Perhaps public support for tariff reform did increase after 1906, but Chamberlain and his allies overestimated its appeal. The election of January 1910 pitted tariff reform against the Liberals' platform of additional social spending financed by income and land taxes.<sup>130</sup> Again, the Liberals prevailed. Three years later, a new Conservative leader, Andrew Bonar Law, finally conceded the obvious. In a speech at Ashton-Under-Lyne on 16 December 1912, he retreated from the taxation of food:

We do not wish to impose [food duties]. They are not proposed by us for the sake of Protection, and there is not Protection in them. They are proposed solely for the sake of Preference, and if . . . the Colonies do not want them – I will put it far stronger than that, unless the Colonies regard them as essential for Preference – then also the food duties will not be imposed.<sup>131</sup>

The Conservative rank-and-file rushed to embrace this apparent softening on tariff reform. Within a month, the party had removed food taxes completely from its platform.<sup>132</sup>

The elections of 1906 and 1910 underscored both Britain's lack of food security and its surfeit of conventionality. On a local level, many of the poor simply did not have enough to eat. Dieticians and social scientists did quibble about the minutia of gathering and interpreting data, but they agreed in general that the British working class suffered from pervasive undernutrition. Modern historians have verified their findings, although of course some doubt always lingers around the edges of any statistical analysis. On the national level, Britain depended too much on food imports. Though shipments arrived all year round from every part of the globe, no more than four months' worth of grain was in storage at any given time. Without years of lead time to restore acres of pasture to tillage, British farmers could not compensate for a deep or long-term shortfall in imports. Ironically, the national problem may have helped to attenuate the local one as cheap foreign grain meant lower food prices and fuller bellies to the poor. However, in solving both problems, Britons stuck to conventional wisdom. New liberalism or Fabian socialism might have appealed to the intellectual elite, but old-fashioned Victorian individualism was still the dominant paradigm for relieving poverty. Some politicians may have favored agricultural protection or government-funded grain storage, but the Royal Commission on Supply of Food trusted in old-fashioned free trade to feed the country, even during a war. Voters preferred the version of food insecurity that they knew – free trade – to one that they did not – tariff reform.

The reluctance to break with traditional economic and moral values in the decade before the First World War did not necessarily mean that Britons were ignoring the food insecurity around them. Admittedly, the government did little more to protect the food supply or to alleviate hunger than it ever had. The Admiralty and War Office modeled their economic strategy on the advice of the Royal Commission on Supply of Food. According to William Beveridge, Britain's so-called "war book" included only a single instruction related to food in

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<sup>130</sup> See Blewett, especially 120-124. See also Alan Sykes, "The Confederacy and the purge of the Unionist free traders, 1906-1910," *Historical Journal* 18.2 (June 1975): 349-366.

<sup>131</sup> "Tariff reform and food duties: Mr. Bonar Law's policy," *Times* 17 Dec. 1912: 8.

<sup>132</sup> "Unionist policy: A party memorial to Mr. Bonar Law," *Times* 9 Jan. 1913: 6; "Mr. Bonar Law and his party: Reply to the memorial," *Times* 15 Jan. 1913: 7.

August 1914 – that labor exchanges should assess retail prices in their vicinities.<sup>133</sup> The government fed the hungry directly only in the workhouse or through its spotty, means-tested, locally-funded school meals program. However, in the spirit of Victorian voluntarism, private citizens did take on the myriad of problems associated with food. Like the government and the electorate, the prewar food reform movement largely respected the liberal consensus on economics and philanthropy, though it did dabble some in collectivism. At the same time, it made the most of the young science of nutrition. This combination of old values and new knowledge inspired the wartime food economy campaign.

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<sup>133</sup> Beveridge 5.

## 2. The Importance of Diet in the Life of the Nation

‘Next time,’ she said to Mr Wilcox, ‘you shall come to lunch with me at Mr Eustace Miles’s.’

‘With pleasure.’

‘No, you’d hate it,’ she said, pushing her glass towards him for some more cider. ‘It’s all proteids and body-buildings, and people coming up to you and beg pardon, but you have such a beautiful aura.’<sup>1</sup>

E. M. Forster’s mockery of Eustace Miles’s Restaurant contained a kernel of truth. Founded in 1906 by the popular author and tennis champion, the restaurant’s bill of fare included not only fine vegetarian cuisine, but also programs in mental, physical, and spiritual training. By the publication of Howards End in 1910, the restaurant near Charing Cross had grown into the unofficial headquarters for an eccentric collection of health buffs, theosophists, and vegetarians among whom Forster’s conventional Mr. Wilcox would have felt out of place.<sup>2</sup> However, even if vegetarianism had yet to enter the mainstream, it had modeled how a hungry country with staunchly liberal values could feed itself better. In the mid-nineteenth century, early vegetarians founded several associations and societies to promote themselves and their ideas about healthy living. One meat-eater at a time, they would eventually convert all of British society to the gospel of lentils and lettuce. In other words, they aimed to empower individuals with the knowledge to reform themselves, much as Samuel Smiles envisioned in Self-Help.

As Eustace Miles would have admitted, vegetarianism had largely failed either to build bodies or to burnish auras in the prewar period. But, would its methods work better for the more charitable purpose of alleviating hunger among Britain’s poor? The Bread and Food Reform League and Miles’s own National Food Reform Association set out to answer this question. Though they both had connections to vegetarianism, neither openly opposed meat-eating out of respect for the typical Briton’s gastronomic preferences. Rather, they espoused modest dietary modifications that would reduce food expenditures, improve nutrition, and lift the poor out of food insecurity. Their ideas also resonated with the middle class in its pursuit of a genteel lifestyle on a modest budget. Unfortunately, food reform faced a plethora of problems ranging from the coarseness of commercially-ground whole-wheat flour to the apparent intransigence of working-class housewives. Moreover, the gradual rise of collectivism threatened – but certainly did not displace – food reform’s Victorian underpinnings. In the teeth of these challenges, food reform succeeded primarily in developing a vocabulary and a set of strategies for marshaling the household economy in the service of the nation.

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<sup>1</sup> E. M. Forster, Howards End (London: Penguin, 2000) 131; as quoted in Brigid Allen, “Miles, Eustace Hamilton (1868–1948),” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004) 6 Jan. 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50457>>.

<sup>2</sup> Allen, “Miles, Eustace Hamilton (1868–1948).”

### The staff of life

Through the early 1800s, Britons had eaten a wide assortment of biscuits, breads, and porridges prepared from different grains according to local tastes.<sup>3</sup> However, by 1850, most of these traditional starches had disappeared, supplanted by industrially baked white, wheaten bread. Even with the introduction of patent wholegrain varieties in the second half of the nineteenth century, white bread still accounted for 95 percent of sales by weight in 1900.<sup>4</sup> This fundamental change in the pattern of bread consumption coincided with the rise of social science and the discovery of the poverty and hunger lurking in Britain's urban slums and rural villages.

May Yates, the founder of the Bread and Food Reform League (BFRL), interpreted this correlation as causation. She conformed to many of the stereotypes of middle-class do-gooders of the late Victorian era.<sup>5</sup> The unmarried daughter of a Manchester businessman, she embarked on a career as a dilettante artist. Simultaneously, she joined the Ladies' Sanitary Association, through which she gained firsthand knowledge of the grim realities of a working-class existence in industrial Britain.<sup>6</sup> On a trip to Sicily, she fancied that the local peasants seemed much healthier and stronger than the proletarians of Manchester. She made similar observations of the "fellaheen" that worked at one of her father's factories in Egypt. Yates sought the cause of this health disparity in Mediterranean bread, the earthy brown richness of which contrasted so starkly with the pasty white British variety.<sup>7</sup> To remake the sickly English working class in the image of the hardy Mediterranean peasantry, Yates proposed to turn back the rising tide of white bread. She founded the Bread Reform League in 1880 – it added "food" to its name in 1886 – and abandoned watercolors for speaking engagements and international conferences.

Fortuitously, Yates managed to enlist the support of two of the most prominent philanthropists of the day, an indication of her own appeal and that of her self-appointed mission. Samuel Morley, a textile manufacturer and Liberal MP, served as the league's first president. Morley's sympathy for the hungry and the poor dated back at least to his participation in the anti-corn law campaign. As an MP, he fought against state-funded education and for disestablishment of the Church of England. However, Morley tempered his radicalism with generosity and integrity. He ran clean, well-lit mills and paid high wages and generous pensions for retired workers, all while donating as much as £20,000 to £30,000 to charities each year.<sup>8</sup> As one of the league's vice presidents, the Earl of Shaftesbury played the part of Morley's Conservative foil. A committed evangelical Christian, Shaftesbury cut his teeth in Parliament on

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<sup>3</sup> According to E. J. T. Collins, perhaps 40 to 45 percent of Britons subsisted on grains other than wheat in 1800. See E. J. T. Collins, "Dietary change and cereal consumption in Britain in the nineteenth century," *Agricultural History Review* 23.2 (1975) 105.

<sup>4</sup> E. J. T. Collins, "The 'consumer revolution' and the growth of factory foods: Changing patterns of bread and cereal-eating in Britain in the twentieth century," *The Making of the Modern British Diet*, ed. Derek Oddy and Derek Miller (London: Croom Helm, 1976) 26-29.

<sup>5</sup> Yates's birth name was Mary Ann Yates Corkling.

<sup>6</sup> James Gregory, "Corkling, Mary Ann Yates (1850–1938)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004) 4 Jan. 2007 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/74770>>.

<sup>7</sup> See Bread and Food Reform League, *Bread of Olden Days and Fifty Years of Bread Reform* (Norwich, UK: Jarrold, 1930).

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Parry, "Morley, Samuel (1809-1886)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004) 5 Oct. 2006 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19291>>.

legislation to protect industrial laborers and the mentally ill. Like Morley, he donated generously to charity, especially through the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes and the Ragged School Union, which he founded in 1844.<sup>9</sup> Morley and Shaftesbury lent instant credibility to Yates and the BFRL, which soon enjoyed the patronage of twenty-five dames and peeresses. Moreover, their participation in the league testifies to the growing moral and political weight of the food problem – even a relative unknown like May Yates could enlist the support of prominent politicians and socialites in attempting to fight it.

Though Yates herself had little formal scientific education, the BFRL based its claims on some of the best contemporary dietetics and economics. With the exception of Shaftesbury, its panel of vice presidents consisted of doctors and surgeons, including several fellows of the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of Surgeons, and the Royal Society. Other physicians and scientists such as Ray Lankester, Thomas Henry Huxley, Erasmus Wilson, and B. W. Richardson voiced their support.<sup>10</sup> Initially, the league depended on qualitative evidence to prove brown bread's superior nutritional value. Its first annual report touted brown bread as a "great stimulant to the digestive organs" and as a cheap source of energy. Supposedly, the typical laborer could do more work on a given amount of brown than of white bread.<sup>11</sup> By the turn of the century, the league could defend its claims with grains of ash or lime and numbers of pence.<sup>12</sup> While brown and white breads had similar numbers of calories, only the former had significant amounts of trace mineral nutrients like calcium, fluorine, iron, and phosphorus.<sup>13</sup> By obtaining these nutrients from bread, working-class families had to buy fewer expensive foods like cheese or meat and could cut daily expenditures on food from 7d. to 4d. per head.<sup>14</sup>

Initially, the BFRL tried to spread its message by persuasion alone. To maintain the semblance of impartiality, it eschewed all commercial ties, never recommending any particular baker or miller. Moreover, it rejected the possibility of government regulation or subsidization to encourage brown over white bread. Education, enterprise and philanthropy would suffice:

The Council [of the league] are convinced that they acted wisely in devoting their efforts simply to teaching [sic] the value of Wheat-Meal Bread, and trusting that their efforts would create the demand which inevitably produces the proper supply. . . . When the public realise the necessity of supplying the people with the

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<sup>9</sup> Shaftesbury's founded the Ragged School Union only after he failed to secure legislation providing for the education of child factory workers. See John Wolfe, "Cooper, Anthony Ashley – seventh earl of Shaftesbury (1801-1885)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004) 8 Oct. 2006 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6210>>.

<sup>10</sup> Bread Reform League, Report 1882 (London, 1883) 1; Bread and Food Reform League, Report of the Bread and Food Reform League and the Educational Health and Food Campaign (London, 1914) 1.

<sup>11</sup> Report 1882 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> A grain is a unit of weight equal to 0.0023 ounce.

<sup>13</sup> Bread and Food Reform League, Report of the Bread and Food Reform League and the Educational Health and Food Campaign (London, 1910) 11-12. Brown bread contained more than four times as much iron and phosphorus as white bread. Moreover, the bran in wholegrain flour contained traces of calcium and fluorine.

<sup>14</sup> Bread and Food Reform League, Report of the Meeting to Inaugurate an Educational Health and Food Campaign, Held Wednesday, June 26th, 1907, at the Mansion House under the Patronage of H.R.H. the Princess Christian 12.

healthiest and most nourishing form of bread, the Council feel certain that there is sufficient philanthropic enterprise in England to organise and carry out a plan for the reliable supply of standard Wheat-Meal and [sic] Bread.<sup>15</sup>

In its first two years, the league staged two large meetings in Kensington and another at the Mansion House. It sold 24,000 pamphlets and distributed another 250,000 leaflets free of charge. In 1881 alone, Yates gave free public lectures in seventeen cities and towns from London to Liverpool and presented scholarly papers at four conferences. She received sixteen other invitations to speak that year, but could not honor them due to poor health. During Yates's illness, the league's supporters distributed its literature at seven more conferences or exhibitions.<sup>16</sup> From the beginning, Yates depended mostly on her own indefatigability and ran the league on a relatively modest budget. From August 1880 to December 1882, she raised just £425 4s. 8d., broken down into £333 3s. in donations and subscriptions and £92 1s. 8d. in sales and admission fees.<sup>17</sup>

In its first two decades, the league expanded its remit beyond bread to other foods and forged connections with other reform movements. In 1886, it reorganized itself as the Bread and Food Reform League to reflect the growing scope of its interests.<sup>18</sup> While the superiority of brown over white bread remained the league's primary preoccupation, it also began to promote other economical and healthful foods such as fruit, legumes, oatmeal, and vegetables. At the same time, its founder gravitated ever closer to vegetarianism. In 1890, Yates became the organizing secretary of the London Vegetarian Society, though she had not yet gone entirely meatless herself.<sup>19</sup> In the same year, the society joined with the league in the Educational Food Fund, which provided free meals of vegetarian soup and brown bread to children in London's board schools.<sup>20</sup> In both Britain and the United States, vegetarianism had close ties to temperance, which soon insinuated itself into the BFRL's mission as well:

The more general use of such staple foods as wheat-meal, oatmeal, lentils, peas, haricot beans, &c., combined with a larger consumption of fruit and green vegetables [sic] would promote the health of all classes of society [sic], and diminish the craving for alcoholic stimulants and narcotics arising from insufficient and innutritious diet.<sup>21</sup>

The logic of food reform and of temperance dovetailed neatly: the former promised domestic economy and good health, both of which alcohol threatened to destroy. In 1895, Yates formalized the alliance between the two movements by helping to establish the World Women's Christian Temperance Union's Food Reform Department.<sup>22</sup> Yates's bridge-building culminated in the Educational Health and Food Campaign, which she inaugurated in 1907. Under the

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<sup>15</sup> Report 1882 6, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Report 1882 13-14.

<sup>17</sup> Report 1882 29-31.

<sup>18</sup> Bread of Olden Days 13-14.

<sup>19</sup> Gregory, "Corkling, Mary Ann Yates (1850–1938)."

<sup>20</sup> Bread of Olden Days 19.

<sup>21</sup> Educational Food Fund, The Second Annual Report of the Educational Food Fund and Children's Dinners (London, 1891) 2.

<sup>22</sup> Gregory, "Corkling, Mary Ann Yates (1850–1938)" and Bread of Olden Days 20.

patronage of Princess Christian, the campaign involved a wide range of civic organizations from the British Medical Association to the Working Men's Club and Institute Union.<sup>23</sup>

As its interests and affiliations widened, so did the BFRL's methods, which began to reflect the few rays of collectivism peaking around the edges of the individualist monolith. For instance, the Educational Food Fund – the BFRL's joint venture with the London Vegetarian Society – gave up commercial neutrality and directly engaged in the food trade, selling 24,871 dinners at ½d. each at the Alma and East Lane board schools. Moreover, the fund bought all the ingredients for its dinners from local merchants to encourage them to stock healthful foods.<sup>24</sup> To justify this new approach, the league cited the increasing popular anxiety about the "physical and moral degradation into which such large numbers of our population are sinking."<sup>25</sup> At the inauguration of the Educational Health and Food Campaign, Yates linked infant mortality and poor public health directly to the fate of the empire itself:

Statesmen, who guide imperial destinies, may well ask themselves what guarantee there is for the permanence of the race or the development of our great Empire, when children are dying by thousands, and thousands more are doomed to live in misery and pain.<sup>26</sup>

With the stakes escalating from the parochial to the imperial, the BFRL contemplated legislation as a more certain remedy for poor diet than persuasion. The Educational Food and Health Campaign lobbied legislators to enact laws "to check the adulteration and sophistication of food, at present rampant" and "to establish a standard of value" for bread.<sup>27</sup> Though the league defined it vaguely, standardization meant setting a minimum level of "nutritive value" for bread sold publicly. In the spirit of conciliation, the league's petition to Parliament backed away from its typically unqualified enthusiasm for whole-meal bread and suggested instead that the so-called "old-fashioned household" variety become the standard. Household bread was baked from semi-refined flour that retained at least some of the trace nutrients in the original grain and, perhaps, would better suit the tastes of typical Britons.

In reforming the British diet, the BFRL's greatest challenge lay in a self-reinforcing market dysfunction. In the interest of healthy digestion, the league recommended milling whole-meal flour finely enough that it could pass through an eighteen-mesh wire sieve. However, little of the whole-meal bread or flour for sale in Britain measured up to this benchmark. In a meeting the league held in 1881, several working-class Londoners complained that even though they liked brown bread, its availability and quality were variable and its cost too high. In its annual report the next year, the league admitted that "masses of the people cannot possibly be influenced until the Wheat-Meal Bread [sic] is sold at a fair price, instead of being treated as a fancy article."<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, the most successful whole-meal flour company – Hovis – marketed itself specifically to the wealthy, which reinforced the popular perception of brown

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<sup>23</sup> The British Women's Patriotic League, Food Education Society, National Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis, National Council of Women, National League for Health, Maternity and Child Welfare, London Trades' Council, People's League of Health, Trades Union Congress, and Women's Co-operative Guild also participated. Refer to *Bread of Olden Days* 21.

<sup>24</sup> *The Second Annual Report of the Educational Food Fund* 5-6.

<sup>25</sup> *The Second Annual Report of the Educational Food Fund* 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Report of the Meeting to Inaugurate an Educational Health and Food Campaign* 9.

<sup>27</sup> *Report of the Meeting to Inaugurate an Educational Health and Food Campaign* 11.

<sup>28</sup> *Report 1882* 19-20.



bread as "fancy." Before the First World War, bakers with a working-class clientele carried either a coarse imitation of Hovis at unaffordable prices or no brown bread at all. In 1911, high prices and short supply conspired to thwart a public relations windfall for the league. Inspired by Sir Oswald Mosley's experiments with his own diet, the Daily Mail briefly and suddenly advocated the health benefits of household bread, exciting a surge in demand for it among its readers. With no stocks of suitable flour, bakers resorted instead to adulteration and substitution with the predictable results of tarnishing the reputation of household bread and driving demand back down.<sup>29</sup> A pattern emerged in which the limited quantity and quality of the brown bread supply compelled most Britons to choose white instead. In turn, low demand for brown bread left bakers with little incentive to increase its supply. Eventually, consumers developed a deep-seated mistrust of brown bread and a corresponding preference for white, neither of which would change over the subsequent century despite the best efforts of the BFRL, other private-sector organizations, and the British government itself. Even Hovis never achieved a market share greater than 5 percent.<sup>30</sup>

For all the challenges it faced, whether ideological or economic, the BFRL remained more or less committed to its original vision of reforming the British diet through education. The Educational Food Fund of the 1890s sought not only to feed schoolchildren, but also vicariously to instruct parents in the fundamentals of a healthful diet. Like many Victorian philanthropic enterprises, the fund worried that giving food away for free would encourage irresponsibility and injure self-respect, hence its insistence on charging a halfpenny for each meal.<sup>31</sup> Almost two decades later, the Educational Food and Health Campaign still cited "ignorance about the laws of hygiene and diet" as its greatest enemy. Throughout her career, May Yates devoted herself to reading papers at conferences and delivering public lectures, spending relatively little energy and time lobbying legislators.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, its association with vegetarianism aside, the league continued to proclaim that it did not advocate "any special system of diet" right up to the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>33</sup>

### Rearing an imperial race

By the turn of the century, the BFRL had made little progress in slowing the apparent deterioration in the quality of the British diet. The dominance of white bread had not waned, and per capita consumption of meat had increased from 109.8 to 132.1 pounds between 1880 and

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<sup>29</sup> Report 1914 18-19; see also "The wholemeal bread experiments," Times 14 Jan. 1911: 10.

<sup>30</sup> E. J. T. Collins, "The 'consumer revolution,'" 29-31.

<sup>31</sup> Educational Food Fund, The Second Annual Report of the Educational Food Fund and Children's Dinners 6.

<sup>32</sup> According to the leagues annual report for 1908, Yates attended the International Congress on School Hygiene, the National Conference on Infantile Mortality, the Royal Institute of Public Health Congress, and the annual council of the British Women's Temperance Association. She lectured in Oxford, Bournemouth, Clapton, Beccles, Colchester, Wimbledon, Hackney, Stratford, Forest Gate, and Bethnal Green, among other locations. See the Bread and Food Reform League, Report of the Bread and Food Reform League and the Educational Health and Food Campaign (London, 1908) 10-11.

<sup>33</sup> Report 1914 5.

1900.<sup>34</sup> With so many politicians, scientists, and socialists lined up behind it, how had food reform failed to win over the general public? The iconic vegetarian Eustace Miles found the answer not in economics – where, in the case of bread, it probably resided – and instead in public relations. He argued that the man in the street overlooked the peeresses and physicians in the background of the movement and focused instead on the cranks at its forefront. His book Failures of Vegetarianism, published in 1902, lamented that custom had lulled most Britons into eating a diet rich in meat, but poor in grains and vegetables. Unaware of the "true" reason for their dietary habits, they fell back on old lies about the alleged health benefits of animal foods and deficiencies of vegetable ones. The "intoxicating" effect of meat reinforced these rationalizations.<sup>35</sup> Vegetarians had attempted to break this cycle, but their own eccentricities had overshadowed their message:

'Vegetarianism' may try to explain its real meaning by alluding to the aim of the Society as stated in the 'Vegetarian' publications. But the outside public does not judge by these: it does not read these – that public judges 'Vegetarianism' by the most prominent 'Vegetarians.' These are not necessarily the successes, but they are the most influential exponents of 'Vegetarianism.'<sup>36</sup>

In the popular imagination, vegetarians were "anæmic and peevish faddists."<sup>37</sup> Despite their own chronic fatigue, indigestion, and other ailments, they nevertheless pronounced on matters of diet with a certainty and rigidity that belied the real state of scientific knowledge.<sup>38</sup> In fact, much of dietetics and physiology remained utterly mysterious and vegetarianism pursued ignorantly or inflexibly could actually harm health.<sup>39</sup>

To rescue vegetarianism from itself, Miles proposed revising its lexicon and softening its dogmatism. The antics of cranky vegetarians like the British physician Anna Kingsford or the American preacher Sylvester Graham had literally given vegetarianism a bad name. Moreover, the word itself suggested a diet composed solely of vegetables when most vegetarians ate a wider range of foods that included eggs, grains, and nuts. Even the famous Robert Hutchison left non-vegetable foods out of the description of vegetarianism in his seminal dietetics textbook.<sup>40</sup> In light of these semantic difficulties, Miles wanted to drop the term "vegetarianism" altogether and replace it with "simpler foods."<sup>41</sup> To avoid tainting the new name with old negative

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<sup>34</sup> Forrest Capie and Richard Perren, "The British market for meat 1850-1914," Agricultural History 54.4 (Oct. 1980): 504. Though food reformers themselves may not have known the precise statistics for consumption of meat, they could hardly mistake that it remained a fixture of the national diet.

<sup>35</sup> Eustace Miles, Failures of Vegetarianism (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1902) 26-27.

<sup>36</sup> Miles 29.

<sup>37</sup> Miles 28.

<sup>38</sup> Miles 57.

<sup>39</sup> Miles 56-57, 128-129.

<sup>40</sup> Miles 36-37, 111; see also Robert Hutchison, Food and the Principles of Dietetics (New York: William Wood, 1902) 167-172. Hutchison did distinguish between so-called "consistent vegetarians" who avoided all animal foods and those who drank milk and ate eggs. Though the majority of his analysis did focus on the former, he at least recognized the existence of the latter and commended their attenuated form of vegetarianism as physiologically sound, especially for those suffering from gout.

<sup>41</sup> Miles 7-8.

connotations, erstwhile vegetarians would have to downplay their false confidence and reassess themselves more honestly:

"Truth saves any cause", and . . . if you cannot speak the truth without throwing doubts on the perfection of the cause, then that cause has something wrong about it.<sup>42</sup>

The public already knew that fad diets did not always work, so why should food reformers pretend otherwise? To earn back their credibility, they would have to open themselves to criticism and experimentation. Rather than prescribing the same bland diet for everyone, they would have to facilitate the individual's own search for the foods that best met his unique needs and tastes. They would have to formulate their advice as questions rather than as imperatives. They would have to loosen up their puritanical disposition with a little fun, perhaps by organizing parlor games or outdoor sports around the theme of nutrition.<sup>43</sup> Revitalized by honesty, flexibility, and fun, food reform would finally succeed in rallying British public opinion to its side.

Six years after the publication of his book, Miles expanded his vision of food reform to include public service. Failures of Vegetarianism had dealt with diet purely as an individual prerogative and had more or less ignored Britain's many social problems. However, after the election of 1906, Miles found himself more attuned to the moral and political resonance of food. In February 1908, he founded the National Food Reform Association to purge the noxious brew of extravagance on the one hand and poverty on the other that had poisoned the country. At the formative meeting in London, Miles asked those in attendance to imagine a foreigner from the remote reaches of the Orient visiting Britain for the first time:

He would be struck with the advertisements of pills and medicines, then with the number of hospitals and their appeals, the asylums, the rate of infant mortality, the drunkenness and crime, the cruelty to children and to animals, the prevalent luxury, and lastly the general overeating and waste. If he sought an explanation of these matters, might he not find it in the ignorance pervading all classes upon the subject of dietetics, with its many widespread ramifications?<sup>44</sup>

To remedy this general ignorance of nutrition, the newly-founded NFRA would step back from old ethical and scientific strictures in favor of soft populist enticements. Indeed, the food reform of the past had appealed mostly to the already converted rather than to the fresh blood it needed to sustain itself. More importantly in Miles' mind, the membership of the NFRA would defy the stereotype of the anemic, peevish vegetarian.<sup>45</sup> At its founding, the association had only two doctors and one fellow of the Royal Society among its thirty-six vice presidents.<sup>46</sup> Its committee members and officers included Miles himself, Neville Lytton, the son of a peer and a well-known artist and tennis champion, Charles Stewart Rolls, the co-founder of Rolls-Royce and an

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<sup>42</sup> Miles 63.

<sup>43</sup> Miles 131-132.

<sup>44</sup> National Food Reform Association, Reasons for Food Reform: An Account of a Private Meeting Held at 54 Mount Street, Grosvenor Square, London, February 26th, 1908, to Hear Proposals for a New Departure in the Movement Towards a More Rational and Humane Diet (London, 1910) 8.

<sup>45</sup> "Reasons for food reform" 9.

<sup>46</sup> By contrast, eight doctors and eight fellows of the Royal Society were vice presidents of the BFRL at the same time in its organizational history.

automobile and bicycle racing champion, Aylmer Maude, a popular writer, and Florence Booth, the wife of the chief of staff of the Salvation Army. This eclectic group of activists, artists, and athletes had little scientific expertise, but could appeal to a wide slice of the British public, from the young and adventurous to the old and devout.

In practice, prying food reform free from the legacy of vegetarianism proved more difficult than Miles had anticipated. At its first meeting, the association adopted a resolution that attempted to compensate for its ambiguity with its solemnity:

That this Meeting [sic], profoundly conscious of the importance of Diet [sic] as a factor in the moral, intellectual, physical, political, and economic life of the nation, believes that the time is ripe for a new step towards a more rational and humane system.<sup>47</sup>

Like the resolution, the panel of speakers never mentioned the word "vegetarianism" itself, but they did frequently draw on well-worn vegetarian rhetoric. In the first speech, Neville Lytton tried to refute the common misperception that athletes and intellectuals had to eat red meat to fuel their strenuous physical or mental exertions. By necessity, Lytton's list of counterexamples included only vegetarians: Leo Tolstoy, George Bernard Shaw, Harley Granville-Barker, Percy Shelley and, of course, Eustace Miles himself.<sup>48</sup> In a later speech, F. A. Rollo Russell asserted that meat-eating actually sapped physical strength while a diet of grains and vegetables could boost it to incredible proportions. As evidence, he cited the same ethnographic anecdotes as May Yates and other food reformers.<sup>49</sup> Aylmer Maude recalled Adam Smith and William Paley's argument from the eighteenth century that meat-eating caused significant reductions in agricultural efficiency, leading to higher food prices. The three acres of pasture required to keep one ox could grow enough grain, potatoes, or pulses to feed many people; eventually, Britain's ever-expanding population would have to switch to a plant-based diet.<sup>50</sup> Careful diction aside, Miles and his fellows shared much more with other food reformers, present and past, than they would have cared to admit.

Ultimately, the tension of simultaneously promoting and rejecting vegetarianism rebounded on the NFRA itself, forcing a shift in personnel and strategy. The death of C. S. Rolls in June 1910 may have precipitated the shake-up. Among the most colorful members of the NFRA's coterie of celebrities, Rolls died when he crashed his Wright flyer at an international air show. At the time of Rolls's death, Miles and Lytton allowed Charles Hecht – the organizing secretary – to assume practical leadership of the association, though they themselves remained peripherally involved. Miles's may have backed away from the organization he founded due to the death of his colleague, on whom much of the NFRA's public relations strategy depended.<sup>51</sup> Earnest, knowledgeable, and serious, Hecht took a more traditional approach than had Miles. Under his direction, the NFRA defined a set of five goals for itself:

1. To enlighten public opinion on matters of diet.

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<sup>47</sup> "Reasons for food reform" 12.

<sup>48</sup> "Reasons for food reform" 13-14.

<sup>49</sup> "Reasons for food reform" 20-22.

<sup>50</sup> "Reasons for food reform" 30-31.

<sup>51</sup> The NFRA held a conference on feeding schoolchildren in December 1908 at which Lytton and Miles presided. See "Scientific feeding of school children," *Times* 7 Dec. 1908: 6.

2. To point out the dangers of our present system of food supply and its bearings on such problems as the adulteration of food and milk, infant mortality, consumption and physical deterioration.
3. To make known the intimate connexion of diet with:
  - a. Moral and physical well-being.
  - b. Social reform.
  - c. Economy – national and domestic.
4. To urge the necessity of reconsidering the dietary of Schools and Colleges, the Army and Navy, Hospitals, Workhouses, Asylums, Prisons and other Institutions, etc.
5. To recommend more humane, hygienic and scientific methods, both in the selection and preparation of food.<sup>52</sup>

The NFRA's new agenda smacked of the stodginess of old-fashioned food reform, but it did inspire a fresh round of scholarship on nutrition. Beginning in December 1908, the NFRA organized four conferences on the nutrition of various vulnerable populations. The first two dealt with the feeding of schoolchildren and hospital nurses, respectively, but garnered relatively little attention from experts or the press.<sup>53</sup> However, a much larger event on the diet of private-school students followed at London's Guildhall in 1912, the proceedings of which Hecht published as Our Children's Health at Home and at School. A year later, many of the same experts returned to the Guildhall to discuss the diet of government-school students, which led to another book entitled Rearing an Imperial Race. The second two conferences achieved a high standard of academic freedom and integrity, attracting legitimate scholars from well-respected institutions.

At the first Guildhall conference, vegetarianism remained a central topic of debate, though again even its proponents avoided invoking the term itself. W. H. Prosser, the principal of a boys' school in Norfolk, reported that his students ate meat only once daily, but no parents had yet complained. He singled out for particular praise one boy brought up on a strictly meatless diet:

That boys can and do thrive without flesh foods has often been proved. I have in my school one boy who has never tasted meat, and I can unhesitatingly say that I have never in the course of my scholastic career, extending over a period of eighteen years, come across a more promising boy or a more healthy one.<sup>54</sup>

Wycliffe College in Gloucestershire presented a poster on a three-year long, ongoing experiment conducted on approximately a third of its 150 boys. The subjects ate a diet consisting of stiff porridge and salads with eggs, nuts, milk, and cheese substituting for meat.<sup>55</sup> Over the course of the experiment, the "abstainers" had enjoyed great athletic success, placing five of the top seven runners in the five-mile-long senior cross country race. Abstainers had outperformed meat-eaters by 25 percent on a test of arm strength involving pull-ups from the rungs of a ladder

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<sup>52</sup> National Food Reform Association, Rearing an Imperial Race, ed. Charles E. Hecht (London: St. Catherine, 1913) 479.

<sup>53</sup> "Scientific feeding of school children," and "Hospital nurses and their food," Times 7 Nov. 1910: 16.

<sup>54</sup> National Food Reform Association, Our Children's Health at Home and at School, ed. Charles E. Hecht (London, 1912) 73-74.

<sup>55</sup> Our Children's Health at Home and at School 261.

suspended horizontally. Moreover, the students who ate at the "meatless tables" had amassed an academic record of excellence that "the meat-eaters [could] never hope to touch."<sup>56</sup>

These remarkable results of a meatless diet notwithstanding, skeptics questioned its real efficiency. Robert Hutchison himself feared that "rearing healthy children to produce the maximum degree of efficiency without having recourse to meat" would prove "extremely difficult," though he offered no specific evidence in his defense.<sup>57</sup> Marie Michaelis, a lecturer in hygiene and physiology at King's College for Women, made a more subtle and equivocal argument in favor of meat. On the one hand, vegetable protein cost less per unit of weight than did animal; on the other hand, the human digestive tract absorbed animal protein more readily than vegetable. Though she lacked scientific proof, Michaelis speculated that animal protein might cost less per unit absorbed than did vegetable and was therefore more economical.<sup>58</sup> However, she also turned her wit against vegetarianism's detractors. Hutchison and others had criticized a meatless diet as "too bulky" because of the relatively low concentration of protein in most plants. Michaelis observed wryly that such a criticism presumed that vegetarians "ate grass" rather than proteinaceous foods like cheese and other dairy products, eggs, or legumes.<sup>59</sup> Michaelis's speculation on cost and bulk hit home with at least one member of the audience. Perhaps daunted by the prospect of large bills for cheese, milk, and nuts, Reverend Marchant Pearson of Ardingley College in Sussex asked, "What will it all cost?" His colleagues seemed confident enough to say, "Hang the expense!" but he had his doubts.<sup>60</sup>

A year later, the focus of discussion shifted away from vegetarianism to undernutrition. The headmaster of Wycliffe College could confidently assume that his students had enough to eat in general and so could invest in a three-year-long experiment to determine which particular diet yielded the best academic and athletic results. By contrast, the poor students in government schools often went hungry. At the second Guildhall conference, L. Haden Guest, assistant school doctor for the London County Council, argued that "a very large proportion of elementary school children are in such a state of nutrition as would arouse very serious concern if it occurred in a middle-class family."<sup>61</sup> Ernest T. Roberts, the chief medical officer of the Glasgow School Board, reported that 62.5 percent of Glaswegian families earning fewer than 20s. per week consumed fewer than 3000 calories per man per day.<sup>62</sup> Contemporary nutrition scientists estimated that a man of moderate activity and weight required up to 3500 calories per day to remain in good health.<sup>63</sup> This 500-calorie deficit translated into chronic, low-grade undernutrition, loss of productivity, and increased risk of disease.

In their analysis of working-class nutrition, many of those assembled in the Guildhall looked past low wages to blame the ignorance of mothers and wives. In one of the epigraphs to the published proceedings of the conference, the novelist Mrs. Humphry Ward neatly summarized the prevailing sentiment:

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<sup>56</sup> Our Children's Health at Home and at School 265-266.

<sup>57</sup> Our Children's Health at Home and at School 44-45.

<sup>58</sup> Our Children's Health at Home and at School 181.

<sup>59</sup> Our Children's Health at Home and at School 182.

<sup>60</sup> Our Children's Health at Home and at School 111.

<sup>61</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 27.

<sup>62</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 43.

<sup>63</sup> Hutchison 25-26.

It is not food that is dear and scarce in England – it is the mind to cook it with! Food is extraordinarily cheap and good in England – the raw material of food, that is to say. Even the labourer on 18s. or 21s. a week could live plentifully, so far as food is concerned, if he or his wife knew all there is to be known by ordinarily intelligent people about food and its preparation. But, unfortunately, his wife, as a rule, knows hardly anything of what can be done on a few pence to please and nourish her family.<sup>64</sup>

A chorus of experts concurred with Mrs. Ward, condemning in particularly strong terms the rising popularity of "convenience foods" like preserved meats and sweetened biscuits.<sup>65</sup> For example, Amy Walker Black of the Chester-le-Street Union Boarding Out Committee in County Durham lamented a decline in the quality of the local miners' diet. In the nineteenth century, they had subsisted on bread baked from coarse flour and vegetables from the kitchen garden with butcher's meat only once per week. In the twentieth century, they indulged in ready-made white bread and biscuits, tinned skim milk, and bacon or beef at least once per day. While perhaps more convenient, the meaty, mushy, sugary modern diet had contributed to a decline in the health of miners and their families. Similarly, M. Cecile Matheson of the Birmingham Women's Settlement complained of mothers feeding pickles, strong tea, and plain bread to their two-year-olds to avoid cooking.<sup>66</sup> She condemned in equally strong terms fathers who insisted on eating meat when the extra expense practically took food from their children's mouths. Ernest Roberts suggested that his Glaswegian subjects spent too much money on meat and eggs when oatmeal, peas, beans, and cheese provided as much protein at a lower cost.<sup>67</sup>

To correct the ignorance at the heart of undernutrition, Black, Matheson, Roberts and their allies favored a twist on the Victorian model of self-help. Traditionally, British philanthropy flowed through voluntary channels only to those who both deserved and wanted to receive it. However, the Guildhall consensus did not trust the ignorant to seek the knowledge they lacked on their own initiative nor did it want them to sink under their own weight. To escape from this conundrum, British society would have to strike a different compromise between coercion and individual responsibility. The government would mandate education in dietetics, domestic economy, and hygiene for all the "future mothers of the race" until age fourteen with compulsory attendance at continuation school until sixteen or eighteen.<sup>68</sup> Working-class families would still have to fend for themselves or fall on the mercy of the workhouse, but at least they would have the right skills to do so. To support the increased burden of instruction and to provide new career opportunities for women, technical colleges and universities around the country would have to offer more courses in domestic economy and

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<sup>64</sup> Mrs. Humphry Ward as quoted in Rearing an Imperial Race x.

<sup>65</sup> The chorus included including Sir George Kekewich, former secretary of the Board of Education; Lady Meyer of the St. Pancras School for Mothers; M. Cecile Matheson, warden of Birmingham Women's Settlement; George Finch, former assistant school medical officer to the East Sussex County Council; Lady Edmund Talbot, president of the Association of Teachers of Domestic Subjects; and Chalmers Watson, assistant physician of the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh. See Rearing an Imperial Race 5, 60, 91, 108, 186, 362.

<sup>66</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 91, 94.

<sup>67</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 46.

<sup>68</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race xxix-xxx.

institutional housekeeping.<sup>69</sup> In his remarks upon assuming the chair on the first day of the conference, Sir George Kekewich unwittingly summed up the dilemma for most of his audience:

Surely the remedy is that every woman before marriage should know how to do her duty by her children. . . . We are not ready for it yet – it would be an interference with the liberty of the subject, I suppose, if you were to insist on that sort of examination being passed before marriage.<sup>70</sup>

No one contested him on either point.

The consensus around an education-based solution to future undernutrition did crack over the question of what to do about the present. In the long term, better education would equip mothers to feed their children properly even on small budgets. However, in the short term, many young women had already left school without enough instruction in domestic economy. As Kekewich recognized, the government simply could not screen them for mothering skills nor require them to return for more schooling after they had acquired jobs, husbands, and families. How could the community at large best serve the children of such women? The London County Council's L. Haden Guest embodied the dilemma facing principled liberals in answering this question. On the one hand, Guest supported sending so-called health visitors to advise needy families – an iconic mode of Victorian philanthropy – though he cautioned that it required "enormous tact." On the other hand, he would not stand idly by as the children in his care slowly starved:

There are a number of children who are thin and pale, with lips sunken in, and who are obviously in need of food. . . . Children are not fed, they require to be fed and there is no more to be said about it.<sup>71</sup>

He related his own experience with a program that supplied meals to 244 children for three months at Addington Street School in Lambeth. The boys exhibited "marked improvement in physical appearance" and "increased mental activity" while the girls became "more troublesome . . . more full of vitality."<sup>72</sup> In addition to these benefits for the children themselves, Guest mused that the program may have had a vicarious educational effect on their parents.<sup>73</sup> Lady Meyer of the St. Pancras School for Mothers agreed, reporting that a school meals program she administered in rural Essex had inspired parents to try harder:

When you feed children, when the parents, from want of stamina and means and knowledge, have let their children deteriorate, when they see how important other people in the State – the teachers, the Care Committees, everybody who is looking after them – consider those children are, the eyes of slack and ignorant and half baked parents are opening, and they make an effort to become responsible.<sup>74</sup>

These guilty mothers sought cooking advice from a local health center, proving that meals at school could translate into better eating at home.<sup>75</sup> Projecting further into the future, Meyer argued that feeding the present generation of hungry children would enable them to profit by

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<sup>69</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race xxxviii.

<sup>70</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 5.

<sup>71</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 35.

<sup>72</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 31-32.

<sup>73</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 36.

<sup>74</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 60.

<sup>75</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 122.



their education and to become "the founders of good homes." From her point of view, charity could promote personal responsibility by diminishing the ignorance that so often undermined it.

Even more than the short-term problem of today's hungry children, Guest and Meyer's colleagues worried about long-term compliance with school instruction in domestic economy. Even the proponents of more education in domestic economy recognized that mothers would not necessarily follow through on the lessons they had learned as schoolgirls. Indeed, Birmingham's Matheson pointed out that London's schools had amassed a dismal record up to 1913:

For forty-three years elementary education has been compulsory and universal, and in London, at any rate, this education has always included the principles of personal and civic hygiene. . . . We also teach the girls to cook and wash, to clean and sew. How is it that we have still slums in a worse degree than can be accounted for by bad housing and poverty?<sup>76</sup>

According to Mrs. Chester of the London Teachers' Association, this apparent lack of educability persisted into adulthood. In her experience, only "intelligent" women who already had superior housekeeping skills bothered to attend domestic economy lectures. Those who really needed direction found excuses for staying away.<sup>77</sup>

Ironically, Matheson and Chester proposed to solve this problem with more education, albeit for teachers and schoolboys rather than for schoolgirls. Matheson wondered whether teachers understood the "difficulties in the way of cleanly living" that weighed on the typical working-class housewife. How much did they know of the working-class superstitions that so frustrated the efforts of health visitors and district nurses? Could they speak their students' working-class dialect, which communicated blame and praise in subtle turns of phrase?<sup>78</sup> To address any deficiencies in these areas, educators had to work more closely with other social service providers who had more direct contact with the poor. Local social workers or care committees could serve as the bridge between home and school. Moreover, teaching boys about domestic economy could lighten the load of working-class housewives. Male superstitions about the strength-building properties of red meat discouraged women from buying cheaper vegetable sources of protein. If boys learned about lentils in school, perhaps they would not grow into beef-addled men.<sup>79</sup> The problem of compliance with domestic economy education lay with the approach, not with the principle.

While the majority of those in the Guildhall gravitated to the middle of the sociopolitical spectrum, a vocal minority held out on the fringes. On the left, Durham's Amy Walker Black advocated abandoning "object lessons" in favor of providing meals to all children regardless of need:

No one will question the fact that it is more economical and more satisfactory from every point of view to cater for a large number under skilled supervision, than it is for an overworked and comparatively unskilled woman to feed her individual family of a few persons. . . . Mere object-lessons have failed, and always must fail. Actual feeding at school, to ensure adequate and appropriate

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<sup>76</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 91.

<sup>77</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 55.

<sup>78</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 93.

<sup>79</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 93-95.

diet, is the real remedy, and in the interests of the national health and prosperity is inevitable.<sup>80</sup>

Black's argument for communal feeding followed the logic of "national efficiency" that came into vogue after the Boer War: feeding children at school cost less in money and time while providing better nutrition, all of which improved the health of Britain's people and the competitiveness of its industries. However, it also had socialistic overtones, implying that housewives should leave their family's nutritional needs to state-sanctioned experts. Black no doubt conjured fears among her colleagues about the rise of labor politics in centers of industry and mining such as Durham. Meanwhile, on the right, Miss A. I. M. Elliot of the Southwark Health Society blamed not ignorance so much as willful bad behavior for the hunger of poor British children. On the one hand, she admitted that a few working-class families had fallen into poverty due to factors beyond their control. On the other hand, the "rank and file" of casual laborers had brought poverty on themselves by mixing a "little drunkenness with a good deal of selfishness." School meals abetted working-class irresponsibility without improving a child's overall well-being. She recounted an anecdote of a mother and two children who ate nothing but school meals, and so went hungry over weekends and holidays. The school's so-called generosity had enabled them to persist in these desperate circumstances without altering their self-destructive behavior or seeking Poor Law relief. A more "far-sighted and humane" policy would compel parents to fulfill their responsibilities or enter the workhouse.<sup>81</sup>

Though it had set out to transform food reform by playing on the public's fascination with celebrity, the NFRA ended up as a forum for little known experts with more or less traditional ideas. Admittedly, the quirkiness and self-righteousness of vegetarianism's most outspoken proponents may have detracted from the force of their message. Though vegetarianism's popularity had grown in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, it remained a marginal movement with perhaps a few thousand practitioners out of a population of 32.5 million.<sup>82</sup> However, even Miles and Lytton struggled to find new arguments in favor of food reform, falling back instead on the very clichés they had dismissed as ineffective. Hanging as it did on people rather than ideas, Miles's public relations strategy collapsed with the death of one of its most star-studded spokesmen. Thereafter, Hecht and the experts assembled in the Guildhall retreated even further into the shadow of vegetarianism and the traditional Victorian value system. In England's private schools, food reform meant vegetarianism, even if those concerned studiously avoided the term itself. In government schools, food reform meant moral reform.

#### Fathomless capacity for self-sacrifice

While the NFRA criticized the poor for their ignorance, a few other, similarly-placed experts did come to their defense, including Maud Pember Reeves, the wife of a New Zealander politician, and Anna Martin, an otherwise unknown social worker.<sup>83</sup> Reeves's Round About a

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<sup>80</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 105-106.

<sup>81</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 47-49

<sup>82</sup> Census population of England and Wales in 1901, as reported in Walter Arnstein, Britain Yesterday and Today, 7th ed. (Lexington, MA: DC Heath, 1996) 463.

<sup>83</sup> A pamphlet entitled "The married working woman: A study," published in 1911, reflected anecdotally on Martin's experiences working at a settlement in southeast London frequented by the wives of casual laborers. See National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, "The married working woman: A study," by Anna Martin (1911) 4.

Pound a Week documented the same undernutrition that so concerned the BFRL and NFRA, but attributed it to factors beyond the working-class woman's control. Like Rowntree's Poverty, Round About a Pound a Week surveyed the standard of living in one working-class community: the London borough of Lambeth. However, Pember Reeves wrote in a less academic register than Rowntree, employing a few statistics to illustrate her many anecdotes rather than vice versa. In her analysis, ignorance and laziness played a less prominent role in poverty than did lack of facilities, money, and time. For example, the typical Lambeth housewife knew that her children needed to drink milk but simply could not afford to buy it for them. Experts recommended that children drink a quart of fresh milk per day, which cost 2s. 4d. per week in 1912. Multiplied by four children, the milk bill amounted to 9s. 4d., or 4d. more than the average Lambeth household's entire food budget.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, Lambeth housewives usually had no more than a few old pans and an open hearth with which to cook. Even if they had had a scientific understanding of nutrition, their equipment would have severely restricted the number and types of dishes they could prepare.<sup>85</sup> For instance, few had a range that controlled heat finely enough to cook porridge without burning it to the bottom of the pan; even fewer had a coal- or gas-fired oven in which to bake their own bread. By documenting in intimate detail the material constraints on working-class housekeeping, Pember Reeves deflected the experts' indictment of ignorance back at them:

That the diet of the poorer London children is insufficient, unscientific, and utterly unsatisfactory is horribly true. But that the real cause of this state of things is the ignorance and indifference of their mothers is untrue. What person or body of people, however educated and expert, could maintain a working man in physical efficiency and rear healthy children on the amount of money which is all these same mothers have to deal with? It would be an impossible problem if set to trained and expert people. How much more an impossible problem when set to the saddened, weakened, overburdened wives of London labourers?<sup>86</sup>

The problem of poverty admitted to no answer other than higher wages. Only when working-class households could afford milk, proper cooking equipment, and other material necessities would a wider dissemination of knowledge about hygiene or nutrition have any impact on their standard of living.

Like Pember Reeves, Martin argued that working-class realities foiled middle-class methods of household management. First, her clients had too little time: hurrying children out the door to school filled most of the morning, as did paid work the afternoon. These obligations squeezed cleaning and cooking into a few hours in the evening, during which even the most efficient and energetic housekeeper could not keep dirt and disorder entirely at bay.<sup>87</sup> Second, they had too little money: after rent, coal, gas, soap, insurance, and the small savings required for the eventual replacement of clothes and shoes, the working-class housewife in Martin's corner of London had only 10s. to 14s. with which to feed herself, her husband, and three to four children.<sup>88</sup> Though 14s. exceeded the typical food budget in Lambeth by 50 percent, it still provided a meager existence. In light of these constraints, working-class housewives simply

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<sup>84</sup> Maud Pember Reeves, Round About a Pound a Week (London: Bell, 1914) 99.

<sup>85</sup> Pember Reeves 56-57, 59.

<sup>86</sup> Pember Reeves 145.

<sup>87</sup> "The married working woman" 10-12.

<sup>88</sup> "The married working woman" 12.

could not scrub the step, polish the grate, or bake brown bread at home as outsiders exhorted them to do.

However, in contrast with Reeves, Martin made no apologies for the supposed "ignorance" of working-class housewives, but instead recast it as a subtle genius that middle-class busybodies simply could not understand. With necessity to spur her invention, the laborer's wife developed "an almost superhuman skill" at wringing every possible calorie from each penny in her food budget.<sup>89</sup> Martin offered a litany of examples, one for each letter of the alphabet between Mrs. A and Mrs. I. "A" lengthened a shilling's worth of meat into meals for six people over two days by cooking it into heavy starches like a pie and a suet pudding. "E" did the same, cooking small amounts of meat into potato, pudding, and vegetable dishes to make them more flavorful and satiating. "B" bested the local board school's penny dinner with a stew of meat, potatoes, and vegetables that cost 4.5d. and fed five people.<sup>90</sup> In fact, working-class housewives provided for their children at far lower cost than did the government. Poor Law schools in London clothed and fed children for between 2s. 10d. and 3s. 9d. per week while Martin's clients did the same for 1s. 6d. to 2s., or 33 to 50 percent less.<sup>91</sup>

Even the quirks of working-class culture and diet that drew the most middle-class ire often served carefully calculated ends. Martin recounted a heart-wrenching anecdote of a girl sent with 1½d. by her dying mother to fetch dinner for three younger brothers. Though the heroine of the story spent most of her money on stale bread, she also bought a few pickles – those *bêtes-noires* of food reformers – for the purpose of wetting the boys' appetite. Without the saliva generated by the pickles, her brothers could not have chewed the dry, crusty bread.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, meals purchased at cook-shops or stalls often had nutritional merits that middle-class critics overlooked. Mrs. B, who could outperform the local board school's professional cooks, knew that fish and chips contained more fat than she could sometimes afford at the local grocery and so represented better value for her money. Another intelligent, though illiterate mother spent excessively on seeming luxuries like cocoa and milk, but only to keep her delicate daughters in work. Her apparent extravagance actually brought in more money than if she had sacrificed her daughters' health to save a few pennies. Few working-class families could afford the canned foods that so exercised Mrs. Humphry Ward; shopkeepers in poor neighborhoods stacked tins in their windows as cheap decoration while trading mostly in dry and fresh foods.<sup>93</sup>

Martin's impassioned defense of working-class housewives raised the confounding question of how so many supposed experts could have their facts so completely wrong? After all, many of the toughest critics of the poor lived and worked among them every day and would have seen firsthand all of these clever housekeeping tricks in action – if they in fact existed. Martin responded that the naysayers simply could not stomach the bleak economic reality that the plight of poor British children resulted from the "insufficiency of their fathers' wages."<sup>94</sup> Instead, they indulged in an inductive self-deception, attributing to all working-class families the ignorance and immorality evident in a relatively few cases:

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<sup>89</sup> "The married working woman" 13.

<sup>90</sup> "The married working woman" 14-15.

<sup>91</sup> "The married working woman" 33.

<sup>92</sup> "The married working woman" 20.

<sup>93</sup> "The married working woman" 20-22.

<sup>94</sup> "The married working woman" 19.

There are thousands of parents in London alone who are totally unfit to have the care of their children at all, and of whom no criticism can be too severe. But it is not a justifiable proceeding . . . to impute the faults of homes devastated by drink, or driven, from some special defect of character, below the normal level, to the households of decent labourers, who constitute at least 85 per cent. [sic] of their class.<sup>95</sup>

Moreover, too much blame fell onto women and not enough onto men. A housewife in Lambeth could not compel her husband to eat foods he did not like any better than could one in Belgravia.<sup>96</sup> As for the majority of the middle class with little or no direct contact with the poor, it saved itself "the trouble of thinking or of personal investigation" and accepted any stereotype "supplied to it with a sufficient show of authority."<sup>97</sup>

To lift working-class families out of structural poverty, both Pember Reeves and Martin bypassed the shibboleths of the political right and left in favor of a package of eclectic reforms that would in theory empower the working class and protect its economic security. Superficially, working-class girls and their mothers did enjoy domestic economy education for its own sake. According to Martin, her clients prided themselves on their daughters' ability to boil potatoes or starch pinafores. At the same time, education could only do so much for families living hand to mouth.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, Pember Reeves calculated that the London County Council based its domestic economy curriculum on a minimum budget 40 percent larger than what the typical Lambeth household earned.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, socialism had limited appeal to the British people in general. Pember Reeves originally presented her research on Lambeth to the Fabian Women's Group, but she edited the word "socialism" entirely out of Round About a Pound a Week, which she intended for a popular audience. Martin explained that the "English people do not yearn after equality":

They have too little imagination to be envious of other people's luxuries, but they have the deepest attachment to their homes and families, and are well content if things prosper within their own four walls. Nothing but the present intolerable industrial disorganization could have rendered possible the Socialistic [sic] propaganda of the last few years among a nation of born individualists.<sup>100</sup>

For both Pember Reeves and Martin, any solution to Britain's endemic social problems would have to start with a minimum wage to ensure responsible families a respectable standard of living.<sup>101</sup> From this anchor, the state could then extend a modest, but sturdy social safety net to catch anyone, especially children, who again fell into the poverty trap. Pember Reeves envisioned a government department of public guardianship that would assist parents in meeting the needs of their children. She also favored the expanded provision of meals and medical

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<sup>95</sup> "The married working woman" 19.

<sup>96</sup> "The married working woman" 20.

<sup>97</sup> "The married working woman" 18.

<sup>98</sup> "The married working woman" 32-33.

<sup>99</sup> Pember Reeves 222.

<sup>100</sup> "The married working woman" 45.

<sup>101</sup> Pember Reeves 216-218; "The married working woman" 44.

inspection for schoolchildren.<sup>102</sup> Martin proposed earlier closing times for pubs, unemployment insurance, fair-rent arbitration, and the vote for women.<sup>103</sup>

Since the mid-1970s, scholars have sided more with Pember Reeves and Martin than with Matheson and Meyer in the debate over the character of working-class housekeeping. Like Martin did in 1911, they have celebrated a working-class cult of domesticity and the conscientious, hardworking women entangled in it. In Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London 1870-1918, Ellen Ross described the provision of adequate food on a short budget as an "awesome responsibility" that fell squarely on the shoulders of mothers.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, self-esteem and social standing depended on good cooking.<sup>105</sup> For instance, a working-class boy told a committee of the Charity Organisation Society that his mother "rattled plates" for the benefit of her neighbors on evenings when she had nothing to feed her family.<sup>106</sup> Sunday dinner in particular symbolized working-class aspirations to share fully in "the roast beef of old England."<sup>107</sup> Joanna Bourke has argued that the heavy responsibilities of housekeeping could empower women within their families. From the late nineteenth century, many working-class women voluntarily left paid employment to become full-time homemakers. Their increasingly savvy housekeeping and higher real wages brought about a significant improvement in the working-class standard of living before the First World War. For this reason, many poor young women sought out domestic economy education, in some cases by staying in school past the minimum leaving age. A skilled housewife could use a husband's favorite foods as leverage against him.<sup>108</sup> Ironically, just as working-class housewives came under such scathing censure, they had become more conscientious, educated, and motivated than ever before.

However, despite the earnest protestations of Pember Reeves, Martin, and Ross, some truth must lie in the criticisms levied against working-class housewives at the turn of the century. Undoubtedly, many working-class families could barely afford to feed themselves. In these circumstances, some poor housewives did work miracles of household management, often at the cost of their own comfort and health. Yet not all children eating pickles in the alleys of London or Manchester had a dying mother at home. Not all housewives carefully calculated the fat content of fish and chips before deciding to buy them. Moreover, at least some of the unflattering anecdotes of working-class home life must carry weight. M. Cecile Matheson, among the most critical voices at the second Guildhall conference, worked at a settlement in Birmingham similar to Martin's in London. She had as much firsthand knowledge of poverty as Pember Reeves or Martin – perhaps even more. By that measure, her criticisms deserve as much credence as do Martin's acclamations. Indeed, Martin accused naysayers like Matheson of extrapolating a small number of cases of ignorance or neglect into a blanket condemnation of all

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<sup>102</sup> Pember Reeves 223-231.

<sup>103</sup> "The married working woman" 33, 44-45.

<sup>104</sup> Ellen Ross, Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London 1870-1918 (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 1993) 27.

<sup>105</sup> Anna Davin, Growing Up Poor (London: Rivers Oram, 1996) 70-71.

<sup>106</sup> Ross 29.

<sup>107</sup> Ross 37-39; Peter Clarke, Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990, The Penguin History of Britain, ed. David Cannadine (London: Penguin, 1997) 7.

<sup>108</sup> Joanna Bourke, "Housewifery in working-class England 1860-1914," Past and Present 143 (1994): 167-197.

working-class housewives. Could Matheson not respond that Martin had done the same with a small number of cases of thrift?

My husband will now be more tiresome than ever about the bills

In theory, food reform embraced both the wealthy and the poor. Indeed, the NFRA's first Guildhall conference focused on the health of private-school students, the majority of whom were well-to-do. In practice, the BFRL and the NFRA devoted most of their efforts to the poor, who naturally provoked far more anxiety and sympathy than did the wealthy. However, many members of the contemporary middle class suffered from a surprising degree of financial insecurity.<sup>109</sup> In addition, a growing number of artisans, clerks, and teachers aspired to a middle-class lifestyle, but had to work within a tight budget. To meet their needs, an informal cult of economical cooking and marketing emerged in parallel with the food reform movement, the principles of which it often shared.

Magazines targeted at middle-class housewives both encouraged and reflected aspirations to a more genteel standard of living. For example, The Gentlewoman featured an "at home" each week with one of Britain's wealthiest women. The 1 October 1892 edition described Lady Amherst's Didlington Hall as a "most interesting house, with its marvellous [sic] museums, its collections of art treasures, its unique and valuable library, and the lovely and tasteful appointments of its numerous rooms."<sup>110</sup> Of course, few of The Gentlewoman's readers lived as well as Lady Amherst. Many of them could barely afford a table and chairs, let alone a collection of art. Indeed, the furniture column in the 2 July 1892 edition chastised two correspondents for their foolish pretensions. In response to the pseudonymous writer "no spare cash," the columnist wrote: "You could not possibly furnish six bedrooms, two nurseries, and two reception rooms for the sum you name, and certainly not at the place you speak of." In response to "Costobelle," the columnist despaired: "I am afraid, if I had the income you have, I should go out and drown myself! I am quite sure I should not enjoy myself at all."<sup>111</sup> On a milder note, The Gentlewoman also offered its less well-heeled readers regular advice on household economies. An article in the 30 July 1892 edition explained how to furnish a home on less than £100 while avoiding the tacky knockoffs that looked so "cheap and truly inartistic."<sup>112</sup> The tactfully named "enquiry bureau" even helped middle-class women to find suitable employment: the 25 June 1892 edition included an aging governess seeking retirement advice and three jobseekers advertising themselves as a woodcarver, proofreader, and travel companion, respectively.<sup>113</sup>

The same dilemma of class identity and personal finance played out more openly in the writings of the expert cook and popular journalist Dorothy Peel. In the 1890s, she authored a series of articles for Hearth and Home on catering for a middle-class family on only 10s. per person per week. Though many working-class women fed six or more on less than 10s.

<sup>109</sup> Jose Harris has described the individual wealth of the typical businessman or professional as "more modest than is often supposed." See Jose Harris, Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914 (London: Penguin, 1994) 107.

<sup>110</sup> "Gentlewomen 'at home,'" The Gentlewoman 5.117 (1 Oct. 1892): 1.

<sup>111</sup> The Gentlewoman 5.104 (2 July 1892): 16.

<sup>112</sup> Mrs. Panton, "Economical house furnishing," The Gentlewoman 5.108 (30 July 1892): 157.

<sup>113</sup> "Enquiry bureau," The Gentlewoman 4.103 (25 June 1892): 872.

altogether, let alone per person, a few of Peel's middle-class readership nonetheless demurred. One particularly aggrieved correspondent complained:

DEAR MRS. PEEL, -- I wish you wouldn't write such nonsense. My husband will now be more tiresome than ever about the bills.<sup>114</sup>

Rather than sink from the implicit challenge of this letter and others like it, Peel developed the original Hearth and Home articles into a book. The popular, if awkwardly-titled 10/- a Head for House Books helped to make Mrs. C. S. Peel one of the most respected writers in the cookbook genre.<sup>115</sup>

According to Peel, "extravagance in buying" was the leading reason that housewives could not meet the 10s. per person standard. At the same time, she warned that cheapness did not always mean economy – what advantage did the housewife gain in spending less on a poor product that then went to waste? To find the ideal balance between price and quality, the cost-conscious housewife first made test purchases from several local shopkeepers and tradesmen to become familiar with their wares. Next, she compared pricelists to identify from whom to buy each item, matching the desired quality to the lowest price. Finally, having settled on a pattern of trade with certain shopkeepers, she regularly checked her bills against their pricelists to ensure that they did not abuse her loyalty. When possible, she bought foods that kept well in bulk. The occasional "artful" substitution of the cheap for the expensive could lower her costs further without jeopardizing her reputation. For example, meat imported from America, Australia, or New Zealand often cost a halfpenny less per pound than the domestic equivalent, but had nearly the same quality. Turnip tops filled in nicely for spinach, as did chicory and celery for seakale. If fresh vegetables were too expensive, some tinned ones retained most of their original flavor. Analogously, dried fruits worked well enough in pies and puddings. Of course, "the happy possessors of gardens" could preserve the fruits and vegetables they grew for use in the winter.<sup>116</sup>

To reduce waste in the home itself, Peel emphasized reusing and recycling all scraps of food into other dishes. Bread topped the list of the most commonly wasted foods and yet had so many alternative uses even after it had gone stale. Scrapings from toast, heels of loaves, crusts trimmed away for bread sauces, old croutons – one could bake and pound them all into crumbs, which stored well and went into many popular recipes. Due diligence with bread scraps could cut up to a third off the baker's bill. Careful peeling of potatoes preserved more of the starch; cold cooked potatoes could reappear mashed or as cones or rissoles.<sup>117</sup> The bones and trimmings from a fish fillet could go into a soup stock or perhaps a small breakfast dish.<sup>118</sup> Even empty jars and tins often had a redemption value of anywhere from a halfpenny to a shilling.<sup>119</sup> Ideally, the frugal cook would "bamboozle her family" so thoroughly that they would not recognize "the remains of yesterday's dinner . . . as the component parts of to-day's."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Mrs. CS Peel, 10/- a Head for House Books: An Indispensable Manual for Housekeepers, 4th ed. (Westminster, UK: Constable, 1902) xiv.

<sup>115</sup> "Books" is plural in the title; however, the British Library and other principal archives catalog only one, not a series.

<sup>116</sup> Peel 1-5.

<sup>117</sup> Peel 8-9.

<sup>118</sup> Peel 4.

<sup>119</sup> Peel 3.

<sup>120</sup> Peel 159.



To illustrate these principles in practice, Peel presented a set of suggested menus organized by the season of the year and the day of the week. True to Peel's own recommendation to recycle and reuse, key ingredients often appeared in several dishes in two or even three meals on consecutive days. On the winter menu, Sunday dinner featured roast sirloin of beef – an iconic English dish. As the sirloin itself consisted of an upper- and under-cut, Peel prescribed serving the former on Sunday, but saving the latter for Monday to stretch one piece of meat into two meals. Likewise, a fruit salad of tinned peaches and pineapples first prepared for supper on Sunday became a meringue for dinner on Monday. A neck of mutton for hot pot on Tuesday also furnished broth for lunch and cutlets for dinner on Wednesday.<sup>121</sup>

In her zeal to pinch pennies, Peel did not question the middle-class British diet itself nor the large number of human and material resources necessary to support it. Economy meant preparing traditional dishes with the least expense, not inventing new ones with cheaper ingredients or methods of cooking. Her menus called for meat at nearly every meal and did not even moot the possibility of substituting cheese, pulses, or oatmeal. Moreover, she assumed the reader would employ a cook and three to four other "maidservants," a large retinue of hired help even for a well-to-do London professional.<sup>122</sup> The list of recommended kitchen equipage ran to eighty-two items on three pages, from a scale and weights through a plate rack.<sup>123</sup> A somewhat snooty disclaimer followed:

In many households of eight persons the batterie de cuisine would be considerably smaller. The list here given could be cut down if needs be, but mention is made of all articles in any way necessary in a household of medium size where nice cooking is required.<sup>124</sup>

Peel's reluctance to compromise on her expensive list of utensils neatly reflected the middle-class predicament her book aimed to resolve: how to maintain the lifestyle that peer pressure required on the modest salary of a young doctor or lawyer.

#### Would it be wise to assume that the children were never going to get anything better?

As the second Guildhall conference ended, those in attendance should have felt thoroughly dejected. Their colleagues from around the country had just described the trials and tribulations of a working-class childhood in the darkest terms. Drunkenness, hunger, ignorance, and neglect seemed to stalk every urban alleyway and country lane. However, the gloom hovering over the surface of the conference concealed a deeper confidence in the poor themselves. Matheson, Meyers, and their allies had bluntly criticized the poor for their ignorance, but had never written them off as inherently and irredeemably stupid. To the contrary, they believed that with better education, most working families could save themselves from poverty. Of course, a fine line separates the idea that the poor did not need a handout from the idea that they did not deserve one. As demonstrated by A. I. M. Elliot's tirade against drunkenness and selfishness, these two ideas could coexist in the minds even of those generally sympathetic to the poor. Yet, confidence – even optimism – prevailed, especially about the prospects of working-class children. Ella Pycroft, chairwoman of the Association of Teachers of

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<sup>121</sup> Peel 16-17, 45-46, 122-123.

<sup>122</sup> Peel 15.

<sup>123</sup> Peel 11-14.

<sup>124</sup> Peel 14.

Domestic Subjects, argued that the best way to help poor children was to educate them for a better future:

It is sad in some ways, because it comes back to the fact that the money people get now is not enough to feed and clothe and house them properly. It is also hopeful, because nobody has said it is no good to try. We had a meeting at the Conference of Educational Associations, and two of the speakers told us how bad things were. . . . One lady said we should not teach the children to cook what they could not get. Now most of them can only get potatoes and skimmed milk; of course, you cannot give a lesson on that. Would it be wise to assume that the children were never going to get anything better? We have to see that they do, and to stimulate their ideas and make them want better things, to prepare them for better things when they get them.<sup>125</sup>

This liberal faith in progress and the individual's capacity for self-improvement contained an element of condescension. It elevated middle-class over working-class knowledge; it discounted the economic and social factors over which the poor had no control, but that nonetheless kept them down. At the same time, condescension inheres in all philanthropy, whether private or public. The power dynamic always runs in the same direction – from those with material and political resources to those without them. Clearly, Ella Pycroft had the best intentions and truly sympathized with the children in her care, whether or not she condescended to their parents.

Unfortunately, despite the convictions of Ella Pycroft and others like her, education does not always succeed as a vehicle of social transformation – at least not on a timescale relevant to prewar Europe. As Matheson noted, forty-three years of cooking classes had done little to improve the diet of working-class Londoners. May Yates had spent more than twenty years educating the public about the virtues of brown bread but to no avail. Admittedly, neither London's board schools nor May Yates had adequate human or material resources. Perhaps, as the second Guildhall conference concluded, better-trained teachers, more class time, and modern facilities would improve the results of domestic economy education. However, even then, would dietary trends decades in the making suddenly reverse themselves? Many thousands of schoolchildren would have had to go through a revamped cooking curriculum for its principles to acquire any significant cultural currency. Such a slow process would have barely begun by the time the First World War made Britain's food problems both more severe and more immediate. Food reformers did experiment with other, less liberal strategies, but on a vanishingly small scale. The BFRL's school meals program reached just a few hundred children; Amy Walker Black dared to give voice to her socialist proclivities at an NFRA-sponsored event, but neither she nor anyone else had any intention actually to act on them. Meanwhile, Britain's dependency on imported food continued to deepen.

So, why did food reform matter if it did not – perhaps could not – work? In the decade leading up to the First World War, Britain had done little to address its food insecurity at any level. At the macroeconomic level, the government had never followed through on the Royal Commission on Food Supply's recommendations to subsidize granary construction or to indemnify shippers against wartime losses. The elections of 1906 and 1910 had ruled out subsidies or tariffs to encourage domestic farmers to grow more food. At the microeconomic level, Britain had a ramshackle communal feeding infrastructure. Few workplaces had their own canteens; some schools provided meals to their students, but on terms that varied across the

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<sup>125</sup> Rearing an Imperial Race 185.

country; the workhouse fed the desperately poor, but not well. In other words, Britain had no institutions at either the national or local level that could efficiently distribute a smaller food supply. Instead, it had a set of ideas developed by food reformers and cookbook writers for how individuals on their own initiative could make do with less to eat. These ideas proceeded logically from the country's long-standing liberal tradition and, for better or for worse, would carry it forward into the wartime food crisis.

### 3. £3.75 Million in Lumps of Sugar

On Thursday, July 30th, our newspapers . . . beat into our consciousness such statements as "All Europe Arming – British Fleet puts [sic] to Sea – Position of Extreme Gravity." . . . The price of flour has risen 1s. 6d. to 2s. per sack in Liverpool since the previous Friday. . . On Saturday . . . we learn that exports of food from France and Germany are forbidden. . . How will the poor people live? we ask each other. How will many of us live, indeed, if our food becomes . . . dearer?<sup>1</sup>

As Dorothy Peel recorded in her memoirs, the war unleashed British society's pent-up anxiety about food. Much of what the Royal Commission on Supply of Food had predicted did come to pass, including rising prices and public panic. Due in large part to the commission itself, the government had no plan for addressing this crisis beyond monitoring price trends through local labor exchanges. Official neglect left the field more or less entirely to food reformers and their ready-made stratagems for eating more economically. However, the war raised the stakes of British food insecurity. In the past, hunger had posed only a distant threat, slowly undermining economic competitiveness or imperial grandeur over the course of many years. After August 1914, food suddenly became an existential question – would lack of bread drive Britain to its knees before the onslaught of Prussian militarism? Moreover, rising prices and dwindling supplies threatened not only the poor, but also those at the bottom end of the middle class.

Food reformers had to adapt themselves quickly to these wartime conditions. For the country to survive on a smaller supply of food, all of its citizens, regardless of class, would have to eat more efficiently and in short order. Accordingly, food reformers had to do and say whatever would convince the largest number of people to join them, even if that meant compromising to some degree on principle. However, what could have deteriorated into a cynical exercise in mass manipulation instead grew into an opportunity to redress class prejudices. In the case of the poor especially, Ella Pycroft's brand of hope deferred to the future would no longer suffice; food reformers had to contend more directly with working-class dietary preferences and material deprivation than before the war. This experience engendered a more practical, but perhaps also more genuine sympathy with the plight of working families, which in turn helped to soften the liberal certainties that had underlain the food reform movement since its inception.

#### Unduly inflated prices

Though it did trigger a paroxysm of panic, the initial bout of wartime inflation was actually relatively mild. On 7 August 1914, the Times reported an epidemic of hoarding that threatened to starve the poor in London's East End:

The unwarrantable purchase of large quantities of provisions by selfish and unreasoning people has already created a serious situation in London and in the large provincial towns. Not only have prices been unduly inflated, but more patriotic members of the community have been unable to procure even their ordinary supplies. The great stores are already overwhelmed with orders they have received, and some of them had to turn away customers yesterday. . . . Great

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<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Peel, How We Lived Then (London: Lane, 1929) 12-13.

hardship has been inflicted upon the poor of the East-end, some of whom were unable to obtain necessary articles of food even at enhanced prices.<sup>2</sup>

The same article declared that the government had fixed maximum prices for staple foods and would soon assume control of all flour mills in the United Kingdom. However, the Times' alarm aside, prices did not soar nor did supplies crash. Flour cost no more in early August than it had at the end of July; the prices of butter and meat had increased between a halfpenny and two pence a pound, or about 23 percent on average.<sup>3</sup> By December, inflation of retail prices averaged 16 percent, though for certain traditionally cheap foods, like frozen beef, it spiked to as much as 30 percent.<sup>4</sup> No doubt many poor families endured hardship due to the higher cost of food, but the famine conditions Henry Seton-Karr had feared did not materialize. Moreover, the government did not regulate prices nor nationalize flour mills. An independent committee of food retailers had drawn up the schedule of maximum prices to which the Times referred and presented it to a cabinet committee, but it had no force of law.

Even in the initial panic, the Liberal government adhered to its laissez-faire prewar economic plan. Between August 1914 and January 1915, it created thirty-eight advisory or cabinet committees to shoulder the burden of administering the war, five of which dealt with food. Reginald McKenna, the home secretary, chaired the Cabinet Committee on Food Supplies, which contented itself with ensuring adequate importation and production of supplies, leaving distribution and pricing to private enterprise. The government intervened strongly only in the market for sugar. It established a Royal Commission for Sugar Supplies, which, from 26 October, enjoyed a monopoly on sugar importation. Though a government entity, the commission nevertheless operated through a private agent, Henry Tate and Sons. Moreover, as

<sup>2</sup> "State control of food prices: Maximum rates fixed," Times 7 Aug. 1914: 3. The Times further alleged that a cabal of "unprincipled dealers" had attempted to "corner" the East End market in food. They had surreptitiously bought up unspecified provisions from East End shops further to inflate prices.

<sup>3</sup> Table 3.1: Prices of staple foods in London: 6 August 1914 to 28 July 1914

Food	Price on 6 August	Price on 28 July	Percentage increase
Flour	1.5	1.5	0.0%
Sugar	4	1.5	166.7%
English beef	7.5	6.5	15.4%
Chilled beef	7.5	6	25.0%
Frozen beef	6.5	4.5	44.4%
English mutton	8.5	8	6.3%
English pork	8	6.5	23.1%
Danish bacon	10.5	8.5	23.5%
Colonial cheese	8.5	6.5	30.8%
Butter	15	13	15.4%
Average inflation*			23.0%

Source: "State control of food prices: Maximum rates fixed."

\*The average inflation excludes flour and sugar. Also, the Times listed prices, but did not calculate their relative increases. Only the price of sugar rose by more than half, though at 4d. per pound, it remained more affordable than butter or meat.

<sup>4</sup> L. Margaret Barnett, British Food Policy during the First World War (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985) 36-37.

orthodox free-traders might have feared, it appeared to waste the taxpayers' money, spending perhaps £2 million more than market value for the sugar it bought up to June 1915. A more secretive Grain Supplies Committee constituted in October fared even worse. Its clumsily concealed interventions in international markets may have even reduced British grain stocks.<sup>5</sup> The lackluster results of the government's forays into the sugar and grain businesses discouraged other macroeconomic interventions through mid-1916.<sup>6</sup> On the microeconomic front, the government promoted the formation of committees of retailers, which then produced lists of maximum rates they could not enforce, but it intentionally left consumers alone.<sup>7</sup>

### Keeping up with the Smythes

In the void left by the government, the popularity of the food reform movement grew rapidly. The NFRA's "post bag" swelled to between forty and fifty letters per day in mid-August 1914 and then overflowed with between sixty-five and 120 for the six weeks after Whitsun 1915.<sup>8</sup> The total volume of correspondence throughout the war "proved almost more than the slender staff, even though reinforced by volunteers, could cope with." Up to 1913, the association had distributed 14,000 and 20,000 copies, respectively, of its pamphlets Economical Dishes for Workers and Hints toward Diet Reform; by December 1917, those numbers had grown to 104,000 and 60,000. The NFRA's principal spokesperson, Florence Petty, sold 20,000 copies of her The Pudding Lady's Recipe Book in 1917, its first year of publication, and 30,000 of her pamphlet Fireless Cookery. Total sales of literature shot up from £81 in 1914 to £306 in 1915, £392 in 1916, and £761 in 1917 before sliding back to £321 in 1918. The NFRA staged 450 cooking demonstrations in 1915 and 1916, 470 in 1917 alone, and 176 in 1918. By May 1917, Queen Mary and three current or former cabinet ministers -- David Lloyd George, Reginald McKenna, and Lord Selbourne -- had publicly expressed their gratitude for and interest in the NFRA's work.<sup>9</sup> Though similar statistics of the BFRL's wartime activities may not have survived, it too won plaudits from the queen.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps ironically, the newly-founded food reform organizations grew faster and achieved even more success than their predecessors. The National Food Fund began as one of

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<sup>5</sup> Unlike the Sugar Commission, the Grain Committee attempted to conceal its activities so as not to spook the market. It operated entirely under the guise of a private agent, Ross T. Smythe of Liverpool. Unfortunately, Smythe's indiscretion campaign quickly spoiled the ruse. During the Gallipoli campaign, the price of grain fell briefly due to the prospect of renewed trade with Russia through the Dardanelles. While other dealers waited for events to unfold and the market to stabilize, Smythe continued to buy. His competitors quickly traced his singular confidence back to British government backing. After this revelation, private dealers hesitated to buy if Smythe did not as well on the assumption that the British government had better market intelligence and that its purchasing power would inflate prices. Their caution translated into a smaller volume of grain imported into the United Kingdom.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, the Board of Agriculture and the cabinet debated, but then rejected schemes to augment domestic grain production with price guarantees.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of the British government's wartime food policies, see Barnett.

<sup>8</sup> Whitsun fell on 23 May in that year.

<sup>9</sup> National Food Reform Association, "Some opinions," (May 1917), SP Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>10</sup> "The queen and food reform: Diet and hygiene campaign," Times 16 July 1915: 11.

several charitable projects undertaken by the Women's Emergency Corps, which formed in August 1914 to rally women into wartime volunteer service.<sup>11</sup> By October 1914, the NFF had become an independent organization that provided food assistance to Belgian refugees and impoverished Britons.<sup>12</sup> As of March 1915, it had also embarked on an educational campaign to teach the "principles of economy in buying, cooking, and using food."<sup>13</sup> In October 1915, the NFF spun off its "education branch" as an independent but affiliated entity, the National Food Economy League, under the direction of Julia Lady Chance.<sup>14</sup> In the words of Lady Chance, the NFEL "surprised everyone by the enormous proportions it attained without any volition, as it seemed, on the part of the people concerned with it."<sup>15</sup> Its revenues from the sale of booklets and leaflets amounted to between £6000 and £8000 per year, ten times as much as the NFRA's.<sup>16</sup> Between 1915 and 1918, it dispensed 750,000 copies of its various publications. The twenty-first edition of its Handbook for Housewives sold out in three days and went through five more printings in a single month. Moreover, the NFEL organized more than 2,000 demonstration lectures around the country.<sup>17</sup>

Despite its upsurge in popularity, however, the wartime food economy movement did not behave much differently during the war than it had before – at least not at first glance. The old guard seemed to fall back on the same advice presented in the same promotional materials. For instance, on 19 August 1914, the Times bemusedly observed that with the outbreak of war vegetarians had not hesitated "to sing the praises of nuts" as an economical food, just as they always had. Interested parties could contact the National Food Reform Association for copies of its pamphlets.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the bulk of the literature the NFRA dispensed in 1917 consisted of the

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<sup>11</sup> In November 1919, the Times listed the establishment of the National Food Fund among the Women's Emergency Corps's accomplishments. Indeed, in September 1914, the Times had reported that a Miss Carey from the Women's Emergency Corps had begun to supply food from local markets to Belgian refugees. Apparently, she parlayed this personal project into a full-fledged independent charity – the National Food Fund. Inside two months, however, Carey's co-workers discovered that she had in the past promoted five fraudulent companies and was even then cheating the NFF for personal gain. She may also have had ties to at least two other sham charities: the Belgian Soldiers Fund and the War Babies League. Carey disappeared, but the NFF persisted under new leadership. See "Women's emergency work," Times 11 Aug. 1914: 3, "Succouring the victims of the war: British relief work," Times 14 Sept. 1914: 4; "Women's Emergency Corps: Disbanding this month," Times 8 Nov. 1919: 9. See also Lady Chance, interview with A. E. Conway, 11 Feb. 1919, ts., Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>12</sup> National Food Fund, "The National Food Fund and Its Work," Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>13</sup> "Classes in Household Economy," Times 12 March 1915: 5.

<sup>14</sup> Julia Chance, "An account of the work of the National Food Economy League," ts., Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London; "Economy for housewives: The choice of foodstuffs," Times 18 Oct. 1915: 5.

<sup>15</sup> Lady Chance, letter to A. E. Conway, 24 March 1918, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum.

<sup>16</sup> Lady Chance, interview with A. E. Conway.

<sup>17</sup> "An Account of the Work of the National Food Economy League."

<sup>18</sup> "How to be useful in war time: Aids to economy in food," Times 19 Aug. 1914: 9.

same two pamphlets as it had in 1913: Economical Dishes for Workers and Hints toward Diet Reform.<sup>19</sup> The Bread and Food Reform League's first press release of the war, dated 1 September 1914, reminisced about a campaign twenty years before in Belgium to recover the "lost art of making good bread."<sup>20</sup> In January 1915, it cooperated with the NFRA in a futile effort to revive a campaign for a so-called "standard bread" baked from wholemeal flour. The BFRL had enlisted the Daily Mail as its partner in the last standard bread campaign in 1911.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the newly founded NFEL followed a similar trajectory of development as its predecessors, if on a larger scale. A team of experts in domestic economy, including men and women alike, wrote a series of pamphlets and a syllabus for demonstration lectures. While the older food reform organizations operated primarily from London, the NFEL opened so-called "centers" – or branch offices – throughout England, Wales, and Ireland. The centers sold literature and arranged for courses of demonstration lectures, up to a week in length, taught by "commissioners" dispatched from NFEL headquarters in London.<sup>22</sup>

This semblance of sameness suffused the NFEL and NFRA's advice for wartime food conservation. They recycled economical recipes similar to those Dorothy Peel had offered aspiring middle-class matrons over the previous two decades. The NFEL's Handbook for Housewives recommended puddings composed of crumbs and crusts and salads scraped together from the "odds and ends" of vegetables.<sup>23</sup> Florence Petty, the NFRA's "Pudding Lady," advised saving cheese rinds and vegetable skins for soup stock.<sup>24</sup> By carving roasts or steaks before cooking, the economizing housewife could wheedle out of them half again as many dishes.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> These two pamphlets still topped the NFRA's catalog of publications as late as May 1917. A new series of pamphlets entitled Facts for Patriots and geared to the war came third. See "Some opinions."

<sup>20</sup> "Bread reform in Belgium," Times 1 Sept. 1914: 11.

<sup>21</sup> See also Bread and Food Reform League, Standardisation of Bread (1911), 08425.33.13, British Library, London.

<sup>22</sup> A center paid from £2 12s. 6d. to £3 13s. 6d. for a week long course. It recouped this initial outlay by collecting a small fee from all the women who enrolled. See "The Educational Campaign of the National Food Economy League," Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>23</sup> Both the NFF and NFEL Handbooks for Housewives included the same recipe for "soup made from materials usually thrown away," such as the peelings of all vegetables, the outer leaves of cabbage, celery, leeks, and lettuce, the tops of carrots and turnips, and rinds of bacon and cheese. See National Food Fund, The National Food Fund Handbook for Housewives (1915) 21, and National Food Economy League, The National Food Economy League Handbook for Housewives, 24th ed. (1917) 17. Both are part of the Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>24</sup> Florence Petty, The Pudding Lady's Recipe Book (London: G. Bell, 1918) 95, 101, SP Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>25</sup> Traditionally, the English housewife baked Sunday's sirloin with potatoes, then served it cold on Monday and in a hash on Tuesday, for a total of three dishes from one joint of meat. According to the NFEL, however, she could cut the top from the fillet, setting aside the bone and suet for soup stock and baking respectively. The fillet could yield at least two dishes, perhaps grilled rounds of beef with fried bread or stuffed olives with spaghetti; the top commended itself to stuffing and braising with vegetables. She could stew scraps with haricot beans and peas,



However, despite the most conscientious conservation of scraps and the most cunning carving of Sunday's sirloin, rising prices and dwindling supplies could still necessitate reductions in consumption. Fortunately, the homemaker could supplement meat with other, cheaper and more readily available proteinaceous foods, such as beans, cheese, and peas.<sup>26</sup> The BFRL claimed that a pound of flesh-forming substance cost a mere 7.5d. as oats compared to a staggering 2s. 8d. as beef.<sup>27</sup> The NFRA's Economical Dishes for Workers recommended sausages and turnovers made from lentils instead of meat.<sup>28</sup> Its Facts for Patriots lauded pulses as "the poor man's beef."<sup>29</sup>

As before the war, food economy hinged on bread. In October 1914, the journalist and gourmand Earnest Oldmeadow stepped in to write an economical cookbook for a London publisher after the original author bowed out to work for the Red Cross. The book, entitled Home Cookery in War-Time, appeared in 1915.<sup>30</sup> Though his jocularity bucked the somber tradition of the food reform movement, Oldmeadow nevertheless captured the wartime veneration of bread in a colorful personal anecdote:

Years ago an almost religious reverence surrounded bread. You could waste other things; but never bread. My own childhood was embittered as the result of my having thrown away in a moment of petulance a horrible slice of bread, with crust burnt almost black and a doughy crumb. My brothers and sisters could throw away apples over the hedge after sampling them with a single bite; or they could leave half-a-slice of roast sirloin on the plate, with impunity; but my sin in throwing away that piece of bread was never allowed to die. When an old Welsh nurse called to see me after a few years of absence one of her first questions was directed to this hateful subject, and she did not go away without telling me a blood-chilling narrative about a boy who threw away a piece of bread and perished miserably a few months afterwards, on a raft in the Indian Ocean, without so much as a ship's biscuit. Nevertheless I do not wholly succeed in despising this old sentiment. Bread, quite apart from its high use in the Christian mysteries, has a human sanctity as the stoutest staff of life. To waste it at any

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braise or fry them, or even press them into corn beef. When carefully dressed and cooked, her single joint of meat provided six dishes: four main courses, soup, and baked dumplings or pudding. See NFF Handbook 11-12, and NFEL Handbook 8-9.

<sup>26</sup> NFF Handbook 9-10; NFEL Handbook 4.

<sup>27</sup> Bread and Food Reform League, Food in War Time and Recipes for Penny Meals (London, 1915-1916) 6, SP Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA. The NFRA cited the same figures in its Facts for Patriots pamphlet series. However, one food reformer had not plagiarized from another. Both the league and the association had borrowed these statistics from the dietician Robert Hutchison, who published them in his textbook on nutrition. See National Food Reform Association, Facts for Patriots, no. 12 (London, 1918) 26-28, SP Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA, and Robert Hutchison, Food and the Principles of Dietetics, revised ed. (New York: Wood, 1906) 181.

<sup>28</sup> Economical Dishes for Workers 9, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Facts for Patriots, no. 12, 26-28.

<sup>30</sup> Ernest Oldmeadow, Home Cookery in War-Time (London: Grant Richards, 1915) 10, 31(41)/3.421 78/752, Imperial War Museum, London. He dated the preface "feast of St. Denis of France, 1914," or, in more quotidian format, 9 October 1914.

time is not good. To waste it in war-time is an unspiritual as well as a selfish action.<sup>31</sup>

If the BFRL did not share Oldmeadow's sense of humor, it naturally reacted just as strongly against the wartime waste of bread. As it had traditionally done, the league emphasized the greater nutritional value of brown over white bread, citing as evidence old ethnographic analogies that it now adapted to reflect the bellicosity of the empire's Indian armies:

This Bread is largely used in Egypt, India, and elsewhere, and the Sikhs [sic], Punjabi, and Pathan soldiers have very fine physique, stamina, and perfect dentition.<sup>32</sup>

The old aphorism that two loaves of brown bread contained as much sustenance as three of white now did double duty: wholemeal flour conserved not only the individual consumer's money, but also the entire nation's stocks of grain.<sup>33</sup>

The war did motivate some mild innovation in methods of cooking. According to the BFRL and the NFEL, poaching, steaming, and stewing, supposedly retained the nutritive value of food better than did traditional baking, boiling, and frying. Boiling leached away flavors and nutrients, leaving foods "scarcely worth eating" at all; by contrast, steaming imparted a surprisingly delicious flavor to fish or vegetables, without depriving them of essential nutrients.<sup>34</sup> Stewing in an earthenware pot saved fuel and labor, while drawing forth the "fullest amount of flavor and nourishment."<sup>35</sup> The economizing housewife could also stew in a hay box, an empty crate insulated with hay, newspaper, or old clothes: she brought her pot to a boil, removed it from the fire and swaddled it in wool, and then sealed it in the hay box. With heat trapped in by the hay, the contents of the pot cooked slowly without the expenditure of any fuel or labor.<sup>36</sup> If she could not afford the apparatuses for economical cooking, she could improvise them from the flotsam and jetsam of early twentieth-century consumer culture: long glass bottles could serve for rolling pins, stoneware jam jars for double boilers, tongue tins punched through with holes for steaming baskets.<sup>37</sup> The Pudding Lady explained in her recipe book how to construct an oven from a seven-pound biscuit tin mounted on a gas ring or paraffin lamp.<sup>38</sup>

In keeping with the logic and rhetoric of the prewar national efficiency movement, these small economies, effected by individual housewives, could amount in the aggregate to

<sup>31</sup> Oldmeadow 64.

<sup>32</sup> Food in War Time and Recipes for Penny Meals 4.

<sup>33</sup> Bread and Food Reform League, "Making our food go further: A national necessity explained by a food expert," by May Yates, reprinted from The Graphic 21 Apr. 1917, SP Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>34</sup> NFEL Handbook 5, 11-12; National Food Economy League, Housekeeping on 25/- a Week or Under, For a Family of Five, 13th ed., 3. See also Bread and Food Reform League, Report of the Bread and Food Reform League and the Educational Health and Food Campaign (London, 1914) 22-23.

<sup>35</sup> Stewing meant "long, slow cooking over gentle heat." Once she had the food in the pot and over the fire, the housewife could more or less leave it alone, perhaps stirring occasionally, for hours at a time, depending on the recipe. Stewing required a less vigorous fire, thus conserving coal or gas. See NFEL Handbook 11 and Housekeeping on 25/- 3.

<sup>36</sup> NFF Handbook 18; NFEL Handbook 12-15; Housekeeping on 25/- 4-5; Petty 104-106.

<sup>37</sup> NFF Handbook 19; NFEL Handbook 14-15; Housekeeping on 25/- 3.

<sup>38</sup> Petty 103.

impressively large savings. According to the NFEL, if each of 30 million consumers ate one ounce less meat per day at a price of 10d. per pound, they would save £30 million over the course of a year. If the same 30 million consumers took one fewer lump of sugar at afternoon tea, they would altogether save £3.75 million. If they could abstain from alcohol for a year, they could save £185 million, 1.8 million tons of barley, 3.64 million hundredweights of sugar, and 1.6 million tons of coal.<sup>39</sup>

However, the superficial appearance of consistency belied the philosophical changes unfolding underneath. Before the war, food reformers had treated the well-to-do fundamentally differently from the poor: the former they had invited in, but the latter they had preached to. The NFRA had entitled its publication of the 1912 Mansion House conference on nutrition at private schools "Our Children's Health at Home and at School." The words "our" and "home" in the title implied that the middle- and upper-class parents of children attending Britain's best schools naturally belonged to the food reform movement. In addition, the experts in attendance at the conference itself did not disparage them as ignorant or lazy for feeding their children improperly. A similar conference a year later in the same location, but about working-class schoolchildren went by the title "Rearing an Imperial Race." On the one hand, the words "rearing" and "imperial" connote dignity and strength, so in choosing this title, the NFRA did not mean any condescension. On the other hand, these words lacked the inclusiveness and warmth of "our" and "home." The experts assembled in 1913 often sympathized with the plight of working-class parents with school-age children, but nevertheless criticized them for drunkenness, ignorance, or laziness. The NFRA's prewar class perspective boiled down to a simple formula: food reform needed the well-to-do, but the poor needed food reform. Though it did not banish class-consciousness, the First World War necessitated cross-class cooperation on an unprecedented scale. By the end of 1916, food reformers realized that to guarantee adequate nutrition for the entire country by voluntary means, they needed the cooperation of the poor more than the latter needed their advice.

The newest members of the food reform movement best exemplified this transition due in part to their personal histories. Ernest Oldmeadow trained as a minister in the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the most gentrified branch of Methodism.<sup>40</sup> After his ordination, he moved to London, but did not take on a pastoral charge.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, he dabbled in journalism, editing a periodical known as the Dome from 1897-1900. At the turn of the century, he deviated from his original career path, giving up his Methodist ministry, converting to Catholicism, and pursuing journalism full-time. As his journalistic and literary writing later suggested, he gravitated toward the Catholic Church out of an aesthetic affinity for ritual, much as did the members of the mid-nineteenth century Oxford Movement. Over the next twenty years, Oldmeadow wrote three

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<sup>39</sup> National Food Economy League, Patriotic Food Economy for the Well-To-Do (1917) 22-23.

<sup>40</sup> The Wesleyan Methodist Church regarded itself as the most authentic successor to the ecclesiastical organization that John Wesley himself had built toward the end of his life. By contrast, so-called Primitive Methodists had split with the institutional church, but cleaved more closely to the populist spirit of Wesley's teachings. Though Primitive Methodism, too, gravitated toward middle-class respectability in the second half of the nineteenth century, it nevertheless produced several of the leaders of Britain's labor movement.

<sup>41</sup> Wesleyan Methodist Church, Minutes of Several Conversations at the One Hundred and Fifty-Fifth Yearly Conference of the People Called Methodists, in the Connexion Established by the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M., Begun in Hull on Tuesday, July 19, 1898 (London, 1898) 75.

novels as well as food and music reviews for London newspapers.<sup>42</sup> Though good-humored and self-deprecating, Oldmeadow's patrician bearing and refined tastes bordered at times on snobbery. One of his critics remarked that Oldmeadow had a "Latin" streak in his character that carried in its train a "gift for romance."<sup>43</sup> In combination with this continental flare, his extensive knowledge of fine foods and wines earned him a reputation among the smart set as a veritable gourmand.<sup>44</sup>

By contrast, Lady Chance acquired her gentility by descent and by marriage. She belonged to the aristocratic Strachey family from Somerset County, which had a remarkable history of literary and scientific achievement as well as of public service. At least fourteen of her relatives, including nine of her cousins, have their own entries in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.<sup>45</sup> In 1884, she married William Chance, a barrister of the Inner Temple whose grandfather and great uncle had founded the glass manufacturing firm Chance Brothers in Smethwick, near Birmingham. The Chances had also distinguished themselves in science and in philanthropy. William's father, James Timmins Chance, had earned a baronetcy in 1900 for his work in optics and for his generosity to the city of Birmingham. William himself not only practiced law, but also served as a Poor Law guardian in Surrey.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> His novels included Susan (1907), Coggin (1920), and The Hare (1921). See John Matthews Manly and Edith Rickert, Contemporary British Literature: Bibliographies and Study Outlines (New York: Harcourt, 1921) 133.

<sup>43</sup> George N. Shuster, The Catholic Spirit in Modern English Literature (New York: Macmillan, 1922) 353-354.

<sup>44</sup> For example, Nathaniel Newnham-Davis, the author The Gourmet's Guide to London, credited Oldmeadow with finding the Rendezvous, which subsequently grew into among the city's most popular restaurants. See Nathaniel Newnham-Davis, The Gourmet's Guide to London (New York: Brentano, 1914) 256. See also "Mr. E. J. Oldmeadow," obituary, Times 13 Sept. 1949: 7.

<sup>45</sup> Lady Chance was born Julia Charlotte Strachey. Her father, Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Strachey, was the son of Edward Strachey, a civil servant in Bengal, and the grandson of Sir Henry Strachey, Bt. Lieutenant-General Sir Richard Strachey, a soldier and a geographer, and Sir John Strachey, a governor of the North-Western Provinces in India, were her uncles. Her cousins included the writers Dorothea Bussy and Lytton Strachey, the academician Joan Pernel Strachey, the feminist Philippa Strachey, the politician Baron Strachie, and the journalist John St. Loe Strachey, to name just a few. At the least, her great-great-great grandfather, great-grandfather, three of her uncles and nine of her cousins have their own entries in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. See "Lieutenant-Colonel H. Strachey," obituary, Times 10 Feb. 1912: 11, and "Julia Lady Chance," obituary, Times 1 Sept. 1949: 7. See also entries for John Strachey (1671-1743), Sir Henry Strachey (1736-1810), Sir Edward Strachey (1812-1901), Sir Richard Strachey (1817-1908), Sir John Strachey (1823-1907), Baron Strachie (1858-1936), John St. Loe Strachey (1860-1927), Dorothea Bussy (1865-1960), Ralph Strachey (1868-1923), Philippa Strachey (1872-1968), Oliver Strachey (1874-1960), Joan Pernel Strachey (1876-1951), Lytton Strachey (1880-1932), and James Beaumont Strachey (1887-1967) in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004).

<sup>46</sup> According to their own promotional materials, Chances Brothers manufactured the first sheet glass in England. In the 1840s and 1850s, James Timmins Chance developed manufacturing processes for patent plate glass and for lighthouse lenses, the latter of which became central to

In Julia, the politics of the Strachey and Chance families seemed awkwardly to merge. She may have derived her interest in women's suffrage from her aunt Jane and her cousins Philippa and Joan, but, like her husband, she identified with the Conservative Party.<sup>47</sup> Before the war, Chance had belonged to the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association and written pamphlets for it and for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. In her writing, she advocated ardently for women's suffrage, but at the same time betrayed a measure of naivety about class and politics. In a pamphlet intended specifically for a working-class readership, she explained that the CUWFA aimed to enfranchise three different categories of women: property owners, heads of household paying more than 4s. per week in rent, and university degree holders. These women needed the vote first and foremost to fight "white slavery" by redressing the "double standard of morality" that condemned a prostitute as a "shameless outcast" for the same sin that it excused as "but a slight fault" in men. Chance later held out higher wages and lower infant mortality as indirect benefits of suffrage, but she seemed to argue overall that wealthy, educated women wanted the vote for themselves in order to regulate the morality of their social inferiors.<sup>48</sup> Chance wrote a similar tract under the auspices of the NUWSS entitled Women's Suffrage and Morality, again emphasizing the scourge of white

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the family business. In celebrating its centennial in 1924, Chance Brothers boasted that its lighthouses "flash over every sea in the inhabited globe." The company also had dealt generously with its employees and its community. Chance Brothers educated 10,000 of its employees' children at its own school and funded an independently managed pension scheme for its retirees and those injured while working in its factories. James Chance donated the land for West Smethwick Park to Birmingham and endowed the school of engineering at the city's namesake university. In addition to his legal practice and his seat on the board of guardians in Surrey, William Chance belonged to the Charity Organization Committees of Chelsea and Southwark. Though reputedly generous in person, he adhered publicly to the rigid form of Victorian moral reformism represented by the Poor Law Act of 1832. He played a key role in the founding of the Poor Law Unions Association. See Charles Welch, "Chance, Sir James Timmins, first baronet (1814–1902)," rev. Anita McConnell, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004) 26 June 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32359>>; Chance Brothers, 100 Years of British Glass Making 1824-1924, p157\*129\*DSC, British Library, London; "Sir William Chance: Poor Law administration," obituary, Times 10 Apr. 1935: 19.

<sup>47</sup> As an example of the Strachey family's political affiliation, one of her cousins, Edward Strachey, represented the Liberal Party in the Commons from 1892 to 1911 and then in the Lords as Baron Strachie until his death in 1936. (The spelling of the last name "Strachey" and the title "Strachie" did differ.) See C. S. Orwin, "Strachey, Edward, first Baron Strachie (1858–1936)," rev. H. C. G. Matthew, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004) 30 June 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36336>>.

<sup>48</sup> Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association, Words to Working Women on Women's Suffrage, by Lady Chance (July 1912) 2-4, 8, 324.6230941, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, London. Chance cited a study by the Independent Labour Party to the effect that 80 percent of women lodgers belonged to the "working class." However, she did not calculate how many of those met the 4s. rent requirement that the CUWFA proposed. Moreover, married working-class women would not have received the vote under the CUWFA plan.

slavery and the potential of the vote to vanquish it.<sup>49</sup> Though she sincerely sympathized with working-class women, Chance's outrage at prostitution may have blinded her to their more immediate concerns – high rents, low wages, unemployment, and so on.

These class prejudices colored some of the early efforts of the wartime food economy movement. In his wartime cookbook, Oldmeadow related an amusing allegory of the working-class Smiths and the middle-class Smythes. The former resided at 749 Jubilee Road, the latter at the Rowans, Beechcroft Avenue. The former bought their provisions from a "beery costermonger," the latter from a "pert young man in a ready-made blue suit, who always had enough time on his hands to exchange gallantries with [the] housemaid." Though he liked both families equally well, Oldmeadow nevertheless had not written his book with the Smiths in mind. On the one hand, they would not have read it anyway as the denizens of Jubilee Road had little interest in literature. On the other hand, even if they had read it, they would not have followed its advice, as the experience of previous food reformers had proved:

With reluctance and regret, I must pass by the humblest households also. There could be no more useful or patriotic work than to knead better ideals and sounder practices of cookery into the hearts and minds of the working classes. . . . We know that well-meaning philanthropists and social doctrinaires have laboured long and unselfishly to this end, but their industry and zeal have made little impression.<sup>50</sup>

By contrast, the Smythes embodied the good sense and public-spiritedness to which England owed its greatness:

I am thinking of the scores of thousands who are the salt of England; the people who, without forgetting to help the poor and to provide for the future, seem to get the most out of life; who bring a wholesome curiosity [sic] into play and are always picking up lore worth having; who spend their bits of money intelligently on every occasion, whether it be the choice of a book or the planning of a holiday or anything else through which the old grooves have been worn too well.<sup>51</sup>

Unlike the Smiths, the Smythes would bring their "wholesome curiosity" to bear on the food crisis, find out the best course of action for themselves and their country, and follow it. Though Oldmeadow did not openly question the Smiths' patriotism, he implied that it did not measure up to the same standard as did the Smythes'.

Lady Chance's NFF echoed Oldmeadow's ambivalence about the working class in its early food reform literature. In the introduction to its Handbook for Housewives, published in late 1914 or early 1915, the NFF made several not necessarily malicious, but nonetheless ill-informed assumptions about the working class:

The Educational Campaign of the National Food Fund is not primarily intended to teach the very poor in the large towns. Experience has shown that . . . they buy a large amount of their food ready cooked. One reason for this is that many of the women . . . are obliged to go out to work, and thus have not the time to cook. Another reason is the lack of convenience in their houses, few of which possess

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<sup>49</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, Women's Suffrage and Morality: An Address to Married Women, by Lady Chance (Jan. 1913), 324.6230941, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, London.

<sup>50</sup> Oldmeadow 6.

<sup>51</sup> Oldmeadow 7.

an oven or a closed range, the one open fire having to do duty for heating, drying clothes, and all such cooking as may be done. Improvement in the feeding of these homes must be expected to come rather from greater knowledge of the nutritive values of food, which may in time filter through to mothers from their children, if and when these latter are taught such things in a reasonable manner at school. . . . A development of a system of co-operative kitchens or cheap restaurants . . . is likely to be of more use to the very poor in the towns than trying to teach the individual women to cook.<sup>52</sup>

On the one hand, the Handbook for Housewives genuinely pitied the plight of the poor, pointing out inadequacies in urban housing and the difficulty in making ends meet on low wages. On the other hand, it politely declined their participation in the food economy movement. If they did not cook themselves, working-class housewives could not personally economize in food other than by reducing consumption – hardly a viable option for those on the brink of undernutrition. Whatever the depth and sincerity of their patriotism, they could contribute only obliquely, by heeding the advice of their board-school educated children in choosing the healthiest dishes from the menus at cooperative kitchens and cheap restaurants. From the vantage point of the NFF's education office, working-class women made second-class citizens who essentially could not participate in food reform or the war effort more generally to the same degree as their middle-class counterparts.

Unfortunately, Oldmeadow and Chance marginalized the working class in the food economy movement based on false assumptions. Working-class women actively sought out opportunities to educate themselves in domestic economy, including cooking. Admittedly, many East End or Salford homes lacked proper facilities. Working-class homemakers often made do with an open fire instead of a stove or an oven and may have had to lug water back to the kitchen from an outdoor spout. In such circumstances, they may have resorted occasionally to ready-baked bread or the Edwardian equivalent of fast food – the fish and chips, grilled sausages, meat pies, pickles and so forth on offer at sidewalk stalls.<sup>53</sup> However, these expedients supplemented rather than replaced their own cooking.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the working class as a whole exhibited

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<sup>52</sup> NFF Handbook 3. Unfortunately, the NFF neither numbered nor dated its Handbook for Housewives. It remarked only that, at the time of publication, £1 bought as much as 16s did formerly, an increase in food prices of 25 percent (NFF Handbook 4). Statistics compiled after the war indicate that inflation in retail food prices reached that point in March 1915, but had hovered between 15 and 22 percent from the previous August. See William Beveridge, British Food Control, Economic and Social History of the World War: British Series, ed. James Shotwell (London and Oxford: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Oxford UP, 1928) 322. Before Britain even declared war, the Board of Trade had instructed its local labor exchanges to track the price of food, and, presumably, would have had reasonably accurate statistics on inflation. On the authority of its own or the Board of Trade's statistics, the NFF could conceivably have estimated inflation at 25 percent any time between August 1914 and March 1915 – as Prime Minister Asquith himself did before the House of Commons that February. See Beveridge 8-9. These contextual clues place the publication of the Handbook for Housewives at the end of 1914 or beginning of 1915.

<sup>53</sup> Ellen Ross, Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London 1870-1918 (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 1993) 48-50.

<sup>54</sup> Ross 1993 51.

plenty of patriotism throughout the war. For example, working-class men enlisted in the armed forces in unprecedented numbers. Those who feared rejection by military doctors would go to extraordinary lengths to disguise their physical deficiencies.<sup>55</sup> Working-class men and women took pride in themselves and in their country, but food reformers apparently lacked either the interest or the capacity to tap into that store of good will.

### No One Too Poor or Too Rich to Help

The war itself provided both the motivation and the opportunity for the food reform movement to broaden and to improve itself. Amid the heady enthusiasm of August 1914, all but the provident few predicted that Sir John French and his men would return in triumph by Christmas. In the meantime, business would carry on more or less as usual. The NFF neither dated nor numbered its original Handbook for Housewives, as the food crisis would surely resolve itself before a second or third edition became necessary. However, the delusion of a speedy victory suffered a critical wound at Ypres and expired altogether at Neuve Chapelle. The inflation of food prices proceeded unchecked in 1915, reaching 25 percent in March, 35 percent in September, and 45 percent in December.<sup>56</sup> Hesitantly, the powers-that-be realized that to survive, let alone to win, they would have to set aside business as usual and mobilize all of Britain's human and material resources for total war. In particular, they would have to embrace the working class, a portion of the population they had formerly held at arm's length. They needed its sons to fill the ranks of Kitchener's armies and its daughters to work in the Ministry of Munitions' factories.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, food reformers realized that to rein in inflation of 20 percent per annum and to compensate for a 15 percent reduction in the importation of wheat, it, too, would have to reach all social classes.

Of the principal food reformer organizations, Lady Chance's NFF had the furthest to go in meeting the demands of a total war. The journey began after she and the education department split from the NFF proper to become the nominally independent NFEL in October 1915.<sup>58</sup> At the time, the organization's target audience had not yet expanded much, as indicated by a plan publicized in the Times to establish model kitchens in London where "mistresses of

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<sup>55</sup> See David Silbey, "Bodies and Cultures Collide: Enlistment, the Medical Exam, and the British Working Class, 1914-1916," Social History of Medicine 17 (2004): 61-76.

<sup>56</sup> Beveridge 322.

<sup>57</sup> In the first few months of the war, several thousand working-class women had lost their jobs, especially in textiles, due to the disruption of international trade. See Angela Woollacott, On Her Their Lives Depend (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1994) 23. Under "business as usual," Parliament and Whitehall sympathized with these unfortunates, but did little to employ them productively. In early 1915, the Central Committee on Women's Employment proposed to retrain them to manufacture erstwhile imports, including artificial flowers, baskets, bon-bon bags, boot polish, brushes, crochet buttons, fireless cookers, gloves, hair nets, Japanese cot quilts, knickerbockers, memorial wreaths, potash, rugs, slippers, stockings, surgical bandages, tapestries, toys, and wicker furniture. See United Kingdom, Interim Report of the Central Committee on Women's Employment 1915 (London: HMSO, 1915) 8-9. By contrast, under "total war," the newly inaugurated Ministry of Munitions aggressively recruited them to work in its factories.

<sup>58</sup> The two organizations remained close. After the split, the NFEL borrowed office space free of charge from the NFF. See "An Account of the Work of the National Food Economy League."



smaller households and their servants" could learn economical cooking methods.<sup>59</sup> However, within a month, the new NFEL had revamped the old NFF literature and curriculum to broaden its appeal to all of British society, from the working class to the well-to-do.<sup>60</sup> With the old commentary on the urban poor edited out, a newly revised Handbook for Housewives addressed itself to just such a universal readership:

A great responsibility has fallen to-day on everyone who has to do with the buying, cooking and using of food. It is at this time of national danger and stress the duty of everyone -- men, women and children alike -- to see to it that not the smallest portion of the nation's food is wasted. . . . To be effective, however, this economy must be practised by the whole Nation, rich and poor alike. . . . No one is too poor or too rich to help.<sup>61</sup>

To reach out to the rich and poor, respectively, the NFEL published two new booklets: Patriotic Food Economy for the Well-to-Do and Housekeeping on 25/- a Week. The pricing of NFEL publications reflected the purchasing power of their respective target audiences, with Housekeeping on 25/- selling for 1d., the Handbook for Housewives for 2d., and Patriotic Food Economy for 6d.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, the NFEL developed two separate syllabi for demonstration lectures, the first for "working women" and the second for "mistresses and their cooks."<sup>63</sup> In casting its net more broadly, the NFEL aimed to catch not only housewives of different socioeconomic classes, but also those of higher and lower degrees of education. It cautioned its instructors against technical terminology that some in their audiences might not understand, such as protein, carbohydrate, vitamin, and mineral.<sup>64</sup> The Handbook for Housewives referred instead to "materials to build the body, to give heat and energy, to enrich the blood, and to form bone."<sup>65</sup>

In appealing to the working class specifically, the NFEL represented national efficiency as reasonable and beneficial for both the individual and the country. It adopted a more

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<sup>59</sup> "Economy for housewives: The choice of foodstuffs."

<sup>60</sup> Lady Chance wrote an article on the NFEL and its progress for the 24 March 1916 edition of the Common Cause. She advertised the publication of a booklet entitled Housekeeping on 25s. a Week intended for a working-class readership. Its sample menus referred to food prices for November 1915, so the league must have written it during that month. See Lady Chance, "The work of the National Food Economy League," Common Cause 24 Mar. 1916, reprinted in the Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>61</sup> NFEL Handbook 1.

<sup>62</sup> Patriotic Food Economy did not include any recipes. The NFEL later compensated for this oversight with National Food Economy League, War-Time Recipes for Households Where Servants Are Employed (May 1917), Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>63</sup> National Food Economy League, "Syllabus for Working Women" and "Syllabus for Mistresses and Cooks," Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>64</sup> The simplification of terminology was primarily intended to accommodate working women, who presumably had less schooling. See "Syllabus for Mistresses and Cooks." However, plainer language probably benefited the NFEL's entire constituency, regardless of class or degree of education. Vitamin first appeared in written English only in 1912; just two to three years later, even the best-educated women had probably never encountered it. See "Vitamin," Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 1989) 31 July 2009 <dictionary.oed.com>.

<sup>65</sup> NFEL Handbook 2.

conciliatory tone than other reformers had in the past, emphasizing food economy's compatibility with pre-existing working-class dietary habits and financial constraints. As opposed to eating less, working-class families would "choose and cook to the best possible advantage" the food they already bought.<sup>66</sup> They would not have to alter their diets radically:

No particular diet is recommended . . . and nobody is going to be asked to leave off eating any particular kind of food altogether.<sup>67</sup>

To the contrary, food economy promised to reduce expenditures by half or more while actually improving diet, both in terms of nutrition and taste:

What this book will do is to teach how it is possible to spend 10d. or 9d. instead of a shilling, and yet be better fed. It will teach how inexpensive food . . . can contain all the nourishment that dearer food can give. It will also teach the housewife how to vary this simple food, and how to make it thoroughly tasty and appetising, so that her family shall not weary of it.<sup>68</sup>

To make good on its word, the NFEL had to accommodate itself to certain aspects of working-class home life to which it might have objected under other circumstances. For example, it accepted that bread constituted the majority of the typical working-class diet.<sup>69</sup> If the working-class housewife insisted on feeding her family bread, then, at the least, "each loaf . . . should contain the greatest possible amount of nourishment."<sup>70</sup> She could buy wholemeal instead of white bread, or, if she had the necessary facilities, she could bake at home and blend wheat flour with barley, maize, oats, potatoes, or rice for "a pleasant variety" of flavors and textures.<sup>71</sup> For her convenience, the NFEL published a leaflet of recipes for breads composed partially or entirely of alternative flours.<sup>72</sup> For another example, the working-class dietary centered on meat

<sup>66</sup> NFF Handbook 4; NFEL Handbook 1.

<sup>67</sup> NFF Handbook 4; NFEL Handbook 2.

<sup>68</sup> NFF Handbook 4; NFEL Handbook 2.

<sup>69</sup> NFEL Handbook 4-5.

<sup>70</sup> NFEL Handbook 5.

<sup>71</sup> NFEL Handbook 5, Housekeeping on 25/- 1. By spring 1917, no one could buy white bread or flour anyway. The Board of Trade had in November 1916 required the lengthening of flour extraction from 70 to 76 percent. Typically, mills had refined away 30 percent or more of the mass of the wheat kernel. Longer extraction meant retaining more of the kernel for humans and diverting less for animals. The higher proportion of hull in lengthened flour made it more brown in color as well as higher in fiber and other nutrients. As wheat supplies dwindled, the Board of Trade ordered further lengthening and, eventually, admixture with barley, oat, and rice flour, so that by March 1917, white bread had disappeared from bakery shelves. See Beveridge 95-96.

<sup>72</sup> National Food Economy League, "War Breads," Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London. Admittedly, the NFEL could not entirely suppress its reformative impulse with respect to the "over-consumption of bread." It innocently recommended oatmeal as a "most nourishing and economical food, not enough used in this country" and twice as nutritious as the typical working-class breakfast of bread, butter, and tea. See Housekeeping on 25/- 1-2. The NFEL's predecessors had promoted oatmeal since the nineteenth century, but to little or no avail. To the working class, plain oatmeal looked and tasted suspiciously like workhouse gruel. To its credit, the NFEL suggested sweetening oatmeal with milk or stiffening its texture with crusty bread. Alternatively, one could bake it into Scotch

despite its high cost and the ready availability of dairy or vegetable substitutes.<sup>73</sup> If the typical mechanic or stevedore would never turn vegetarian, his wife could make the most of the morsels of meat she could afford by carving before cooking, supplementing with other proteinaceous foods, and so on.<sup>74</sup> With efficient marketing and cooking, she could expect to serve meat relatively regularly. The NFEL's sample menu for a working-class family of five included meat or fish in seven of fourteen meals, with only two days of the week without any of either.<sup>75</sup> On those infrequent occasions when she had no meat to offer, she could resort to one of the NFEL's vegetarian recipes, formulated to resolve the "defects of a meatless diet, namely, lack of distinctive flavour and consequent monotony, combined with a too pulpy consistency of the food."<sup>76</sup>

As it did with respect to dietary preferences, the NFEL worked with rather than against working-class equipment and facilities. To bake at home or to cook newfangled meat and vegetarian dishes required certain utensils that, unfortunately, the working-class housewife often did not possess and could not afford. With a smidgen of ingenuity, she could improvise some of what she lacked from bottles, boxes, and tins. However, she would still find her kitchen wanting in comparison to that of her middle- and upper-class counterparts. Accordingly, the average recipe in Housekeeping on 25/- required only two bowls or pans. With only a single pot or saucepan, the working-class housewife could cook potato soup, Scotch barley broth, stewed sheep's tongue, sea pie, oatmeal mince, rhubarb and vegetable marrow jams, beef tea, and savory rice with cheese.<sup>77</sup> With a mixing bowl in addition to her pot, she could boil oatmeal dumplings.<sup>78</sup> With a mixing bowl, pot, and jam jar, she could make maize-meal, dripping, or date pudding.<sup>79</sup> With only a skillet and mixing bowl, she could fry up potatoes and pancakes.<sup>80</sup> In her single pie dish, she could bake liver and rice pudding.<sup>81</sup> Add a mixing bowl, and she could have Yorkshire and batter puddings, toad-in-the-hole, tea scones, and several varieties of bread.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, three different pans, a bowl, and a jam jar would suffice for twenty-six of fifty-six recipes, so even the poorest housewives could cook economically without forgoing variety.

oatcakes, Yorkshire parkin, scones, or minces, foods without the stigma of gruel attached to them. See Housekeeping on 25/- 1-2, NFEL Handbook 10.

<sup>73</sup> The price of beef rose from just under 8d. per pound in 1914 to over 1s. 4d. in 1917, an increase of approximately 200 percent.

<sup>74</sup> Housekeeping on 25/- 2.

<sup>75</sup> Housekeeping on 25/- 7-8.

<sup>76</sup> National Food Economy League, Menus for Meatless Days: For People of Moderate Means, 4th ed., Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London. The NFEL allowed for 5 lbs. 6 oz. of meat altogether in its working-class menu, not significantly less than consumed before the war. In his famous book Poverty, Seebohm Rowntree reported that a carter and his family consumed 6 lbs. 8 oz. of meat (exclusively bacon and pork) in the course of a week in February 1901. See Dorothy Peel, A Year in Public Life (London: Constable, 1919) 124.

<sup>77</sup> Housekeeping on 25/-: recipe numbers 4, 5, 7, 10, 10B, 36, 37, 40, and 51, respectively.

<sup>78</sup> Housekeeping on 25/-: recipe 46.

<sup>79</sup> Housekeeping on 25/-: recipe numbers 10A, 48, 49.

<sup>80</sup> Housekeeping on 25/-: recipe numbers 15 and 19.

<sup>81</sup> Housekeeping on 25/-: recipe numbers 8 and 22.

<sup>82</sup> Housekeeping on 25/-: recipe numbers 19, 25, 28, and 30.

Meanwhile, the NFRA embarked on a similar reconciliation with the working class by hiring Florence Petty – the Pudding Lady – in October 1914. Petty had earned her nickname while working as a health inspector in St. Pancras, where she had called on housewives in their own homes to teach them how to cook traditional English puddings with the implements available to them. Before coming to the NFRA, she had served as chief of staff in the Newport Health Centre in rural Essex, a dental and medical clinic founded by Lady Meyer. During her time in St. Pancras and in Newport, Petty parlayed her unique blend of optimism and tact into a friendly rapport with working-class women.<sup>83</sup> Though Charles Hecht remained the chief executive of the NFRA, Petty became its most visible spokesperson. Both working- and middle-class women flocked to the cooking demonstrations she staged around the country. She attracted 2000 to her appearance in Nottingham and as many as 1000 in Chester, Altincham, and Warrington.<sup>84</sup>

Under her influence, the NFRA reformulated its dietary recommendations better to accommodate working-class tastes. From its inaugural meeting in 1908, the NFRA had attempted incongruously to escape the label "vegetarian" while simultaneously discouraging the eating of meat. Its founder, Eustace Miles, had written an entire book to discredit vegetarianism, but the supposedly more flexible philosophy of food reform he proposed in its place still strongly discouraged meat-eating. None of the recipes in either of the association's two most widely distributed pamphlets called for meat. Moreover, the large majority of them required no flour and less than two ounces of fat and sugar. To most working-class men and women, they appeared no different from the bland, pulpy fare peddled by un-closeted vegetarians. As of the beginning of the war, the NFRA's semantic gymnastics had impressed no one.<sup>85</sup> The publication of Petty's The Pudding Lady's Recipe Book in 1917 marked a definitively new departure from this prewar identity crisis. More than 13 percent of the recipes called for meat, about 25 percent for more than two ounces of fat or sugar, and 40 percent for flour. It included traditional dishes, like forty-six varieties of puddings and thirteen of pies, among more experimental ones, like lentil soufflé, maize-meal rissoles, and potted cheese and nuts. These allowances to flavor and familiarity came at only a slight cost in practicability: Petty's recipes called for 2.25 dishes on average, those in the prewar pamphlet Economical Dishes for Workers for 2.13. The majority of the recipes still qualified as economical even by the exacting standards of the war, but they did not seem as doctrinaire as those in the NFRA's old pamphlets. With a few relatively easy adjustments to their cooking, Britons could eat what they liked while still realizing the benefits of food economy.

### Very real trouble and some sacrifice

To bring the entire nation within its embrace, food economy had to reach out not only to the poor and the middling, but also to the rich. In an article written for the Common Cause, the official publication of the NUWSS, Lady Chance had insisted that "the NFEL has always based

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<sup>83</sup> National Food Reform Association, Rearing and Imperial Race, ed. Charles E. Hecht (London: St. Catherine, 1913) 128, 403-409.

<sup>84</sup> Food Education Society [formerly National Food Reform Association], Report for the period of the war 1914-1918 4-7, SP Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>85</sup> In August 1914, the Times still casually referred to the NFRA as "the vegetarians" and recommended it to readers interested in substituting nuts for meat. See "How to be useful in war time: Aids to economy in food."

its appeal to the public to economise on patriotic grounds."<sup>86</sup> However, both the NFEL and the NFRA also highlighted food economy's benefits for individual pocketbooks. The NFEL's Housekeeping on 25/- promised to feed its readers better than before at half the cost or less. However, the wealthy presumably did not face the same financial constraints and could afford to eat as they had before regardless of wartime inflation. To convince them of the merits of food economy, the NFEL backed away from practicality and thrift for their own sake and relied more heavily on patriotism and noblesse oblige. Of all the NFEL's publications, only Patriotic Food Economy evoked king and country in its very title. From the first page, it portrayed food economy as integral to the war effort, especially in its effect on labor and shipping:

Educated people have long realised that the first object of the National Economy which is required of all patriotic citizens to-day is to release labour of both men and women for essential War work. All expenditure, therefore, must be thought of in terms of labour and not of money. . . . Consumers should restrict their demand for all goods to what is necessary to maintain health and efficiency. . . . A . . . no less important object of National Economy in consumption is to reduce to the lowest possible amount the importation of everything that is not absolutely essential for the conduct of the War or the existence of the Nation, and thus to release shipping . . . for the essentials.<sup>87</sup>

In reducing their own consumption to the minimum compatible with "health and efficiency," the wealthy could employ many of the same economies as the working and middle classes.<sup>88</sup> They could eliminate certain foods and drinks entirely from their diets, such as morning tea, after lunch and dinner coffee, cream, and imports of all kinds.<sup>89</sup> They could eat meat only once per day and reduce the number of courses at each meal to three or fewer.<sup>90</sup> The upper-class mistress could keep two account books, the first for daily, the second for weekly and monthly expenditures – not to save money, but to ensure the efficiency of her household. At a glance, she could know how much of which foods she had purchased for what purpose. In addition, she could issue her orders to tradesmen in writing, retaining a carbon copy for herself, to avert unintentional excess – such as when the butcher delivered too much of the wrong cut of meat.<sup>91</sup> Every cup of flour conserved in this manner freed a mill-hand to enlist in the army or navy; every pound of bacon spared meant more cargo space for munitions and other essential war materiel.

Beyond capital, labor, and shipping, patriotic food economy also hinged on the health and well-being of the master and mistress's fellow citizens, especially those less fortunate than they. Upper-class consumption directly affected working-class purchasing power:

For instance, those who are economising from patriotic motives rather than from actual necessity would not be pursuing the right course if they were to buy only the cheaper kinds of food in order to bring their cash expenditure within a certain

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<sup>86</sup> "The work of the National Food Economy League."

<sup>87</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 1.

<sup>88</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 11-13. Like the Handbook for Housewives before it, Patriotic Food Economy advised carving meat before cooking, saving bones for soup stock and fat for clarification, baking at home, or substituting other grains for wheat.

<sup>89</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 7.

<sup>90</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 7.

<sup>91</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 8.

limit. Such purchasing on the part of the well-to-do would only result in poorer people being thrown back on the expensive kinds, and thus being able to buy even less than at present.<sup>92</sup>

The dietary habits of the poor would determine those of the wealthy: whatever the former ate, the latter would avoid in order to reduce demand and lower prices. As the working class relied so heavily on bread, the upper class would have to make do with porridge, oatcakes, maize, barley, and potatoes.<sup>93</sup> To moderate the cost of meat, the wealthy had to spring for the more expensive varieties, such as fresh fish and wild game or poultry.<sup>94</sup> In the interest of working-class children, who rarely received enough milk, upper-class adults had to scale back on dairy products, including butter.<sup>95</sup> In compromising on quantity rather than quality, the master and mistress "lessened demand, kept down prices, and freed freight" all at once, a veritable trifecta of patriotic food economy.<sup>96</sup> However, quality could cut both ways, as certain luxury foods cost more in capital and labor than their nutritive value warranted.<sup>97</sup> In fulfilling their obligations to king and country, the wealthy had to negotiate between several different, potentially competing interests.

To render this pill of patriotism and paternalism more palatable, the NFEL sweetened it with subtle allusions to English practicality and international chic. While proud of their own culture and traditions, middle- and upper-class Englishmen and women at the turn of the century also fancied themselves as cosmopolitan and sophisticated.<sup>98</sup> In appealing to insularity, the NFEL celebrated the "unsurpassable humility and simplicity" of English cooking. Convenient and wholesome, pies and puddings formed the foundation of British food economy.<sup>99</sup> However, the English cook could learn much from his foreign counterparts, especially with regard to the preparation of vegetables and meats. The NFEL had sold braising, steaming, and stewing to the working and middle classes as merely more economical, conserving fuel and preserving the nutritive value of food. To the upper class, it presented them as Continental cunning par excellence, as the French chef's solution to Britain's culinary defects.<sup>100</sup> Patriotic Food Economy alluded to foreign savoir-faire repeatedly, from French "abhorrence" for ready-made sauces to Italian "cleverness" with cereals and pulses.<sup>101</sup> Its companion volume, War-Time Recipes, likewise included a large number of international dishes: pot-au-feu, poule au pot Béarnaise, soupe aux choux, Danish soup, beef à la Roumaine, Spanish kidneys, bobotie, maize-meal gnocchi, fritto misto, mushrooms à la Bordelaise, potatoes maitre d'hotel, among other ragoûts

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<sup>92</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 4-5.

<sup>93</sup> War-Time Recipes 2; Patriotic Food Economy 11.

<sup>94</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 9.

<sup>95</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 14-15.

<sup>96</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 4-5.

<sup>97</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 9.

<sup>98</sup> Each edition of the Gentlewoman, a weekly magazine published from the 1890s well into the twentieth century, featured a different noblewoman "at home." While most were British peers or their wives, many were foreigners, including even the Empress of Austria. Moreover, the Gentlewoman reported extensively on Continental fashions and trends. See, for instance, "The Empress Elizabeth of Austria at Achilleion, on the Isle of Corfu," Gentlewoman 9 January 1892: 1.

<sup>99</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 10.

<sup>100</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 10.

<sup>101</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 9, 12.

and soufflés.<sup>102</sup>

In bestirring the patriotism of the well-to-do and pandering to their pretensions, however, food reformers also criticized their supposed excesses. Even when the war still seemed unlikely to last past Christmas 1914, Oldmeadow had predicted that it would precipitate a backlash against leisure and luxury:

A time of War is a time for bracing up the whole life of a nation. The English had become too self-indulgent. Too many of us have been right up to or beyond our incomes. In proportion to our numbers and responsibilities, we have had too many purveyors of luxuries, too many entertainers, too many actors and actresses and funny-men and musicians and novelists and painters and paid reformers and professional sportsmen. To take a single illustration, we have had too many pale young men in 'the drapery' and not enough strapping fellows in the Army. When the War is over, we ought to be tougher, simpler, and therefore stronger.<sup>103</sup>

The jovial tone in which he wrote the allegory of the Smiths and the Smythes indicates that Oldmeadow himself did not appreciate the extent of the economic and human losses the country would endure en route to this simpler and stronger future. As the food crisis deepened, it wrung ever more of the self-indulgence out of most household budgets. However, a fortunate few seemed not to feel the economic pinch at all. For example, pricey hotels in London and Manchester continued to serve lavish bills of fare well into 1916.<sup>104</sup> The NFEL reacted to the apparent extravagance of the wealthy, both before and during the war, in uncompromising language:

In plain English, the well-to-do as a rule eat more than they require, and consequently more than is good for them. From the point of view of health, as well as of economy, such excess is positively injurious, and no hardship is involved in a restriction of the too lavish pre-war consumption of food.<sup>105</sup>

Simple gluttony alone did not account for all of this profligacy with food. At least a portion of it originated in the "extreme incompetence of the average English mistress in all matters of domestic management."<sup>106</sup> The war would hardly transform her into an "accomplished housewife," but it could perhaps inspire her to learn more about domestic economy.<sup>107</sup> She could begin with the "science of food values," which, fortunately, the NFEL had "shorn of its difficulties and terrors and rendered perfectly easy of comprehension by even the least scientifically minded housemistress."<sup>108</sup> She might also pursue cooking, which posed few difficulties for all but "invalids and the aged."<sup>109</sup> Of course, even if she mastered the underlying principles, actually practicing food economy required "very real trouble and some sacrifice" on

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<sup>102</sup> War-Time Recipes 4-5, 8, 11, 13, 14, 18, 22, 23, 24. By contrast, the Handbook for Housewives contained only five foreign recipes and Housekeeping on 25/- just one.

<sup>103</sup> Oldmeadow 14.

<sup>104</sup> "Food economy in hotels: Ultimatum from Mr. Runciman," Times 23 Nov. 1916: 9; "Waste of food: Extravagance in Manchester," Times 25 Nov. 1916: 10.

<sup>105</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 2.

<sup>106</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 4.

<sup>107</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 4.

<sup>108</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 5.

<sup>109</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 5-6.

her part.<sup>110</sup>

Table 3.2: Relative economy of the recipes published by different food reform organizations

	NFRA			NFEL		
	<u>The Pudding Lady's Recipe Book</u>	<u>Hints toward Diet Reform</u>	<u>Eco-nomical Dishes for Workers</u>	<u>Hand-book for House-wives (1917)</u>	<u>House-keeping on 25/-</u>	<u>House-holds Where Servants Are Employed</u>
Average no. of pans	2.25	2.75	2.13	2.20	2.06	2.72
Flour	40.40%	16.67%	26.67%	29.59%	29.63%	9.84%
No flour	59.60%	83.33%	73.33%	70.41%	70.37%	90.16%
More than 2 ozs fat	25.59%	4.17%	6.67%	9.18%	9.26%	2.46%
Less than 2 ozs fat	74.41%	95.83%	93.33%	90.82%	90.74%	97.54%
More than 2 ozs sugar	23.57%	0.00%	0.00%	10.20%	12.96%	0.82%
Less than 2 ozs sugar	76.43%	100.00%	100.00%	89.80%	87.04%	99.18%
Baking	35.35%	50.00%	46.67%	24.49%	24.07%	20.49%
No baking	64.65%	50.00%	53.33%	75.51%	75.93%	79.51%
Meat	13.47%	0.00%	0.00%	32.65%	25.93%	36.07%
No meat	86.53%	100.00%	100.00%	67.35%	74.07%	63.93%

### National economy

By carefully crafting its message to appeal to all classes of British society, food reform won itself a modest wartime following. Based on the sale of literature and the attendance at cooking demonstrations, as many as a million British women may have crossed paths with the food economy movement. Most of food economy's constituency likely consisted of working- and middle-class homemakers struggling to make ends meet amid wartime inflation.<sup>111</sup> The

<sup>110</sup> Patriotic Food Economy 2, 5.

<sup>111</sup> Middle-class educators and working-class mothers alike stressed food economy, the former for the sake of the empire and the race, the latter for the sake of their daughters and their sons-in-law. See Jane McDermid, "Women and Education," Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945, ed. June Purvis (New York: St. Martin's, 1995) 118. Indeed, before the war, the typical working-class housewife already practiced most of the economies advocated by the NFF and NFEL: cooking meats into soups and stews rather than serving them as separate dishes, baking all or some of her own bread, and improvising household amenities from junk. See Elizabeth Roberts, "Women's Strategies, 1890-1940," Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850-1940, ed. Jane Lewis (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 238-241 and Ross 1993 48. Above all, she conserved all her crumbs and crusts: "There was no bread wasted, it was toasted up . . . if she did have any crusts that had got too hard, she'd let them soak overnight, take them



sharp invective against the wealthy may have tempered their enthusiasm, but apparently did not entirely deter it. A National Economy Exhibition staged in upscale Knightsbridge attracted large numbers of the well-to-do, many with their servants in tow.<sup>112</sup> The publisher W. H. Smith served a meatless lunch to Dorothy Peel and her colleague Arthur Yapp when they called on him to promote food economy in the workplace.<sup>113</sup> Of course, not everyone rushed to embrace smaller portions of unfamiliar foods. Peel wrote in her memoirs that ingrained habits and prejudices often died hard. For instance, Britons generally balked at trying new grains such as polenta or maize meal, preferring the familiar white, wheaten loaf regardless of its expense.<sup>114</sup> Due in part to this mixed reception, the food economy movement accomplished relatively little on a practical level. Britons consumed just as much meat and wheat in 1915 and 1916 as in 1914.<sup>115</sup>

Though food reform may not have won widespread popularity or success during the war, it did break through some of its own misunderstandings and prejudices. From the vantage point of 1916, hunger no longer seemed like a problem peculiar just to the working class. Such a widespread crisis required a collective solution in which the wealthy cooperated with the poor rather than talking down to them. Consequently, the NFRA shook off the legacy of vegetarianism and brought in the Pudding Lady to forge a new relationship with the working class based on mutual understanding. The NFEL reformulated its program so that everyone, rich and poor alike, could participate. Admittedly, this change in attitude did not lead immediately to a change in methods. Food reform still meant educating individuals to help themselves. It still expected large national efficiencies to accrue from small personal ones. However, it had also become more fair – if not more effective – than in the past.

Food economy played a similarly positive, but incomplete part in promoting women's citizenship. On a macroscopic level, food economy afforded women an opportunity to participate meaningfully in the war effort. Perhaps those with free time could knit mittens for soldiers at the front; perhaps those with disposable income could buy war bonds. However, everyone – bored or busy, rich or poor – had to eat and so could have a hand in food economy. On a microscopic level, the various food reform organizations elevated individual women, such as Lady Chance or Florence Petty, into prominent positions of leadership in an enterprise of national consequence. Like factory inspection, infant welfare, and municipal sanitation before it,

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out, put them in a big basin, put a few currants in and bang it in the oven. Then put sugar and a little drop of milk. That was sweet and it was beautiful" (op. cit. Roberts 239; Ross 1993 46). Of working-class housewives, the NFEL asked nothing more than the same food economy that they had always practiced. To the middle class, the famous Mrs. Beeton had proclaimed "frugality and economy" as "home virtues, without which no household can prosper." See Isabella Beeton, *Household Management*, ed. Nicola Humble (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2000) 8. As food accounted for half of her family budget as late as 1901, the middle-class housewife had both occasion and opportunity to economize in the kitchen.

<sup>112</sup> "Hints on Saving: Suggestion Book at Economy Exhibition," *Times* 6 July 1916: 9.

<sup>113</sup> Peel 1919 168.

<sup>114</sup> Peel 1919 28.

<sup>115</sup> In 1914, Britain consumed 6,300,000 tons of wheat. Consumption contracted by a mere 2.4 percent in 1915 to 6,150,000 tons, then expanded by 0.5 percent in 1916 to 6,330,000 tons. Meat consumption declined a total of 10 percent from 1,276,000 tons in 1914 to 1,145,000 tons in 1916. See Beveridge 361. Admittedly, the demographics of consumption may have changed more significantly, with the wealthy eating less and the poor eating more.

food economy became another field in which educated women could achieve professional respectability. Due to this precedent, the Ministry of Food hired Dorothy Peel and Maud Pember Reeves as "directors of women's service" within two months of its inception in December 1916.

Perhaps unfortunately, the NFEL bowed out of the food economy movement with the debut of the Ministry of Food. In spring 1917, the NFEL's Handbook for Housewives continued to sell briskly; that May, Lady Chance began to plan for a permanent exhibit and shop in London that would undertake "propaganda of a striking, practical kind."<sup>116</sup> She envisaged the shop as the nerve center of the food economy movement, collecting and distributing information on all relevant private and public initiatives throughout Britain. However, the Ministry of Food had little interest in cooperating with private-sector food reformers. The ministry's indifference had the effect of a boycott, leading to the NFEL's demise in March 1918.<sup>117</sup> Meanwhile, the older food reform organizations soldiered on to the end of the war and beyond. The NFRA changed its name to the Food Education Society in 1919, but remained under the direction of Charles Hecht.<sup>118</sup> The BFRL survived to publish a commemorative history for its fiftieth anniversary in 1930.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> "An Account of the Work of the National Food Economy League."

<sup>117</sup> "An Account of the Work of the National Food Economy League."

<sup>118</sup> For example, Maximilian Bircher-Benner, the Swiss physician who invented muesli, spoke at the society's twenty-first annual conference in 1933. See M. O. Bircher-Benner, "The prevention of disease by correct feeding," address, 21st Annual Conference of Educational Associations (6 Jan. 1933), Food Education Society, 7384.ppp.38, British Library, London.

<sup>119</sup> Bread and Food Reform League, Bread of Olden Days and Fifty Years of Bread Reform (Norwich, UK: Jarrold, 1930).

#### 4. The Nation Is Placed upon its Honour

Indeed, this short four months' campaign has done more to raise the standard of living and to lower the cost of living than any movement of the kind which has ever been in Great Britain.<sup>1</sup>

In late 1916, the food crisis worsened to the point that the British government could no longer seem to ignore it. As the loudest voice of discontent, organized labor demanded more than an occasional, discreet intervention in international grain markets. Some of the most vigorous labor agitation coincided with the collapse of Asquith's coalition administration and the rise of the comparatively populist Lloyd George, who promptly instituted the Ministry of Food. Much to the disappointment of organized labor, the ministry fell back on voluntary food economy as the best solution to the crisis. Much to the disappointment of Lady Chance, the ministry did not seek the advice of the NFEL or the NFRA in pursuing its own economy campaign, thereby dooming itself to repeat many of the same mistakes.<sup>2</sup> Like its private-sector counterparts, the Ministry of Food had to overcome old class and sex prejudices in an ultimately futile attempt to preserve a liberal conception of British society.

##### People cannot expect to go through a war like this without a rise of prices

The British government had experimented with food economy in the first two years of the war, but on a modest scale. In May 1915, the Board of Trade officially called on the public to reduce the consumption of meat due to supply constraints and rising prices.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, it requested the Board of Education's assistance in teaching the public to cook with little or no meat.<sup>4</sup> By July, the Board of Education had written a pamphlet entitled Economy in Food: Some Suggestions for Simple and Nourishing Meals for the Home. Local education authorities could apply for a special grant to finance "informal instruction" in food economy, as the board suspected that busy housewives would not have the time to dedicate to regular classes.<sup>5</sup> In his introduction to the pamphlet itself, Arthur Henderson, the president of the Board of Education and the only Labour Party member in the coalition cabinet, encouraged a general sympathy for food economy rather than its actual practice:

It is obvious that the advice contained in this pamphlet is not equally needed by all persons. Many who will read it do not require any assistance; others will not be able to avail themselves of its advice for lack of the facilities for cooking the meals described, or for other reasons. Speaking generally, however, the varying

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<sup>1</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food and National War Savings Committee, "The success of the food economy campaign," by Edgar Jepson, Food Control Campaign Weekly Bulletin 25 July 1917: 137, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>2</sup> Lady Chance, interview with A. E. Conway, 11 Feb. 1919, ts., Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>3</sup> "Economy of meat: Board of Trade and rise in price," Times 21 May 1915: 5; United Kingdom, Board of Trade, Supplies of Meat (20 May 1915), ED 142/44, National Archives, Kew, UK.

<sup>4</sup> United Kingdom, Board of Education, Circular 911: Supplies of Meat, by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 26 May 1915, ED 142/44, National Archives, Kew, UK.

<sup>5</sup> United Kingdom, Board of Education, Circular 918: Economy in Food, by L. A. Selby-Bigge, July 1915, ED 10/82, and Circular 945: Special Grants for Instruction of Housewives in Economical Cookery, 31 Mar. 1916, ED 142/44, National Archives, Kew, UK.

circumstances and conditions have been borne in mind as far as possible, and the purpose of the pamphlet will be met if it makes the reader realise how important it is at the present juncture to give the most careful consideration to the problem of providing a pleasant, adequate, and economical dietary.<sup>6</sup>

As the son of a domestic servant who grew up in the tenements of Glasgow and Newcastle, Henderson knew from personal experience that poverty could frustrate the efforts of the best-intentioned homemakers.<sup>7</sup> The members of the working class could not reasonably eat less than they already did or cook dishes for which they lacked the necessary equipment. Rather, Henderson simply hoped that they would take economy into account as they set about feeding their families as pleasantly and adequately as they could. Henderson's soft line may have fostered the good will of working-class housewives, but it also suggested that the government did not yet take the food crisis very seriously. It warranted no more than a higher level of awareness, in combination perhaps with a casual program of instruction at local polytechnics. In fact, the Board of Education's pamphlet did not even offer particularly economical advice by the standards of its private-sector counterparts; for instance, more than half of its recipes required wheat flour compared to only a fourth of those in the NFEL's Handbook for Housewives.<sup>8</sup>

With the government reluctant to engage the food crisis at either the micro- or macroeconomic levels, the prices at the baker's and butcher's shops climbed inexorably higher during the first two years of the war. In January 1915, a cabinet committee headed by Walter Runciman, president of the Board of Trade, dismissed high food prices as an artifact of temporary supply constraints and predicted that they would fall in the future. However, despite Runciman's optimism, prices did continue to climb, prompting another investigation in June 1916 by a Board of Trade committee under J. M. Robertson, the Liberal MP for Tyneside. On 29 September 1916, the committee published its preliminary findings, which tracked the inexorable, if incremental increase in food prices in both rural and urban areas.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur Henderson, introduction, Economy in Food: Some Suggestions for Simple and Nourishing Meals for the Home, by the United Kingdom Board of Education (London: HMSO, 1915) 4, ED 142/44, National Archives, Kew, UK.

<sup>7</sup> Chris Wrigley, "Henderson, Arthur (1863–1935)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004) 5 Aug. 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33807>>.

<sup>8</sup> Of the recipes in the Board of Education pamphlet, 33.3 percent called for meat, 61 percent for flour, 37 percent for more than two ounces of fat, and 23.5 percent for more than two ounces of sugar. On average, they required 2.4 pans. By comparison, of the recipes in the NFEL's Handbook for Housewives, 33 percent still called for meat, but only 29.6 percent for flour, 9.2 percent for more than two ounces of fat, and 10.2 percent for more than two ounces of sugar. They required 2.2 pans on average. In The Pudding Lady's Recipe Book, the equivalent figures were 13.5 percent for meat, 40.4 percent for flour, 25.6 percent for excessive fat, 23.6 percent for excessive sugar, and 2.25 pans. While these statistics are a crude measure of economy, they still suggest that the Board of Education's cookery experts were less concerned about reducing the consumption of foods in short supply, like flour and meat, than were their counterparts at the NFEL and NFRA.

<sup>9</sup> See also Barnett 80-81.

Table 4.1: Percentage increase in prices of different foods from July 1914 to September 1916

Food	Large cities (population greater than 50,000)	Small towns (population less than 50,000)	United Kingdom overall
British beef			
Ribs	61	59	60
Thin flank	87	73	80
Chilled or frozen beef			
Ribs	83	76	80
Thin flank	102	92	97
British mutton			
Legs	57	54	55
Breast	92	68	80
Frozen mutton			
Legs	80	80	84
Breast	123	111	117
Bacon	49	42	46
Fish	103	70	87
Household flour	59	65	62
Bread	58	50	54
Tea	51	50	50
Sugar	166	160	163
Milk	39	32	35
Butter			
Fresh	48	49	48
Salted	47	49	48
Cheese	45	48	46
Margarine	20	17	18
Eggs	86	78	82
Potatoes	55	49	52
Weighted average increase of all foods	68	62	65

Source: "Food prices: Committee's proposals," Times 30 September 1916: 8.

On average, food prices had risen 10 percent by September 1914, 35 percent by September 1915, and 65 percent by September 1916. The increase in the price of particular foods varied widely around the average: margarine and milk had increased by only 18 and 35 percent, respectively, but frozen mutton and sugar had more than doubled. Inflation had struck hardest in the city, but it had not spared the country, despite its more direct access to homegrown foods. Prices had increased 62 percent in small towns, only 6 percent less than in large ones. The causes of inflation varied from a shortage of shipping to increased consumption by the Allied armed forces to higher costs for inputs for domestic agriculture. As an aside, the Robertson Committee

reported that the Central Powers had fared far worse than had Britain: beef had shot up 196 percent in Berlin and 344 percent in Vienna.<sup>10</sup>

As the cost of living grew between 1915 and 1917, it dragged ever more ponderously on wartime wages. In the decade before the war, a long upward trend in real wages had leveled off and even begun to reverse itself. Wages had nominally increased since 1895, but their real value had declined due to inflation.<sup>11</sup> The war accelerated the increase in both prices and wages, which muddled calculations of its ultimate effect on the cost of living. On the one hand, food prices had outpaced wage rates, which portended a decline in the already precarious standard of living for the working class. On the other hand, real household incomes overall may have increased due to greater job stability, more overtime, and the large number of women who had joined the workforce. The Robertson Committee even speculated that the total amount of "distress" in Britain had decreased since the beginning of the war. In the final analysis, many working-class families earned more money than they had before the war, but spent much of the windfall on food. More generally, the working-class standard of living remained abysmal. The Commission on Labour Unrest, appointed in June 1917, described in bleak terms the misery in which most wage earners and their families lived:

The towns and villages are ugly and overcrowded; houses are scarce and rents are increasing, and the surroundings are insanitary [sic] and depressing. The scenery is disfigured by unsightly refuse . . . the atmosphere polluted by coal dust and smoke, and the rivers spoilt by liquid refuse from works and factories. Facilities for education and recreation are inadequate and opportunities for the wise use of leisure are few.<sup>12</sup>

As it held back the working-class standard of living, the high cost of food let loose accusations of profiteering. In the popular imagination, greedy farmers, shippers, wholesalers, and retailers were conniving, under the cover of the war, to stir up an artificial food crisis to line their own pockets. The Commission on Labour Unrest explained the thought process leading to the popular belief in profiteering:

The publication . . . of the balance sheets of trading and shipping companies showing large dividends, and . . . reports of the increase of the price of commodities . . . tend to create in the workers' mind the belief that the few are making fortunes at the expense of the many. The worker sees . . . for instance, that beef from abroad can be laid on the British wharf at 6½d. per pound, and he knows that his wife has to pay three times more per pound for it. He naturally thinks that somebody is making undue profit out of the consumers. He reads reports of bacon lying rotting at the Port of London, or herring in the north of Scotland, or of potatoes being in some places superabundant, and in others non-existent, and he has a feeling of deep resentment that the possibility of such things was not . . . prevented.<sup>13</sup>

The outrage extended beyond working men and their wives: Dorothy Peel, the maven of middle-class domestic economy, wrote in her memoir of the war that high food prices caused "little or

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<sup>10</sup> "Food prices: Committee's proposals," *Times* 30 Sept. 1916: 7-8.

<sup>11</sup> British Constitution Association, *Industrial Unrest: The Reports of the Commissioners*, by Sir William Chance (London: King, 1917) 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Industrial Unrest* 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Industrial Unrest* 13.

no distress" before 1917, but did engender a "bitter feeling" about supposedly illicit profit-making at consumers' expense.<sup>14</sup> An occasional glance at the financial pages of the Times could reinforce those feelings. For example, in May 1915, the flour-milling concern Spillers and Bakers Limited announced an annual profit of £367,865, its largest ever. After replenishing a £250,000 rainy-day fund, the company had enough cash left over to pay dividends and bonuses of 4s. 6d. on its 1£ ordinary shares, a return of 22.5 percent.<sup>15</sup>

In truth, most of the evidence for profiteering boiled down to unsubstantiated rumor. The Labour MP George Barnes claimed in a Commons debate that "a farmers' association in the west of England" encouraged its members to feed milk to their pigs instead of sending it to market, presumably to constrict supply and inflate prices. He further alleged that an anonymous East Anglian dairyman poured thirty gallons of fresh milk down a drain each day as a matter of course. In neither case did he offer any specifics.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, William Lawton of the Britannia League of Housewives railed against unidentified middlemen who supposedly bought wild rabbits for 6s. per dozen in the country and then sold them at 1s. 8d. to 2s. a piece in the city.<sup>17</sup> In truth, a fine line separated earning large profits in a dysfunctional wartime market and conspiring illegally to boost prices.<sup>18</sup> The Robertson Committee found no indication of the latter in its investigation, but profiteering purveyors of milk and rabbits continued to stalk the popular imagination until well after the war ended.<sup>19</sup>

As discontent over high prices and profiteering mounted, so did pressure on the government to intervene. The day after the publication of the Robertson Committee's report, a Times editorial attributed the increase in the cost of living to impersonal economic forces rather than profiteering. In the Times' opinion, Britons had to reconcile themselves to high prices for the moment:

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<sup>14</sup> Dorothy Peel, A Year in Public Life (London: Constable, 1919) 8-9.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Marwick, The Deluge (New York: Norton, 1970) 123; "Company meeting: Spillers and Bakers (Limited)," Times 3 May 1915: 14.

<sup>16</sup> "Food prices: Plea for further state control," Times 18 Oct. 1916: 9.

<sup>17</sup> "Dealers' profits," Times 27 Nov. 1916: 10.

<sup>18</sup> The Commission on Labour Unrest consulted Robert Graham of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce on food dealers' perspective on market conditions: "Of [the causes of high food prices] the most important were the high cost at points of production both at home and abroad, and he cited as a cause of this the Government buyer for the army in Montreal competing against civilian buyers who were purchasing foodstuffs for the industrial world, and by this means we ourselves were raising prices against ourselves. This is a matter which evidently needs more careful control. Then again he referred to the high freight rates on the Atlantic routes, the great increase in war risk insurances, the difference in exchange rates, and the inflation of the currency. In his view, he expected . . . smaller imports, for which higher prices will have to be paid to attract goods from abroad, and he was more concerned that we should have an adequate supply of foodstuffs even at high prices than not have enough. He thought that these matters ought to be put authoritatively before the public who are led by newspaper articles to believe that the profiteer is the sole cause of high prices." See Industrial Unrest 13-14.

<sup>19</sup> Marwick 123-124; Barnett 81.

It follows from these considerations that no substantial reduction of present prices is possible. After all, people cannot expect to go through a war like this without a rise of prices or any change in their way of living.<sup>20</sup>

The Times admonition to accept an inevitable increase in prices for the duration of the war went unheeded. Organized labor served as the principal outlet for the cross-class dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the food crisis. Beginning in January 1916, the War Emergency Workers' National Committee began an aggressive campaign for government bread subsidies to lower the price of the four-pound loaf from 9d. to 6d.<sup>21</sup> On 30 June 1916, at a special meeting of the Trades Union Congress, the labor leader Joseph Cross alleged that Britons were "starving" not due to the military might of the Central Powers, but rather to the malfeasance of their own countrymen. The congress adopted a resolution demanding that the government "regulate the prices of foodstuffs and fuel in order to prevent the exploitation of the working classes," ideally by the creation of a department or ministry empowered to commandeer supplies and redistribute them.<sup>22</sup> On 19 July, a TUC delegation came onto the floor of the House of Commons itself to present its concerns to the prime minister, who predictably reiterated his opposition to government intervention in the market.<sup>23</sup> Asquith's stoicism did little to quell popular discontent: just six weeks later, thousands braved the rain to attend a rally in Hyde Park against high food prices.<sup>24</sup>

In the fall, the weight of popular discontent finally pushed the Asquith government to emerge from its liberal economic shell, but too tentatively and too late. In late September, the Board of Trade appointed William Beveridge to head a new Food Department, which operated in relative secrecy for the first three weeks of its existence.<sup>25</sup> On 17 October, the cabinet empowered the Board of Trade to regulate the supply and distribution of food under the Defence of the Realm Act.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, the president of the board, Walter Runciman, continued publicly to hold the party line on free trade. On the same day that the cabinet conferred the board's new powers, Runciman told the Commons that, the outrage of the Labour benches notwithstanding, the government had no intention of controlling prices or creating a food ministry. To the contrary, he warned that injudicious interference in the market could actually deepen the food crisis. Runciman spoke from experience: the government's secretive incursion into international grain markets earlier in the war had cost millions of pounds, but failed to shore up food supplies.<sup>27</sup> Fearful of spooking the markets again, the government apparently intended to proceed with regulation in small steps out of the public eye. Unfortunately, this wariness seemed like recalcitrance to Asquith's political antagonists, especially organized labor. A Workers' Food Prices Committee threatened to stage a protest in Trafalgar Square on 19 November.<sup>28</sup> The South Wales Miners' Federation proposed a general strike for 27 November.<sup>29</sup> The

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<sup>20</sup> "The report on food prices," editorial, Times 30 Sept. 1916: 7.

<sup>21</sup> Barnett 135.

<sup>22</sup> "Labour and food prices: Control of freights demanded," Times 1 July 1916: 5.

<sup>23</sup> "Control of prices: Mr. Asquith's reply to labour demands," Times 20 July 1916: 5.

<sup>24</sup> "High food prices: The railwaymen's agitation," Times 28 Aug. 1916: 3.

<sup>25</sup> Barnett 85-86.

<sup>26</sup> Barnett 85.

<sup>27</sup> "Food prices: Plea for further state control."

<sup>28</sup> "Food prices protest: Labour and the rising cost of bread," Times 6 Nov. 1916: 3.

<sup>29</sup> "Miners and food prices: One-day national stoppage proposed," Times 31 Oct. 1916: 5.



Parliamentary Committee of the TUC invited cooperative societies and trade unions across the country to attend a special conference on food prices in Westminster on 7 December.<sup>30</sup> Under threat of these and other public demonstrations of dissatisfaction with its policy, the government finally agreed on 15 November to appoint a "food controller" with wide – though as yet unspecified – powers.<sup>31</sup> A few genuine, if modest regulations followed, including the lengthening of flour extraction from 70 to 76 percent, the prohibition of brewing wheat into beer, and the restriction of the size of meals served in hotels and restaurants.<sup>32</sup>

Seeming to dither on the food crisis helped precipitate the imminent collapse of the Asquith administration. Three weeks after creating the office of food controller, Asquith had yet to fill it. In part, the difficulty in finding a food controller stemmed from the administration's instability rather than its apathy. No one wanted to accept a job today that he would likely lose in a matter of weeks or months when the government finally expired.<sup>33</sup> Asquith approached at least seven people, but all of them turned him down.<sup>34</sup> Unable to fill vacancies in his own cabinet, Asquith resigned on 5 December. Lloyd George agreed to form a government two days later, which symbolically coincided with the TUC's conference on the cost of living. Charles Ammon of the Fawcett Association, a union for sorters at the post office, set the tone of the conference by lambasting the Labour Party's Parliamentary contingent for its "belatedness, apathy, and treachery" in cooperating with the Asquith government.<sup>35</sup> He and his cohorts had lost patience with the cautious, liberal approach to food regulation – so much so that they threatened to turn on even their own Parliamentary representatives.

I hope we can appeal to men and women of all ranks and conditions to play the game

Well aware of the political consequences of neglecting the food crisis, Lloyd George rushed in his first few weeks in office to address it – or, at any rate, to appear to do so. In his first speech before the Commons as prime minister, Lloyd George paid as much attention to the "food problem" as he did to universal national service or the five-member war cabinet. In deference to the demands of organized labor, he promised to encourage cultivation on "every available square yard" at home and to curtail profiteering, the existence of which he tacitly admitted. Moreover, he seemed to call for a redistribution of the burden of the food crisis away from the poor and onto the wealthy:

We must call upon the people of this country to make real sacrifices, but it is essential when we do so that the sacrifices should be equal. Over-consumption by the affluent must not be allowed to create a shortage for the less well-to-do. . . . I

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<sup>30</sup> "Food prices protest;" "Labour and food supply: Demand for vigorous action," Times 8 Dec. 1916: 6.

<sup>31</sup> "A controller of food: Ministers' new policy," Times 16 Nov. 1916: 9.

<sup>32</sup> Barnett 105; "Standard bread: 'Straight-run flour' explained," Times 17 Nov. 1916; "Simpler meals: Rules for hotels and clubs," Times 6 Dec. 1916: 8; "The nation's food: Lord Devonport's new task," Times 11 Dec. 1916: 3. "Flour extraction" refers to the fraction of the wheat kernel actually retained in flour.

<sup>33</sup> Barnett 89.

<sup>34</sup> "Political notes: Search for food controller," Times 27 Nov. 1916: 9.

<sup>35</sup> "Labour and food supply: Demand for vigorous action," Times 8 Dec. 1916: 6.

hope we can appeal to men and women of all ranks and conditions to play the game.<sup>36</sup>

However, the speech concentrated on the broad intentions of the new government while carefully avoiding any specifics. Indeed, the prime minister's audience could interpret his remarks on food in two contradictory ways: on the one hand, he "would not allow" the affluent to consume more than their fair share, suggesting some measure of compulsion; on the other hand, he invited the poor and the wealthy alike to "play the game," suggesting voluntary cooperation between classes. Lloyd George had given up the rhetorical intransigence of Asquith and Runciman and could at least countenance rationing or other compulsory measures to redistribute food. At the same time, even the author of the so-called "people's budget," the champion of the new collectivism of the Liberal Party, seemed to cling to the possibility of a voluntary solution.

To execute this muddled policy, Lloyd George turned to Lord Devonport, who seemed at first glance well placed for the job among a small pool of candidates. Lloyd George's widespread popularity and boundless energy augured well for his administration's length of tenure and political efficacy. Nevertheless, the best and brightest in Parliament seemed less than enthusiastic about joining his cabinet as the country's first food controller. Under pressure to make an appointment quickly, Lloyd George settled on Devonport, known before his ascension to the peerage in 1910 as Hudson Ewbanke Kearley. Devonport's qualifications included extensive experience in the food trade and a willingness to accept undesirable appointments for the sake of party loyalty or patriotism. In the late nineteenth century, he had founded the wholesale firm Kearley and Tonge, which originally specialized in tea. By the 1890s, Kearley and Tonge had grown into a vertically integrated wholesale and retail behemoth with 200 outlets, known as International Stores, nationwide. In 1892, Kearley retired from business to pursue a second career in politics and won election to Parliament as a Liberal for the working-class constituency of Devonport. He sought to switch to a different constituency as early as 1894, but remained in Devonport at the behest of the Liberal Party leadership.<sup>37</sup> During his eighteen years in the Commons, he fought for better housing and higher wages for the large number of his constituents who worked in Devonport's naval shipyard, many of whom lived in desperate poverty. Just before retiring from the Commons in 1910, he became the first chairman of the Port of London Authority, a stressful and thankless job from which other, perhaps more capable men had shrunk.

On closer examination, however, Devonport's sympathy for the working class seemed like carefully disguised contempt and his steadfastness like simple obstinacy. Despite defending their interests in the Commons for the better part of two decades, Devonport may not have liked dockworkers very much. The Times reported in 1894 that their "constant importunities" had driven Devonport to seek another constituency.<sup>38</sup> In plainer language, they whined too much for his taste. Though he did stay put, duty as much as genuine sympathy may have motivated Devonport's advocacy of dockworkers' interests. When he himself became the object of their dissatisfaction, his sympathy gave out altogether. As chairman of the Port of London Authority, Devonport did make meaningful concessions to dockworkers' unions during a strike in 1911. The so-called Devonport Agreement that resulted even bore his name. However, when the dockworkers walked off the job again in the summer of 1912, Devonport simply refused to

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<sup>36</sup> "House of Commons: Mr. Lloyd Georges' speech," Times 20 Dec. 1916: 10, 12.

<sup>37</sup> "Election intelligence," Times 28 Mar. 1894: 8.

<sup>38</sup> "Election intelligence."

negotiate. He ultimately brought the strikers to heel, but with such hardheartedness that even Conservatives had their misgivings.<sup>39</sup> At the height of the 1912 strike, the labor activist Ben Tillett repeatedly and publicly called for Devonport's assassination.<sup>40</sup> Devonport may have won the contest of wills in 1912, but he also lost whatever esteem he had acquired among working men and women in two decades of public service.<sup>41</sup> He took office as food controller already out of favor with his most dissatisfied and most vocal constituency. Moreover, his top lieutenants at the newly created Ministry of Food could not make up this deficit in public relations with the urban poor. His parliamentary secretary, Charles Bathurst, was a scion of the landed gentry with a 4000-acre estate in Gloucestershire.<sup>42</sup> His permanent secretary, Sir Henry Rew, was an economist and statistician previously engaged at the Board of Agriculture and on several of the ad hoc commissions and committees created at the beginning of the war to facilitate the importation of food.<sup>43</sup>

Ironically, the ministry's highest officials knew best how to do what they liked least. At a very general level, Devonport's food policy would consist of some mix of voluntary and compulsory elements. On the one hand, voluntary food economy pressured consumers to eat less, but left producers and distributors free to operate more or less as they had before. On the other hand, price controls and rationing required some degree of government intervention in the supply chain. As former agriculturalists and shopkeepers themselves, Devonport, Bathurst, and Rew naturally favored the first of these two options. However, to lead an effective food economy campaign, they had to know not how to grow or distribute food, but how to cook it at home, which perhaps none of them had ever even attempted. In her memoir, Dorothy Peel recalled a discussion with Bathurst and Rew in February 1917 that revealed the depth of their ignorance about domestic economy:

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<sup>39</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, "Kearley, Hudson Ewbanke, first Viscount Devonport (1856–1934)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004) 6 July 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34252>>.

<sup>40</sup> On 10 July 1912, Tillett remarked that "if the workers of the country realized their duty Lord Devonport would not be allowed to live." See "Disturbance at the docks: Attack on non-unionists," Times 11 July 1912: 8. Later that month, he prayed at a dockworkers' rally for God to strike Devonport dead. See "Rioting at the docks: Strikers' prayer for Lord Devonport's death," Times 25 July 1912: 6. Finally, after the strike ended, Tillett quipped that he would shoot Devonport on sight. See "Mr. Tillett and capitalists: Violent abuse of Lord Devonport," Times 19 Aug. 1912: 5. Ironically and inconveniently, Tillett led much of the labor agitation against high food prices in 1916 and 1917. For instance, he headlined the panel of speakers at the Hyde Park demonstration in August 1916.

<sup>41</sup> For a simple summary of the two strikes on the London docks in 1911 and 1912, see Roland V. Sires, "Labor unrest in England, 1910-1914," Journal of Economic History 15.3 (Sept. 1955): 251-254.

<sup>42</sup> F. M. L. Thompson, "Bathurst, Charles, first Viscount Bledisloe (1867–1958)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004) 8 July 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30642>>.

<sup>43</sup> "Sir Henry Rew: Life-long service to agriculture," obituary, Times 9 Apr. 1929: 18.

After we talked for a few minutes Sir Charles [Bathurst] began to look pathetic; details about bones for stock, suet for puddings, and fat for frying were matters with which he evidently felt himself scarcely fitted to deal.<sup>44</sup>

In truth, Devonport, Bathurst, and Rew's expertise suited them to implementing price controls or rationing. If between them they could not boil an egg, they did know every link in the tortuous chain of importers, farmers, wholesalers, and retailers that supplied Britain's food. Too much government intervention in the food trade, though, would disappoint former colleagues and exceed the ministry's legal mandate. Under the order in council that created his position, Devonport had no power to requisition food, and so could only regulate prices and supplies by persuasion.<sup>45</sup> To compound the ministry's supply-side tendencies, Devonport filled the ranks of his new bureaucracy with businessmen and sidelined the civil servants he inherited from the boards of agriculture and trade.<sup>46</sup>

In early 1917, the ministry's business-friendly bias, domestic naivety, and legal impotence converged in an ill-conceived scheme of "voluntary rationing." The private-sector food economy movement had never prescribed limits for individual consumption, in part because it lacked the authority to do so credibly and in part because it recognized the wide variety of dietary preferences and requirements. By contrast, Devonport had few qualms about imposing his will on others, as he had demonstrated in breaking the London dockworkers strike in 1912. Now, as a cabinet-level minister in a popular wartime administration, he could expect the public to defer to him as it would not to a private charity like the NFRA or NFEL. Moreover, he and his assistants did not understand the complexities of consumer behavior well enough to balk at glossing over them. When they took office in January 1917, an ill-advised scheme to limit the trade deficit with the United States had inadvertently reduced stores of wheat to below normal levels.<sup>47</sup> So, on 2 February 1917, at the end of its sixth week of existence, the Ministry of Food released a schedule of "voluntary" rations that held a particularly strict line on bread.

Table 4.2: Ministry of Food's scale of voluntary rations, 2 February 1917

Bread	4 lbs
Meat	2½ lbs
Sugar	¾ lb

Source: "Voluntary rations: Lord Devonport's policy," *Times* 3 Feb. 1917: 9, and United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, "Ministry of Food – no. 3: Food Controller's restrictions," (Apr. 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford CA.

<sup>44</sup> Peel 1919 14.

<sup>45</sup> By contrast, the Admiralty, Army Council, and Ministry of Munitions had the authority to requisition war materiel at a reasonable rate of prewar profit, which enabled them essentially to dictate prices.

<sup>46</sup> Barnett 95.

<sup>47</sup> Barnett 101-102. Essentially, the large-scale importation of food at war prices without many compensating invisible or visible exports had driven the trade deficit with the United States to unsustainable levels, at least from the point of view of the Treasury. Beginning in late 1916, the Treasury imposed an indefinite ban on further imports of American wheat to prevent the balance from tilting further.

The schedule did not account for differences in age, gender, or occupation, but rather treated all Britons as equivalent in their nutritional requirements. Indeed, by Devonport's own admission, patterns of consumption had not factored into the ministry's calculations. In a statement released to the press, he explained that the rations were based on a "full examination of the actual position of stocks immediately available. . . . [and] exigencies as affecting freight and transport." Essentially, he and his colleagues had summed up the food Britain could grow or import and divided it by the population. To his credit, Devonport admitted that the consumption of food varied between individuals and classes, with the poor consuming proportionally more bread than the wealthy. However, he explicitly left ironing these wrinkles out to each household:

The indicated allowance therefore provides for adjustment or apportionment between members of each household in relation to individual needs. It is recognised that some persons eat more bread and less meat than the quantities indicated above, others eat more meat and less bread.

In addition to its rigidity, the nominally "voluntary" scale of rations had a compulsory aspect. Devonport warned that British honor hinged on compliance with the rations, which he in turn would monitor personally:

The nation is placed upon its honour to observe these conditions. The effect upon consumption will reveal itself through the statistical returns available to the Food Controller. . . . It is expected that a patriotic endeavour will be made by every one [sic] to limit consumption wherever possible to below the standard indicated.<sup>48</sup>

To reinforce the nation's honor and patriotism with fear, Devonport threatened compulsory rationing if voluntary measures did not suitably reduce the consumption of food.

Though the ministry's approach differed from that of the NFRA or NFEL, it nevertheless had a similar effect: the alienation of the working class. In the first year of the war, private-sector food reformers had let class prejudice get the better of them. Earnest Oldmeadow and Lady Chance had assumed that working men and women did not read or cook at home and so could not participate in food economy. Only after the war had grown to unprecedented proportions did they reach out to the working class in good faith. Oversimplification did as much as class prejudice to open the gap between the Ministry of Food and the poor. Devonport's one-size-fits-all rationing scheme notwithstanding, the working-class diet was skewed toward starch and sugar because of the high cost of fat and meat. According to the historian Derek Oddy, the typical working-class household consumed 6.6 pounds of bread and 1 pound of sugar, but only 1.2 pounds of meat per person per week.<sup>49</sup> To satisfy the Ministry of Food's voluntary

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<sup>48</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, No. 1: Voluntary Rationing: The Food Controller's Appeal to the Nation (Feb. 1917), MAF 60/52, National Archives, Kew, UK; see also "Voluntary rations: Lord Devonport's policy," Times 3 Feb. 1917: 9. With regard to the relationship between income and bread consumption, Devonport wrote almost as an aside: "As regards bread especially, the variation in individual consumption is most marked. That is attributable to the fact that the lower the scale of income and of consequent living, the higher the bread consumption, for with many in such circumstances meat is only intermittently comprised in the scale of dietary, whereas bread constitutes the main staple." He did not clarify how families that depended on large quantities of bread could still satisfy the schedule of rations.

<sup>49</sup> D. J. Oddy, "A nutritional analysis of historical evidence: The working-class diet, 1880-1914," The Making of the Modern British Diet, ed. Derek Oddy and Derek Miller (London: Croom

rations, a member of this household would have to reduce his intake of bread and sugar by 2.6 pounds and 0.5 pound, respectively, which would cost him 4050 calories but save him only 9d. (Refer to Appendix A for details.) He could not make up such an energy deficit with meat alone, as a compensatory amount of beef or mutton would weigh more than 4 pounds and cost at least 12s., pushing him beyond the voluntary rations and his own food budget. Similarly, 4050 calories' worth of potatoes weighed an indigestible 13 pounds and cost 1s. 8½d., more than twice the available 9d. Besides, the potato crop had fared poorly worldwide the previous season, limiting supplies to below 13 pounds per head per week.<sup>50</sup> Margarine cost the least at just 10½d. for all of the missing calories. However, if the entire working class had replaced its overage of bread and sugar with margarine, the consumption of fats nationwide would have increased beyond the capacity of domestic or foreign sources to sustain it.<sup>51</sup> The best solution would have involved a digestible and palatable mix of margarine, potatoes, and perhaps a small amount of meat, but it would almost certainly have cost more than the original bread and sugar. Of course, the experiences of real families would likely have differed from this hypothetical scenario. The statistics used to construct it reflected broad trends across all of the United Kingdom, not the peculiarities of the small neighborhoods in which people actually lived. However, it does demonstrate the expense and inconvenience honoring the voluntary rations would have caused to working-class households that had no good alternatives to bread. Middle-class households with more money and access to a wider variety of foods could have more easily substituted for bread, meat, and sugar.

Initially, the press rallied behind the voluntary rationing scheme, but ordinary Britons seemed more confused or frightened than enthusiastic. The Times ran an article on voluntary rationing almost every day in February. Under the title "Rational service," Punch published a cartoon of a portly John Bull standing on a scale with a broadside of the voluntary rations posted on the wall beside him, quipping, "Sacrifice indeed! Why, I'm feeling fitter every minute, and I've still plenty of weight to spare."<sup>52</sup> However, the Times also conceded that many of its readers simply did not understand how to follow the rations. Did the meat ration include bacon? Meals in restaurants as well as those at home? Did it refer to cooked or uncooked weight?<sup>53</sup> Which foods made the most economical substitutes for flour – maize, oatmeal, pasta, rice? If these

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Helm, 1976) 220-223. See also E. J. T. Collins, "Dietary change and cereal consumption in Britain in the nineteenth century," Agricultural History Review 23.2 (1975): 97-115.

<sup>50</sup> Two weeks after the publication of the schedule of voluntary rations, Charles Bathurst, the Ministry of Food's parliamentary secretary, asked that households have a "potato-less" day each week due to low supplies. See "Bread and potatoes: Captain Bathurst on the food rations," Times 16 Feb. 1917: 9.

<sup>51</sup> Between 1902 and 1913, Britain imported or produced fat supplies of 1.41 pounds per person per week. A theoretical class-wide shift from bread to margarine would have more than tripled the per capita working-class consumption of fats from 0.48 pound to 1.63 pound. See Oddy 221. As the working class constituted the large majority of the population, overall demand for fats would have outstripped even peacetime supplies.

<sup>52</sup> Leonard Raven-Hill, "Rational service," cartoon, Punch 14 Feb. 1917: 103. Punch permitted the Ministry of Food to reprint Raven-Hill's cartoon as propaganda. See United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, Ministry of Food No. 5: The Germans Are Trying to Starve Us, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>53</sup> "Family rations: More guidance needed," Times 5 Feb. 1917: 9.

foods came from abroad, did they not in fact divert merchant ships from carrying grain, meat, or sugar and thereby worsen the present shortages? Many housewives did not know the flour, meat, and sugar content of the processed foods that made up an ever-larger part of the British diet and so could not count them against their family's rations.<sup>54</sup> As had the outbreak of the war itself, the announcement of voluntary rationing triggered a spate of panic buying. Bread and meat did not keep well, so hoarders made off with dried grains and pulses. Harrods alone received thousands of orders for hundredweight sacks of lentils and rice.<sup>55</sup>

Unsurprisingly, organized labor took the dimmest view of voluntary rationing. Within the first week after the publication of the scheme, the Times began to receive letters complaining about the difficulties working-class families faced in reducing their consumption of bread. A correspondent calling herself "Countrywoman" wrote from Chichester that "a working man and his wife, and the average family of four children. . . cannot (short of real necessity) do with less than a quartern loaf a day," which by the end of the week would push them over the bread ration. At the same time, they would not even think of buying 15 pounds of meat or 4½ pounds of sugar in a week – their allowance under the voluntary rationing scheme – and probably never had, even in peacetime.<sup>56</sup> An enterprising correspondent named Samuel White kept track of the food consumption of 241 families, comprising 1026 people, in working-class Taunton for the first full week of voluntary rationing. He found bread consumption averaged 6.6 pounds per person per week, well above the 4-pound ration. He and his neighbors depended so heavily on bread because, unlike beans, lentils, and peas, it required no cooking, the facilities and time for which went lacking in Taunton.<sup>57</sup> At the end of February, the Women's Labour League convened a conference in London specifically to address voluntary rationing. A Mrs. Clarke moved a resolution that criticized the rations as both inadequate and unrealistic:

That the proposed meat ration is greater than the majority of working-class families could afford, though not greater than their needs; that the system of distributing sugar should be improved; that 4lb. [sic] of bread per week [is] less than sufficient, as working women could not afford to provide substitutes; and that available supplies of food should be distributed with larger shares to physical workers.

In defense of her own motion, Clarke observed that the women of Barking, her hometown, were "very suspicious" of the food controller. The well-stocked shelves of shops in the West End gave the lie to his warnings of an impending food shortage. Moreover, he seemed to believe that "poor working-class families lived on duck and green peas instead of bread and margarine." Indeed, in her opinion, an 8-pound bread ration was "not too much." In a thinly veiled threat, she concluded that only a "reasonably equitable method of distribution" of food could prevent "trouble" among the women of Barking. With essentially no debate, the entire conference rejected voluntary rationing as "insincere humbug." Clarke's resolution passed unanimously, with amendments calling for the nationalization of the milk supply and for free dinners for mothers and young children at municipal expense thrown in for good measure.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> "Official advice on rations: Question of substitutes," Times 12 Feb. 1917: 5.

<sup>55</sup> "Working of the food rules: Large purchase of cereals," Times 13 Feb. 1917: 11.

<sup>56</sup> "How to save bread: Substitutes for wheat flour," Times 8 Feb. 1917: 11.

<sup>57</sup> Samuel White, letter, Times 20 Feb. 1917: 9.

<sup>58</sup> "Working women and rationing: Complaints of insufficiency," Times 26 Feb. 1917: 3.

Unfortunately, the Ministry of Food simply did not know how to respond effectively to the confusion and the criticism. A second statement, released only three days after the schedule of voluntary rations, attempted to answer the most obvious questions. For example, it clarified that the meat ration did cover bacon, game, ham, poultry, rabbit, and sausage in addition to beef and mutton and did refer to uncooked weight.<sup>59</sup> When this second effort fell flat, Bathurst appeared at an event sponsored by the Metropolitan War Savings Committee on 15 February, where he headlined a panel of speakers that included Dorothy Peel and Maud Pember Reeves.<sup>60</sup> However, he unwittingly deepened the confusion about voluntary rationing by seeming to contradict himself and by suggesting that other foods, too, might run out. In addressing the concerns of the working class, Bathurst conceded that not everyone could abide by the prescribed rations exactly. If a family had no choice but to exceed the ration of one food, it could compensate by eating proportionately less of another. Only a few sentences later, though, he deemed adhering to the rations a "matter of conscience and patriotism" and encouraged the women in the audience to shame those of their acquaintances who failed to do so. Almost as an aside, he remarked that the supply of potatoes had fallen to an alarmingly low level. For "reasons . . . he would not then explain," Britons should try to conserve more potatoes than meat for the next two weeks.<sup>61</sup> After the speech, the audience had no better sense of the flexibility or rigidity of the rations than they had before, but now they feared an impending shortage of another staple starch for which Bathurst offered them no explanation or remedy.

In the absence of adequate guidance from the ministry itself, private citizens and local governments pressed ahead on their own. The Times published several articles in February with the advice of domestic economy instructors at London polytechnics for living within the voluntary rations.<sup>62</sup> By mid-month, the series had acquired the character of a competition. After the Times featured her colleagues in Battersea and Islington, Helen Smith and her staff at Borough Polytechnic hurriedly submitted a selection of barley- and oatmeal-based recipes.<sup>63</sup> Not to be outdone, the Association of Teachers of Domestic Subjects publicly offered its services to the food controller and, while awaiting his response, threw together a number of leaflets on economical cooking.<sup>64</sup> The day after Bathurst's speech for the Metropolitan War Savings Committee, Margaret Dryer of King's College for Women made good his omission by suggesting several possible potato substitutes, including domestically grown oatmeal.<sup>65</sup> Several

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<sup>59</sup> "Bread and meat: Rations further defined," Times 6 Feb. 1917: 9.

<sup>60</sup> "Food problems: The ration scheme at work," Times 15 Feb. 1917: 10.

<sup>61</sup> "Bread and potatoes: Captain Bathurst on the food rations."

<sup>62</sup> See "Menus from the new rations: A week's housekeeping," Times 7 Feb. 1917: 11, "Rations in small households: Menus for two people," Times 15 Feb. 1917: 11, "Oat cakes to save wheat: War economies at Eton," Times 9 Feb. 1917: 9, and "A week on rations: Suggestions for family meals," Times 23 Feb. 1917: 9.

<sup>63</sup> "Food rations: Barley and oatmeal recipes," Times 10 Feb. 1917: 9.

<sup>64</sup> "Rations and the cook: Recipes from a new series," Times 21 Feb. 1917: 9, and "Economy in cooking: Further recipes for the thrift," Times 22 Feb. 1917: 9. The Times reported that the association had offered its assistance to the food controller and in the "meantime" would publish its leaflets, implying that it had not yet received an official response from Devonport or the ministry. See "More ration recipes: Rice pancakes and economy potatoes," Times 7 Mar. 1917: 9.

<sup>65</sup> "Potato substitutes: Difficulties of home catering," Times 17 Feb. 1917: 5.



of London's swankiest clubs, including Boodle's, Brooks's, the Constitution, St. James's, the Savage, the Travellers, and White's, voluntarily implemented a meatless day each week.<sup>66</sup> The Constitution and London Press clubs added potato-less days in March.<sup>67</sup> Clever local governments stepped in to right the Ministry of Food's mistakes or to capitalize on the momentary goodwill of some of their citizens. In late February, the Jersey legislature published its own scale of voluntary rations that specifically allowed more bread in exchange for a proportionate reduction in meat. At roughly the same time, the lord mayor of Belfast printed and distributed pledge cards for housewives to sign and to post in their windows as a symbol of their commitment to honor the voluntary rations.<sup>68</sup> The Education Committee of the London County Council began to organize public cooking demonstrations.<sup>69</sup> By mid-May, the LCC had published a handbook entitled Economy in the Consumption of Food with ninety-eight recipes or recommendations – about the same number as the NFEL's Handbook for Housewives and almost twice as many as the Board of Education's 1915 pamphlet.<sup>70</sup>

It is bread, bread, bread – the main food of our people which forms your battle line<sup>71</sup>

After a month of floundering, the Ministry of Food rushed to fill the gaps in its ranks and to recapture the initiative in its own campaign. At the end of February, it redressed its ignorance of domestic economy by hiring Dorothy Peel and Maud Pember Reeves as its so-called "directors of women's service." Why hire these two particular women among the many who had the necessary qualifications, including Lady Chance at the NFEL, Margaret Dryer at King's College for Women, or Edith Clarke at the National Training School for Cookery? Apparently, the ministry did not solicit applications, but instead simply co-opted the two women whom Bathurst already knew, having shared the stage with them at the war savings event on 15 February. Peel recalled that Henry Rew did not seem too particular about who ended up in the job:

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<sup>66</sup> "Meatless days: Friday rule in London clubs," Times 23 Feb. 1917: 6.

<sup>67</sup> "Maximum prices for food: Lord Devonport's action: Clubs' potatoless days," Times 8 Mar. 1917: 6.

<sup>68</sup> "War food societies: Cooperation for higher production," Times 22 Feb. 1917: 3.

<sup>69</sup> London County Council, Education Committee, "Education Committee minutes, 28 February, 1917," Minutes of Proceedings 1917, 85, and "Higher Education Sub-Committee report, 28 March, 1917," Minutes of Proceedings 1917, 197, 22.06 LCC, London Metropolitan Archive, London.

<sup>70</sup> Economy in the Consumption of Food had similar content and format to a pamphlet entitled Notes on Household Economy, which the LCC had published in August 1915. Like the Board of Education at the same time, the LCC did not yet perceive the food crisis as "urgent" in 1915 and did not even mention the publication of Notes on Household Economy in its minutes. See London County Council, Economy in the Consumption of Food: Practical Hints on Catering for a Small Household in War Time, 2nd ed. (June 1917), and London County Council, Education Committee, Notes on Household Economy (Aug. 1915), LCC/EO/PS/2/56, and London County Council, "Elementary Education Sub-Committee report, 9 May, 1917: Food economy – domestic economy centres -- pamphlet," Minutes of Proceedings 1917, 285, 22.06 LCC, London Metropolitan Archive, London.

<sup>71</sup> United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, F. C. No. 25: Three Minutes' Talks for Theatres and Music Halls (May 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

Public opinion was in favour of there being women in the Ministry, so women there had to be, and Sir Henry desired that I should begin my work as quickly as possible.<sup>72</sup>

Serendipitously, Peel's expertise of the middle class dovetailed neatly with Reeves's of the working class. Moreover, each had dabbled in war service, but neither had an abiding allegiance to a particular organization that might later have a conflict of interest with the ministry.<sup>73</sup> Peel started work on 1 March, when, in an unintentionally poignant illustration of the ministry's inertia, her first official statement repeated exactly the advice Mrs. Adcock of Northern Polytechnic had already given the Times nearly a month before: de-bone meat before serving it.<sup>74</sup> Finally, at the end of the month, the ministry brought on William Kennedy Jones, the former newspaper magnate and current MP, to direct the food economy campaign.<sup>75</sup> Though Kennedy Jones had no more experience of cooking than did Devonport or Bathurst, he did know how to entice working-class readers to buy a cheap newspaper and could, perhaps, do the same for food economy. In addition, he could influence his former colleagues in the newspaper industry to improve coverage of the ministry.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Peel 1919 14.

<sup>73</sup> Peel had belonged to the United Workers, a wartime society that promoted thrift among the wealthy but, despite its name, had no connection with organized labor. See "War stock as wages: Proposed new aids to thrift," Times 15 Jan. 1916: 3, and United Workers, Bulletin of United Workers 2, 2/LSW/E/13/38, box FL364, Women's Library, London. She had also spoken for the National War Savings Committee, which encouraged private investment in government securities. See Peel 1919 11. Meanwhile, Pember Reeves had served on the Board of Trade's Robertson Committee, helping to investigate the rise in food prices. See "Food prices: Committee's proposals."

<sup>74</sup> "Cooks and rations: Mrs. C. S. Peel's advice," Times 3 Mar. 1917: 8, and "How to save bread: Substitutes for wheat flour." Indeed, the ministry could only send a congratulatory representative to Northern Polytechnic's exhibition on 7 March, which featured sample dishes for three family food budgets – 7s. 6d., 10s., and 19s. per week – all of which fell within the voluntary rations. (In truth, the 7s. 6d. dishes slightly overshot the flour ration, but compensated by requiring less meat.) See "Women's help for food ministry: A ration's exhibition," Times 8 Mar. 1917: 9. In the spirit of competition inspired by the Times in February, the Battersea Polytechnic quickly followed with its own exhibit of dishes adapted to satisfy the voluntary rations. See "New kinds of war bread: Battersea exhibition of a day's rations," Times 10 Mar. 1917: 9.

<sup>75</sup> Barnett 115; "The war: 3rd year: 236th day," Times 27 Mar. 1917: 8. Kennedy Jones had managed many of Alfred Harmsworth's newspapers, including the Evening News and Daily Mail. He had also negotiated Harmsworth's acquisition of the Times in 1908. Kennedy Jones essentially invented the popular, halfpenny daily that downplayed politics in favor of gossip, sports, and serialized fiction.

<sup>76</sup> In fact, in his second week at the Ministry of Food, Kennedy Jones dispatched a confidential letter to the editors of British newspapers: "You can help us considerably in this work – in fact you and your paper can turn the tide. Hammer away at the necessity for saving bread [sic] – above all of eliminating waste. Point out that if every person will eat one pound of bread less per week, we can laugh at the submarine. . . . If you will keep these facts before your readers in whatever form commends itself to you, and will emphasize the need for economy in all foods –

After its tactical retreat, the Ministry of Food re-launched the food economy campaign on a firmer footing. While he did not disown the debacle of "voluntary rationing," which continued in the background, Kennedy Jones portrayed the campaign under his direction as separate and new.<sup>77</sup> First, Peel, Pember Reeves and their women's service filled the information void that had drawn the credibility out of the first month of voluntary rationing. They drafted a Food Economy Campaign Handbook that explained why and how the nation would "ration itself." An accompanying syllabus of lectures filled in the culinary details with recipes and tips on baking bread and cooking fish, meats, pulses, and soups, though the ministry did not put them on paper for two more months.<sup>78</sup> In addition, E. I. Spriggs, an expert in diet and human physiology, wrote a series of pamphlets on the science of food economy.<sup>79</sup> Second, an eclectic group of prominent public figures, including Lord Balfour of Burleigh and the Scottish comedian Harry Lauder, joined Kennedy Jones, Peel, and Pember Reeves in promoting the campaign in the press.<sup>80</sup> Even

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but especially in bread and wheat flour – you will be rendering the country the greatest service." See United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, letter to British newspaper editors, by William Kennedy Jones, 4 Apr. 1917, MAF 60/52, National Archives, Kew, UK.

<sup>77</sup> In mid-January 1917, Devonport had announced his intention to "launch at the earliest possible moment a vigorous food economy campaign," which then took the form in early February of voluntary rationing. See "Food saving: Vigorous campaign ahead," Times 17 Jan. 1917: 9. The day after Kennedy Jones's appointment, the Times published a private interview with him about the "campaign in furtherance of economy in food consumption" that he would lead. Though "in furtherance" implied that some economy in food consumption had already occurred, presumably as a result of voluntary rationing, the article also stated that the campaign in question remained in the planning stages. See "Voluntary food control: A great campaign for economy," Times 28 Mar. 1917: 7.

<sup>78</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, The Food Economy Campaign Handbook (London: Argus, 1917).

<sup>79</sup> Spriggs worked at St. George's Hospital in London as a physician and scientist from 1904 to 1913, when a prolonged illness forced a change in his career path. He went to work at Duff House, a clinic for the wealthy in Banff in far northern Scotland. He became the Ministry of Food's honorary medical adviser in 1917, though he also remained connected to Duff House. See "Sir Edmund and Lady Spriggs," obituary, Times 8 Feb. 1949: 7.

<sup>80</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, Listen to Harry Lauder: A Grave Talk to Mothers and Fathers, by Harry Lauder (London: Hulton, 1917); see also "Servant's meeting at Drury Lane: Mr. Harry Lauder's advice," Times 27 Mar. 1917: 5. In his social history of Britain during the First World War, the historian Arthur Marwick named Lauder as Kennedy Jones's "assistant" at the Ministry of Food. Marwick also turned Lauder's popularity as a comedian and singer against the food economy campaign, which he dismissed as "a gigantic music-hall act." However, Lauder never worked formally at the Ministry of Food and continued to perform in a vaudeville revue at the Shaftesbury Theatre throughout the spring of 1917 – the height of the food economy campaign under Kennedy Jones. (See "New features in 'Three Cheers,'" Times 13 Apr. 1917: 3.) The Hoover Institution's extensive collection of Ministry of Food propaganda contains only one leaflet – cited above – that featured Lauder. Moreover, Lauder had a lengthy record of war service: in the words of his entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, he "tirelessly" promoted recruitment and performed in "innumerable" concerts for the troops, both at home and on the western front. These uncompensated patriotic efforts seem more or less altruistic in

King George V issued a royal proclamation urging the public to conserve food.<sup>81</sup> Third, the Ministry of Food enlisted the assistance of the National War Savings Committee and the Board of Education, which already had extensive networks of affiliates across the country, to help organize the campaign at the grassroots level.<sup>82</sup>

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retrospect as Lauder had little to gain and much to lose by them. Indeed, he already enjoyed critical acclaim, widespread popularity, and personal wealth; moreover, his support for the war effort may have indirectly cost him the life of his only son, John, who died in action in 1916. To the cynical modern reader, his exhortations on behalf of food economy recall a bankrupt brand of prewar patriotism, but, at the time, Lauder no doubt meant them sincerely: "You know that, like so many others, I have given to the country what I held dearest in the world – I have given my son. Now the authorities ask me for one thing, one little thing more. They need my services in this most serious time. I would gladly go to fight. If for that I am not fit I would gladly work anywhere in France or at home. But they ask me merely to help them . . . in this campaign. By God, I will." Marwick's mischaracterization of the food economy campaign and Lauder's role in it may stem not from his own mean-spiritedness, but from his choice of sources. In relation to Kennedy Jones and Lauder, Marwick cites William Beveridge's history of food control. According to the historian L. Margaret Barnett, Beveridge and the other senior civil servants at the Ministry of Food greatly resented Devonport for favoring businessmen like Kennedy Jones over themselves. Beveridge denigrated food economy because it failed statistically, but also because he associated it with personal rivals within the ministry itself. See Marwick 193, Barnett 95, William Beveridge, British Food Control, Economic and Social History of the World War: British Series, ed. James Shotwell (London and Oxford: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Oxford UP, 1928) 37, and Dave Russell, "Lauder, Sir Henry [Harry] (1870–1950)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004), 1 Aug. 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34419>>.

<sup>81</sup> "By the king: A proclamation," Times 3 May 1917: 7; United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, F. C. No. 29: By the King – A Proclamation (May 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>82</sup> The National War Savings Committee came into existence to assist the Treasury in borrowing money from the British people themselves. In 1915, the Treasury floated a loan to which small investors could subscribe by purchasing vouchers in multiples of 5s. However, the underlying complexity of the scheme discouraged would-be investors. By the end of November, it had raised only £5,000,000. In early February 1916, Parliament established the Central Advisory Committee for War Savings and the National Organizing Committee for War Savings, the former to structure small investments in government debt and the latter to oversee local savings associations. Later that month, 15/6 war savings certificates, redeemable for £1 in five years, went on sale at post offices. On 3 April, the Central Advisory and National Organizing Committees joined together as the National War Savings Committee in the interest of efficiency. On 15 September, the NWSC had under its auspices 461 local committees and 7,580 savings associations. By 19 May 1917, those figures had grown to 1274 and 34,057, respectively. See also Marwick 129-130, "The new war loan: A wide appeal," Times 22 June 1915: 9, "Parliament: Savings for the state," Times 23 Nov. 1915: 10, "War loan for the workers: The advisory committee," Times 8 Dec. 1915: 10, "New war loan scheme: Saving by small investors," Times 31 Jan. 1916: 9, "War savings: Appointment of new committees," Times 9 Feb. 1916: 8, "Call to

With a year's experience in propagandizing the middle and working classes already under its belt, the NWSC attempted to professionalize the food economy campaign while, simultaneously, helping the Board of Education to renew its earlier efforts. On 21 March, the NWSC dispatched a confidential memorandum to local war savings committees outlining how to add food economy to their efforts on behalf of small investors. It recommended co-opting knowledgeable, trustworthy individuals – perhaps municipal politicians, teachers, or trade unionists – onto adjunct "food control" or "food economy" committees to carry out a propaganda campaign tailored to local needs.<sup>83</sup> To assist in these efforts, the NWSC also dispatched a program for an economy exhibition, two syllabuses of lectures on cooking, and a business plan for a cooperative kitchen.<sup>84</sup> In return, local food committees kept London abreast of their own

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thrift: New loan scheme in force to-day," Times 19 Feb. 1916: 5, "National saving: Union of two committees," Times 4 Apr. 1916: 5, "The war savings organizations," War Savings 1.2 (Oct. 1916): 13, "Committees and associations analysed to the 19th May 1917," War Savings 1.11 (July 1917): 108, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>83</sup> United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, F. C. – 1: Food Control Campaign: Suggestions for Local Authorities and War Savings Committees (Mar. 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA. In truth, the NWSC advised the creation of two separate committees. An advisory committee would investigate the local food situation and report to an executive committee, which would in turn carry out a food economy campaign. However, local war savings committees had wide discrepancy to modify the NWSC's suggested organizational scheme. Ultimately, most of them formed a single "food control" or "food economy" committee. Despite their name, these "food control committees" did not in fact have any authority to "control" food. What the Ministry of Food referred to as "food economy," the NWSC referred to as a "food control," hence the potentially misleading moniker "food control committee." Indeed, the NWSC's food control committees mostly disseminated propaganda. Until May, the authority actually to enforce the food controller's orders lay with the ministry's own inspectorate and with local governments, such as district and municipal councils. At the end of July, most of the NWSC's food control committees dissolved. However, within weeks, the Ministry of Food organized its own nationwide network of "food control committees" that shared the same name as their predecessors under the NWSC, but had wider responsibilities. This second set of food control committees did help to implement price controls and rationing. The similarity in the names of the two sets of committees has bred some confusion among historians. For instance, Margaret Barnett has written of the NWSC's and the ministry's "food control committees" as if they were the same. See Barnett 115, 127; "Oats and maize: Enforcing food orders," Times 10 May 1917: 7; "Local control of food: A list of orders," Times 14 May 1917: 9; "Sugar control scheme: Local committees to deal with prices," Times 6 Aug. 1917: 7; United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, "Local organisations," Report for the Week Ending Wednesday, August 8, 1917, 1-2, and "Enforcement of orders," Report for the Week Ending Wednesday, May 9, 1917, 2-3, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>84</sup> United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, F. C. 9: Food Control Campaign: Suggestions to War Savings Committees with Regard to the Organisation of Food Economy Exhibitions (Apr. 1917), F. C. No. 11: National War Savings Committee Food Campaign: Suggested Course of Six Simple Lectures Suitable for Food Economy Exhibitions (Apr. 1917), F. C. – 13: Food Economy Campaign: Memorandum on Central Kitchens for the Supply of Cooked Food with a View to Economy in the Use of Foodstuffs (May 1917), F. C. No. 17: Food

activities and of changing conditions in their vicinities with weekly reports.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, in a circular to local authorities, the Board of Education's permanent secretary, L. A. Selby-Bigge, employed much stronger language than he had in the summer of 1915 to describe the food crisis:

The Food Controller is anxious to secure the co-operation of Local Education Authorities in calling attention to the urgent need at the present time for economy in food. . . . Lord Devonport has informed the Board that the shortage of wheat is so serious that every possible step must be taken to reduce the consumption of bread and to prevent waste. . . . The Board have no doubt that Local Education Authorities and Teachers will be willing to do all in their power to give effect to Lord Devonport's wishes.<sup>86</sup>

To assist local education authorities, the NWSC published a model "talk" with schoolchildren about the dangers that merchant mariners faced in bringing wheat to Britain.<sup>87</sup> It also distributed memoranda on how to mobilize students and their families in the food economy campaign, including by opening domestic science classrooms to adults and by reducing the amount of bread served in school meals.<sup>88</sup>

Economy Exhibitions: Suggestions for Villages (May 1917), F. C. No. 24: Food Control Campaign: Suggestions for Two Lectures on Food Economy, with Cookery Demonstrations, Suitable for Meetings of Women; Either in Towns or Villages (May 1917), F. C. No. 44: Food Economy Exhibitions: Suggestions as to the Use That May Be Made of Office Windows or Empty Shops (May 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>85</sup> United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, F. C. No. 7: Food Control Campaign (Apr. 1917), and F. C. No. 20: Food Control Campaign: Report of Progress (May 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>86</sup> "The bread peril: Preparing for food tickets," Times 30 Apr. 1917: 10; England, Board of Education, Circular 994, by L. A. Selby-Bigge (7 May 1917), ED 142/45, National Archives, Kew, UK.

<sup>87</sup> To a modern reader, the model talk may have relied too heavily on fear and shame as vehicles of persuasion. It asked children to imagine a merchant ship steaming through the night with its lights off, its sleep-deprived crew nervously scanning the seas for any sign of a German U-boat. If luck and skill failed them, they would end up drowned, starved, or worse: "The captain. . . . has had no sleep for over two days. . . . He is facing death now and he knows it. Twice before he has had his ship sent to the bottom by submarines. Twice before he has seen many of his crew drowned in the icy waters, and others perish of starvation in open boats in which they lived for many days. Nearly every man on board this ship has had to face death in this way at least once. . . . Then look at the bread you are eating and say . . . 'The more I eat, the more must they risk their precious lives. If I waste any, even a crumb, I am not worth their sacrifice.'" United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, F. C. No. 23: A Talk to School Children on Our Daily Bread (June 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>88</sup> One unnamed school apparently asked the children to draw up invitations for their parents to attend a free lecture on economical cooking given by a local domestic science teacher. United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, F. C. – No. 33: Memorandum of Suggestions for Propaganda in Schools (May 1917), and F. C. – No. 45: Provision of Mid-Day Meals for School Children Who Cannot Go Home, or Whose Parents Are at Work All Day (June 1917) GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

If the method of delivery had improved, however, the Ministry of Food's message itself still came off as antagonistic. In the ministry's defense, the grain shortfall precipitated by the Treasury in January had worsened considerably by the spring. The resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare had resulted in unsustainable losses of shipping and the reduction of British grain stocks to a low of less than seven weeks' worth in early May.<sup>89</sup> Accordingly, the food economy campaign in the spring of 1917 became even more urgent, especially with regard to conserving wheat. Nevertheless, much of the Ministry of Food and NWSC's propaganda incongruously laid as much blame on British consumers as on the German navy. One of the Ministry of Food's pamphlets chided wage-earners for the supposedly large amounts of bread found in gutters and on rubbish heaps in their neighborhoods. Such waste supposedly had the same result as lending the enemy twenty additional submarines with which to sink British cargo ships.<sup>90</sup> In another leaflet with a dissonantly jaunty tone, "Mr. Slice O'Bread" castigated his countrymen for routinely wasting him and repeated the dig about virtual U-boats:

I am the 'bit left over'; the slice eaten absent-mindedly when really I wasn't needed; I am the waste crust. If you collected me and my companions for a whole week you would find that we amounted to 9,380 tons of good bread – WASTED! . . . Almost as much – striking an average – as twenty German Submarines [sic] could sink. . . . When you throw me away or waste me you are adding twenty submarines to the German Navy.<sup>91</sup>

To add indifference to insult, the ministry often delivered these messages impersonally by, for example, having leaflets inserted into the pay envelopes of workers in government-controlled factories.<sup>92</sup> However, proximity did not guarantee politesse. On Empire Day, the NWSC's speakers asked rhetorically if the audience intended to "go on overeating and wasting food," thereby bringing themselves and the troops at the front to "ruinous disaster?"<sup>93</sup> In slide presentations, the same speakers accused anyone who was eating the same quantity of food as before the war of "laying up trouble – sure and certain trouble for all around him in the near future."<sup>94</sup> On a different but equally distasteful note, one of the two songs the NWSC wrote for schoolchildren drew a macabre comparison between saving bread and driving "a big, long nail in

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<sup>89</sup> Barnett 101-105.

<sup>90</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, Ministry of Food No. 15: Wage-Earners! Study These Facts (May 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA. A later handbill conveyed an essentially identical message, though it did not address itself specifically to wage earners: United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, Ministry of Food No. 20: Our Daily Bread: Study These Facts (May 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>91</sup> United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, F. C. – 4: Mr. Slice O'Bread (June 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>92</sup> "Food economy: Pay-day leaflets," Times 26. Apr 1917: 5; United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, "Food economy," Report for Week Ending Wednesday, May 2, 1917, 2, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>93</sup> United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, F. C. – No. 37: Notes on a Speech for Empire Day (May 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>94</sup> United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, The Food Battle: A Lecture (June 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

the coffin of the fleeing Hun."<sup>95</sup> Even those Britons who shared the ministry and NWSC's enthusiasm for food economy quickly soured on their negative rhetoric. C. J. Stewart chaired the central organizing committee for the National Welfare and Economy Exhibition, staged from June to August 1917 under the auspices of the Ministry of Food at the newly completed County Hall in London. In a subtle jibe at his official sponsors, Stewart told the Times that he aimed to "introduce a new and more cheerful atmosphere into the campaign for economy." He strongly disapproved of "the tendency sometimes shown to-day to regard the conservation of goods and service in the national interest as a kind of penance imposed during war time."<sup>96</sup>

The ministry and the NWSC's dietary advice proved as off-putting as its propaganda, but due to its inscrutability rather than to its abrasiveness. In general, the food economy campaign disseminated tips on cooking and diet through demonstrations and lectures at the local level. Up to the beginning of May, the ministry and the committee together had published as few as two leaflets of actual recipes, all of them for alternatives to wheat bread.<sup>97</sup> Instead, they relied on E. I. Spriggs's series of short pamphlets as their principal print resource on dietary economy and physiology. Unfortunately, Spriggs delved too deeply into the science and resorted too quickly to technical jargon for most readers.<sup>98</sup> For instance, in the serial entitled Meat and Fish, he analyzed the relative merits of bacon, beef, and mutton in terms of the calories and protein that they contained:

Lean meat, such as very lean beef or the flesh of the rabbit, is about one-fifth protein, one-tenth fat, and the rest water; it gives 40 Calories to the ounce, or 640 to the pound. If there is more fat attached to the meat or lying between the fibres, the food value is much greater. Thus a pound of average mutton gives 1376 Calories, whilst fat bacon gives 2720 Calories, that is four times the food value of

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<sup>95</sup> United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, "Every loaf saved drives a big, long nail," music by Rowland Black, words by Douglas Stuart (June 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>96</sup> "Cheerfulness with economy: A practical exhibition in London," Times 25 May 1917: 3. To brighten the mood at the exhibition, the organizing committee and its staff set up a central stage for concerts and other entertainment.

<sup>97</sup> United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, F. C. No. 14: Forty Million Food Controllers Wanted! (May 1917); United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, Ministry of Food 31: Recipe for Home-Made Flour and Rice Bread (June 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>98</sup> To his credit, Spriggs attempted to tailor his writing to a popular audience. In his final serial, he wrote: "We must discuss a very little simple science. But let no one be afraid of that. Science is just knowledge, and knowledge is for all. . . . It is by knowledge and care in the home that we can all have enough food to keep well and do good work." United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, M. F. 29: Food and How to Save It (Sept. 1917) 4, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA. Though the copy in the Hoover Institution's collection is dated September 1917, Spriggs compiled Food and How to Save It in July from the pamphlets he wrote for the Ministry of Food between February and May. His preface contained an account of the publication process and date.



lean beef. Bacon, therefore, at 1s. 9d. or even 2s. a pound, gives more heat value for the money than any other kind of meat.<sup>99</sup>

Knowing that bacon contained more energy for less money would have helped a housewife in trying to feed her family well on a modest budget. However, to uncover that useful nugget of information, she had to dig through a layer of figures and unfamiliar terms that, in the end, had little practical meaning for her. Indeed, Spriggs' attempt to define those dietetic terms no doubt wrought only greater confusion. In the first of his serials, What Food Is, he constructed a sensible analogy of food to coal and the body to a steam engine. Yet, he again pressed further than his audience needed:

Everything which can be burnt or oxidized has its own fuel or energy value; that is to say, a definite weight of a substance gives out a fixed quantity of heat when it is completely burnt. It does not matter whether it is burnt quickly or slowly; in the end, the same amount of heat, or other form of energy, is set free. Energy is measured in units called Calories, a Calorie being the quantity of heat required to raise a kilogramme of water through one degree centigrade. Take an example: if a kilogramme of water, that is a pint and three quarters, at the temperature of the room, say 15° centigrade, is put on the fire and raised to the boil, that is to 100°C., the energy of the burning coal has raised the water through 85 degrees; therefore, 85 Calories of energy have been used.<sup>100</sup>

Even in the context of the familiar workings of a teakettle, this explanation of the Calorie had little relevance to most British consumers. It may have drawn in a few readers who already had an interest in science, but at the cost of pushing away many more who just wanted to know how to stretch their food budget some. Sadly, but not surprisingly, Punch singled out Spriggs of all the staff of the Ministry of Food to lampoon in verse. In each stanza, the poem's narrator jauntily rehashed a simple principle of nutrition in mock scientific terminology, concluding with one of several renditions of the refrain, "So at least I interpret my Spriggs."<sup>101</sup> Put less poetically, Spriggs had nothing complicated to communicate, and yet few ordinary Britons could understand him. The more practical Win-the-War Cookery Book did not appear until May, three months into the campaign.<sup>102</sup>

For all of its counterproductive tendencies, the government's food economy campaign did attempt actively to engage civilians, particularly women, in the war effort. When not charging them with abetting the German navy, the Ministry of Food and the NWSC celebrated civilians as soldiers of the home front, capable of defeating the enemy merely by economizing in the kitchen. The ministry's Food Economy Handbook reiterated time and again, in all capital letters, that the fate of the nation lay in the hands of its women:

VICTORY NOW DEPENDS UPON OUR WOMEN.

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<sup>99</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, Ministry of Food – No. 18: Meat and Fish (Apr. 1917) 1, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>100</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, Ministry of Food – No. 4: What Food Is, by E. I. Spriggs (Mar. 1917) 4, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>101</sup> Refer to Appendix B for the complete poem. "A song of food-saving," Punch 14 Mar. 1917: 174.

<sup>102</sup> "Food extravagance: People who enjoy the war," Times 5 May 1917: 3; United Kingdom, Ministry of Food and National War Savings Committee, "The Win-the-War Cookery Book," Food Control Campaign Weekly Bulletin 20 June 1917: 74.

IT IS FOR OUR WOMEN TO SEE THAT THEIR SONS AND HUSBANDS,  
THEIR SWEETHEARTS AND BROTHERS DO NOT FIGHT A LOSING  
BATTLE.  
IT IS FOR OUR WOMEN TO SEE THAT OUR DEAD HAVE NOT DIED IN  
VAIN.  
IT IS FOR OUR WOMEN TO SEE THAT THEIR CHILDREN SHALL NOT  
LIVE IN A PRUSSIAN, BRUTALIZED WORLD.  
WOMEN CAN SAVE THE COUNTRY BY SAVING THE FOOD –  
ESPECIALLY BREAD & FLOUR.  
THEY RATION THEIR HOUSEHOLDS.  
THEY ALONE CAN EFFECT THE NECESSARY SAVING!  
OUR WOMEN CAN STOP THIS WASTE.  
OUR WOMEN CAN PREVENT OUR EATING MORE THAN OUR SHARE.  
OUR WOMEN CAN PREVENT THE WASTE OF FOOD AND SO HELP TO  
WIN THE WAR.  
OUR WOMEN CAN SAVE US FROM COMPULSORY RATIONING, FROM  
SPIES, MORE REGISTRATION CARDS, AND VAST EXPENSE.  
OUR WOMEN WILL HAVE DONE AS MUCH TO WIN THE WAR AS OUR  
ARMY OR OUR NAVY.<sup>103</sup>

The rest of the campaign followed the line laid down in the handbook. The NWSC's representatives took the stage during intermission at theaters and music halls to remind the women in the audience that "on you . . . depends Complete Victory." The NWSC's food economy slide presentation included an image of a woman simply standing in the kitchen. The accompanying script referred to British housewives as "the quartermasters of the home" who alone could "save the country in this crisis."<sup>104</sup>

Dorothy Peel embodied the government's newfound respect for women. In her history of the war entitled How We Lived Then, she recalled that in prewar Britain, she and her fellow women had fallen in to the same category of citizenship as imbeciles and infants.<sup>105</sup> Then, in February 1917, the Ministry of Food had actually sought her out – however impulsively – to join its own inner circle and to help lead an important propaganda campaign.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, the Ministry of Food under a curmudgeonly former grocer played up the role of women in the war more aggressively than did the National Food Economy League under a longtime suffragist. Peel herself regarded this change in the government's attitude with some cynicism, writing in retrospect that just when women could "save the nation" by cooking, they "would surely ruin it" by voting.<sup>107</sup> However, other women may have seen official confidence in their cooking as a bright spot in an otherwise somewhat dark propaganda campaign.

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<sup>103</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, The Food Economy Campaign Handbook.

<sup>104</sup> United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, The Food Battle: A Lecture.

<sup>105</sup> Mrs. C. S. Peel, How We Lived Then: 1914-1918: A Sketch of Social and Domestic Life in England During the War (London: John Lane, 1929) 8-9.

<sup>106</sup> Peel and her co-director Pember Reeves sat in the meetings with the leaders of the ministry and of the NWSC at which they collectively decided the course of the food economy campaign. See Peel 1919 31-32.

<sup>107</sup> Peel 1929 121.

Despite its organizational difficulties and its prickly message, Devonport and Kennedy Jones's food economy campaign did achieve remarkable proportions. By June, as many as 1300 local war savings committees had actively joined in the food economy campaign.<sup>108</sup> As many as 1600 newspapers lent their assistance more or less free of cost.<sup>109</sup> On its own, the NWSC distributed 18,406,700 leaflets and 1,116,600 posters from its national headquarters on Salisbury Square. It produced 150 miles of purple ribbon for those who had signed a pledge to honor the king's proclamation. It organized demonstrations or exhibitions in 137 towns and lectures in many more.<sup>110</sup> For its part, the Ministry of Food handed out 1,271,000 leaflets and 153,000 posters in a single, particularly prolific week.<sup>111</sup> As of 31 May, it counted 123 exhibitions and 140 central kitchens that had either already opened or had advanced to the final stages of preparation.<sup>112</sup> The food economy film Everybody's Business played simultaneously in as many as 80 cinemas in London.<sup>113</sup> All of this activity had a frenetic, repetitive quality to it. For instance, the Ministry of Food and the NWSC attempted two different pledge drives, the first in March and the second in May. The two drives involved different pledge cards, one printed with the schedule of voluntary rations, the other with the king's proclamation. These, in turn, overlapped with pledge drives mounted at the local level in Belfast, Carlisle, Manchester, and elsewhere.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Due to the decentralized character of the campaign, the NWSC and the Ministry of Food tended to deal in rough figures. In early April, the Ministry of Food estimated that 1200 war savings committees had joined in the food economy campaign. A month later, the number backed down to 1000 before shooting up to 1300 in June. In any case, war savings committees in England and Wales numbered 1326 altogether on 19 May. See United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, "Food economy campaign," Report for Fortnight Ending Wednesday, April 11, 1917, 2, and "Food economy campaign," Report for Week Ending Wednesday, May 16, 1917, 3; Ministry of Food and National War Savings Committee, "A typical food campaign," Food Control Campaign Weekly Bulletin 20 June 1917: 70-71, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA; "House of Commons: Food saving campaign," Times 19 Apr. 1917: 8, and "Economy of fats: General dearth probable," Times 25 Apr. 1917: 3.

<sup>109</sup> "Parliament: Lord Devonport's statement," Times 26 Apr. 1917: 12.

<sup>110</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food and National War Savings Committee, "Food campaign," Food Control Campaign Weekly Bulletin 18 July 1917: 121, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>111</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, "Food economy campaign," Report for Week Ending Wednesday, May 30, 1917, 2, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>112</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, "Food economy," Report for Week Ending Wednesday, June 6, 1917, 2, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>113</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food and National War Savings Committee, "The success of the food film play," Food Control Campaign Weekly Bulletin 20 June 1917: 74; United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, "Food economy campaign," Report for Week Ending Wednesday, June 23, 1917, 2-3, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA. The NWSC put the number of cinemas at 76, the Ministry of Food at 80.

<sup>114</sup> "Bread economy in hotels: Voluntary rations badge," Times 9 May 1917: 3; "By the king: A proclamation," Times 11 May 1917: 8; United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, By the King: A Proclamation (May 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

The food economy campaign's impressive feats of printing yielded several local successes. In the town of Worthing, West Sussex, local canvassers convinced 2440 of the 2675 households they visited, or 91 percent, to sign a food economy pledge.<sup>115</sup> Even in the rural backwaters of Narberth, Pembrokeshire and Liskeard, Cornwall, door-to-door canvassing achieved 70 and 84.5 percent success, respectively.<sup>116</sup> On a more material level, Portsmouth, Hampshire, managed to reduce its per capita consumption of bread to just 3 pounds, 1 ounce, almost 25 percent less than required by Devonport's schedule of voluntary rations.<sup>117</sup> As the joint campaign wound down in July, local food committees reported a 10 percent reduction in bread consumption on average across the country, a result confirmed by a more scientific survey of bakers' associations.<sup>118</sup> The NWSC and ministry credited the decline "entirely" to their own powers of persuasion as it occurred despite the high cost of potatoes and other bread substitutes.<sup>119</sup>

On closer inspection, however, the success of the food economy campaign seemed more superficial. Not every town shared Worthing's or Liskeard's enthusiasm for food economy. In King's Lynn, Norfolk, a rural town of about 20,000 people, only 55 percent of households would sign the food economy pledge and 43 percent refused. The townspeople did not oppose food economy on principle, but rather did not understand what the canvassers wanted and suspected them of having an ulterior motive. Apparently, the food economy campaign had not "filtered into the awareness of the ordinary working person," at least not in the remote reaches of Norfolk.<sup>120</sup> The war savings committee in Spalding, Lincolnshire, declined to campaign for food economy at all, arguing that unlike munitioneers, local farmhands could not afford to live wastefully. How could they economize in what they could not buy anyway?<sup>121</sup> In a similar vein, the food control committee in St. Pancras, London appealed to Devonport to prioritize equitable

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<sup>115</sup> "Consumption of bread: Efforts to reduce the amount," Times 18 May 1917: 3; United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, "Food economy campaign," Report for Week Ending Wednesday, May 30, 1917, 2, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>116</sup> "Labour dangers of dear food: Widespread demand for higher wages," Times 13 June 1917: 3.

<sup>117</sup> "Bread saving: An example and a claim," Times 25 June 1917: 3; "Food economy," Report for Week Ending Wednesday, June 6, 1917. The lord mayor, H. R. Pink, even demanded that the Ministry of Food exempt Portsmouth from compulsory rationing, if it came into effect, due to the city's outstanding success at voluntarily reducing bread consumption.

<sup>118</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food and National War Savings Committee, "Food campaign," Food Control Campaign Weekly Bulletin 4 July 1917: 89, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>119</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food and National War Savings Committee, "Reduction in the consumption of flour," Food Control Campaign Weekly Bulletin 20 June 1917: 69, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA. If they could have had potatoes cheaply and easily, perhaps British consumers would have eaten more of them and less of bread, regardless of any food economy campaign. However, in the absence of any cheap substitutes, the reduction in bread consumption must have resulted from a conscious decision on the consumers' part simply to eat less. Logically – though not necessarily – the food economy campaign may have influenced that change in behavior.

<sup>120</sup> Barnett 117.

<sup>121</sup> "Spalding and economy campaign," Times 18 May 1917: 3.

distribution over voluntary economy.<sup>122</sup> Organized labor remained the loudest voice of discontent about food. In mid-May, the War Emergency Workers' National Committee published a manifesto in which it argued that food economy discriminated against the working class:

The Ministry of Food appeals to the nation to reduce its consumption of bread and buy substitutes such as oatmeal, oatcakes, &c. The inevitable result of this policy (just as it has been in the case of potatoes and pulse substitutes) has been immediately to drive up the price of the suggested alternatives, much to the profit of the wholesale and retail trades concerned. This policy must be effectively checked in the interests of the general working-class population, and in particular of the women folk and children who are living solely on the fixed allowances given to dependents of men with the Colours [sic].<sup>123</sup>

For the majority of the population, food simply cost too much money. Economizing in the consumption of bread just drove up the price of substitutes, like potatoes, making food overall even less affordable. Within a month, several unions representing more than 500,000 workers intimated that if food prices did not decline, they would seek raises of 10s. per week for men and 5s. for boys.<sup>124</sup>

The popularity of the food economy campaign aside, its claim to have effected a reduction in bread consumption stood on dubious economic ground. Both the NWSC and the Ministry of Food monitored flour consumption by bakers as an indirect measure of bread consumption by their customers. The NWSC followed up on bakers through its network of local food committees, whose intelligence unfortunately varied greatly in its depth and quality. The NWSC's accountants attempted to weave together the various broken threads of data at its disposal, but no doubt a large cumulative error lurked beneath the result. By contrast, the Ministry of Food conducted a more scientific survey of the number of standard sacks of flour consumed by different bakers around the country. Over the course of several months, it built up its sample size to more than 7000 bakers representing between them more than 25 percent of the nation's total estimated flour consumption.<sup>125</sup> On the one hand, the ministry's more direct, more standardized method of data collection made for greater accuracy. On the other hand, the bakers themselves had a perverse incentive to sell as much bread as possible while underreporting their flour consumption to the Ministry of Food. In either case, the NWSC and the Ministry of Food both settled on a reduction in bread consumption of 10 percent due to the food economy campaign.

Table 4.3: Relative consumption of bread in 1916-1917 and 1917-1918 (May 1917 = 100)

4 weeks ending	1916-1917	1917-1918
31 January 1917		98
28 February 1917	94	103
31 March 1917	99	109

<sup>122</sup> "Cheerfulness with economy: Food stocks and fixed prices," *Times* 25 May 1917: 3.

<sup>123</sup> "A food policy: Strong labour manifesto," *Times* 12 May 1917: 7.

<sup>124</sup> "Labour dangers of dear food: Widespread demand for higher wages," *Times* 13 June 1917: 3.

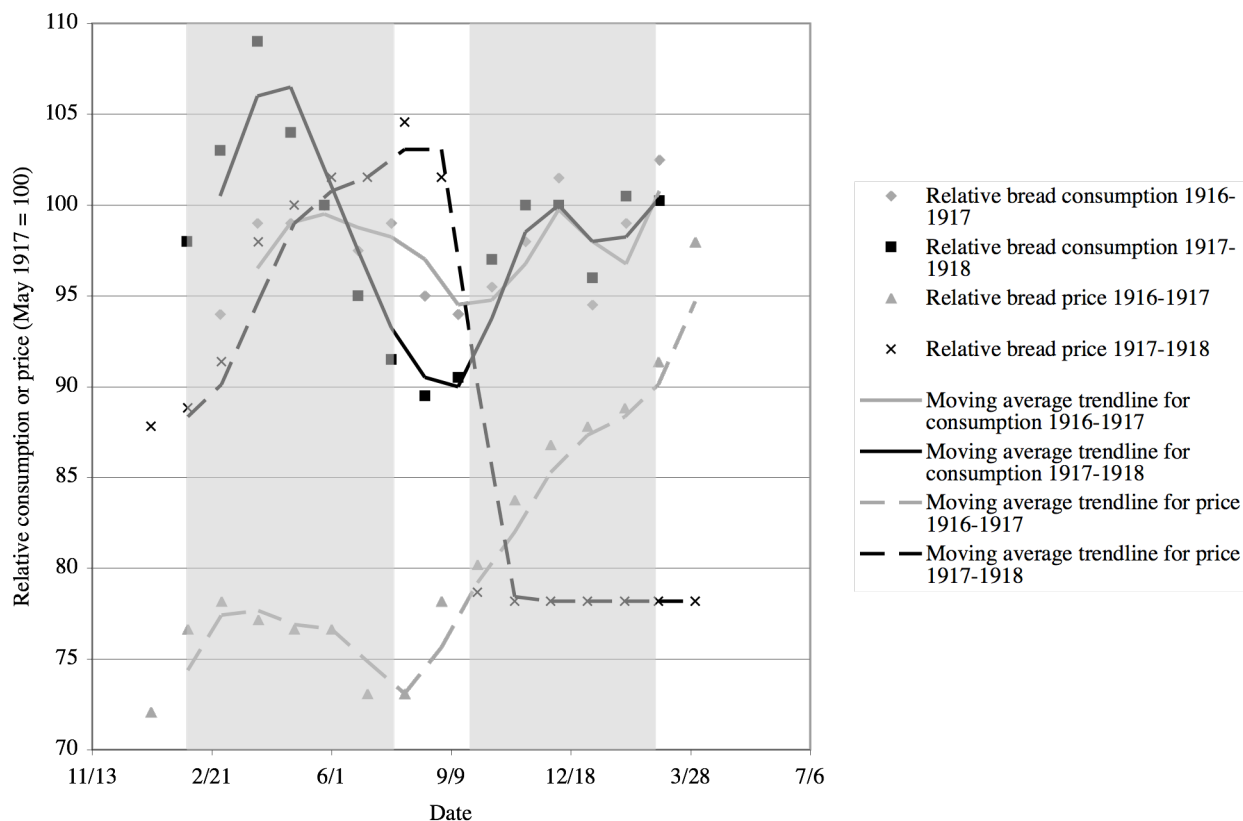
<sup>125</sup> For example, see United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, "Consumption of meat and bread," *Report for Week Ending Wednesday, July 18, 1917*, 2-3, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

28 April 1917	99	104
26 May 1917	100	100
23 June 1917	97.5	95
21 July 1917	99	91.5
18 August 1917	95	89.5
15 September 1917	94	90.5
13 October 1917	95.5	97
10 November 1917	98	100
8 December 1918	101.5	100
5 January 1918	94.5	96
2 February 1918	99	100.5
2 March 1918	102.5	100.25

Source: United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, "Table E – Index numbers of consumption of bread, meat, and provisions," Report for Week Ending Wednesday, March 13, 1918, 12, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

However, even if bread consumption had in fact declined by 10 percent, despite the many possible distortions in the data, the cause may not have lain with the food economy campaign. As shown in figure 4.1, the fall in bread consumption corresponded with a steep rise in price to a wartime peak in September 1917 of more than double the July 1914 baseline. From 17 September, the Ministry of Food regulated the price of bread, cutting it by a quarter literally overnight. Not surprisingly, consumption reversed course nearly as quickly, returning within a few months to 1916 levels. Tellingly, consumption tracked closely with price regardless of the presence or absence of a food economy campaign. After Devonport and Kennedy Jones's campaign ended in late July, consumption of bread continued to decline as long as prices remained high. Likewise, after a second food economy campaign began in September, consumption of bread continued to climb as long as prices remained low. In short, when bread grew too expensive, Britons ate less of it; when the price fell back, they resumed eating; food economy propaganda made little difference.

Figure 4.1: Relative consumption and price of bread in 1916-1917 and 1917-1918 (May 1917 = 100)



Source: United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, consumption statistics, intra-office reports for weeks ending 21 Mar. 1917 through 13 Mar. 1918, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA, and Arthur L. Bowley, "Table XVI – Percentage increases in retail prices of principal foods," *Prices and Wages in the United Kingdom, 1914-1920* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1921) 43-44.

Notes: The shaded areas correspond to the government's two food economy campaigns, the first from February to July 1917, the second from September 1917 to February 1918.

### The League of National Safety

As the food economy campaign came to an end, the Ministry of Food underwent a change in leadership. Frustrated and underappreciated, Devonport resigned as food controller on 28 May, ostensibly for reasons of ill health.<sup>126</sup> The historian Margaret Barnett has pointed out that Devonport often took the blame for policy decisions handed down by the war cabinet.<sup>127</sup> However, whether deserved or not, his mounting unpopularity limited his effectiveness. Organized labor had begun demanding his resignation in addition to the implementation of some

<sup>126</sup> Barnett 121; "Ministerial changes: Ill-health of Lord Devonport," *Times* 30 May 1917: 7.

<sup>127</sup> For example, Devonport had reconciled himself to compulsory rationing by mid-May, but the hesitation of the war cabinet prevented him from implementing it. See Barnett 110-111.

scheme of equitable distribution.<sup>128</sup> On 14 June, Lord Rhondda replaced Devonport as food controller. The two men differed less in their economic philosophy than in their demeanor. An unabashed capitalist who had made his fortune in coal mining, Rhondda nonetheless had a good rapport with organized labor. He had supported the miners in their strike in 1898 and advocated for many of their demands, including a minimum wage, collective bargaining, workmen's compensation, and a shorter workday.<sup>129</sup> In his first public statement as food controller, he affirmed that his sympathies lay with the consumer and that he planned to seek the advice of the cooperative societies in formulating policy.<sup>130</sup> In his first few weeks in office, Rhondda met personally with representatives of the War Emergency Workers' National Committee and impressed them with his willingness to entertain their concerns seriously and thoughtfully.<sup>131</sup> Meanwhile, Lloyd George appointed J. R. Clynes of the Labour Party as the ministry's parliamentary secretary, further smoothing relations with the working class.<sup>132</sup> Internally, Rhondda continued to staff the Ministry of Food with businessmen, but he simultaneously reached out to the civil servants his predecessor had alienated. He allowed his staff a relatively high degree of freedom, simultaneously priming their personal initiative and winning their allegiance.<sup>133</sup>

Rhondda built better public relations with organized labor and with women into the bureaucracy of the Ministry of Food itself. During his tenure as food controller, Devonport had kept the ministry relatively lean. He had more or less limited the ministry's physical presence outside London to a network of inspectors, divided into twenty-two districts across the country, including Ireland and Scotland.<sup>134</sup> To reach beyond London, Devonport had depended on the NWSC's and the Board of Education's pre-existing local affiliates. In growing the Ministry of Food, Rhondda did not change the bureaucratic model, but rather simply brought its local appendages under his direct supervision. Like Devonport had done with the inspectorate, Rhondda divided the country into seventeen divisions, each headed by a commissioner.<sup>135</sup> Like

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<sup>128</sup> As an example, a Mrs. Gasson told fellow co-operators at their annual congress that they could only hope that Lord Devonport would resign, clearing the way for a fairer food policy. See "Lord Devonport: Cooperative Congress and food control," *Times* 31 May 1917: 3.

<sup>129</sup> Viscountess Rhondda et al., *D. A. Thomas: Viscount Rhondda* (London: Longmans Green, 1921) 118-119.

<sup>130</sup> "Lord Rhondda on this task: Cheaper bread first," *Times* 18 June 1917: 9.

<sup>131</sup> Barnett 134.

<sup>132</sup> Barnett 133; "The war: 3rd year: 334th day," *Times* 3 July 1917: 8.

<sup>133</sup> Barnett has described Rhondda's relationship with his employees as "euphoric." See Barnett 125.

<sup>134</sup> "More maximum prices: Enforcing food orders," *Times* 10 May 1917: 7. As an example, the ministry dispatched an inspector to investigate the dearth of potatoes on the Liverpool market in early May. See "Parliament: Shortage of potatoes," *Times* 6 Mar. 1917: 10.

<sup>135</sup> Like their predecessor's in Devonport's inspectorate, divisional commissioners assisted in the enforcement of food orders, particularly in cases with a high degree of technical complexity. Moreover, from January 1918, commissioners had the power to search premises for illicit stockpiles of food and to "require returns and information and make inspection" to enforce the ministry's orders generally. However, the ministry depended on food control committees, in cooperation with local authorities, to enforce most of its orders. See United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, *M. G. Enforcement 1 (England and Wales): Enforcement of Orders Made by the Food*



the NWSC had done, he asked local authorities to appoint "food control committees," which would serve as the point of direct contact between the ministry and the citizenry.<sup>136</sup>

Superficially, Rhondda seemed to decentralize the ministry. From early August, the preponderance of its personnel worked outside London for one of the 1900 food control committees. Though Rhondda formulated general policy in London, the divisional commissioners and local committees enjoyed wide discretion in interpreting and implementing it. However, in actuality, Rhondda had consolidated and increased his own authority. He had reclaimed the prerogatives that Devonport had conceded to the NWSC and the Board of Education. Moreover, an order in council had empowered him to requisition goods like the Admiralty, Army Council, and Ministry of Munitions could, which enabled him effectively to control supplies and prices.<sup>137</sup> Meanwhile, Rhondda brought organized labor, his predecessor's loudest critic, into the ministry's fold. He insisted that no more than four tradesmen and at least one woman and one representative of organized labor sit on every food control committee.<sup>138</sup> Then, in December, the ministry established the Consumers' Council, an advisory committee composed in the main of prominent co-operators and trade unionists. Though businessmen held the reins of food policy as tightly as before, trade unionists could at least sit beside them on the box instead of simply bouncing along for the ride in the carriage.

Though Rhondda reached out to organized labor in good faith, he did not immediately act on its demand for compulsory rationing, preferring instead to match price controls with another round of food economy propaganda. With his power to requisition food, Rhondda could effectively control prices at every stage of the supply chain. Ultimately, 90 percent of the British food supply came under some degree of control. To Rhondda's credit, divisional commissioners and local food control committees managed to ensure that tradesmen honored maximum prices and to stymie the development of a black market.<sup>139</sup> Nonetheless, price controls predictably tended further to tighten already lean supplies and to disrupt normal channels of distribution. The Ministry of Food resorted to several different expedients to iron out these wrinkles, including the rationing of sugar on an individual basis.<sup>140</sup> However, with the war cabinet's

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Controller (Nov. 1917), M. G. Enforcement 1 (Scotland): The Enforcement of Orders Made by the Food Controller (Nov. 1917), and M. G. Enforcement 4 (England, Scotland, and Wales): Powers of Food Commissioners (Jan. 1918), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>136</sup> Barnett 127; "Sugar control scheme: Local committees to deal with prices," Times 6 Aug. 1917: 7.

<sup>137</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food and National War Savings Committee, "New powers for food controller," Food Control Campaign Weekly Bulletin 4 July 1917: 91, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA; "Requisitioning of food: New powers for the controller," Times 30 June 1917: 6.

<sup>138</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, "Local food control," Report for Week Ending Wednesday, September 5, 1917, 3, "Local food control," Report for Week Ending Wednesday, October 3, 1917, 2-3, Local authorities, "Report for Week Ending Wednesday, October 24, 1917," 3, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>139</sup> Barnett 136.

<sup>140</sup> The ministry required families to register with a single retailer, who would in turn buy based on the number of his customers from a single wholesaler, who would in turn buy from the government's Sugar Commission, the only legal importer. The simplicity of the scheme on paper

acquiescence, Rhondda resisted the broad application of compulsory rationing for primarily ideological reasons. On the one hand, he boasted a surprisingly open mind for a dyed-in-the-wool Liberal of, in the words of his daughter, "the school of Cobden, Mill, and Gladstone."<sup>141</sup> He had intervened far more dramatically in the free market than had his predecessor, all the while taking the wartime socialism of co-operators and trade unionists seriously. On the other hand, he seemed determined to allow the market one more opportunity to work itself out. On 18 September, he appointed Sir Arthur Yapp, the secretary of the National Council of Young Men's Christian Associations, as the second director of food economy.

If Kennedy Jones had a knack for selling stories, Yapp had one for organizing people. Under his leadership, the YMCA had established 250 rest and recreation centers to serve British soldiers within ten days of the declaration of war.<sup>142</sup> Implicitly drawing a distinction between himself and his predecessors, Yapp promised to run an orderly food economy campaign "based on exact knowledge," the representatives of which would speak "the whole truth" with "one voice."<sup>143</sup> Moreover, he sought to include co-operators, teachers, trade unionists, and women on the auxiliaries that food control committees would appoint to carry out the economy campaign in their vicinities.<sup>144</sup> The campaign would begin with three months of building this nationwide organization and of making connections with those whose help Yapp intended to request. It would culminate with the progressive expansion of the so-called League of National Safety, whose members pledged to economize in their eating. Yapp set an initial goal of only 10,000 members, but made no secret of his intention eventually to enroll everyone in the United Kingdom.<sup>145</sup>

As promised, Yapp conducted his campaign according to the best information available to him, which he in turn shared with the public. As had his predecessors, Yapp began by publishing a schedule of voluntary rations. However, he attempted to account for sex, traditional dietary habits, and different levels of physical exertion, allowing as much as eight pounds of bread for those who tilled a field or manned a furnace compared to only three and a half to four and a half for those who sat at a desk. Symbolically, Yapp reduced the meat ration to only two

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belied the complexity of putting it into effect. In September, the war cabinet and the Ministry of Food decided to register individuals rather than families to increase the system's flexibility, necessitating a second round of paperwork that, unfortunately, many of the poorest and least educated filled out incorrectly. The system went into effect on 1 January 1918 with registration still incomplete. See Barnett 137-139.

<sup>141</sup> Rhondda et al. 29.

<sup>142</sup> G. L. Clapperton, "Yapp, Sir Arthur Keysall (1869–1936)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004) 13 Aug. 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37057>>. By the end of the war, the YMCA operated 10,000 such centers.

<sup>143</sup> "The food economy campaign: Sir Arthur Yapp's appointment," National Food Journal 1.2 (26 Sept. 1917): 18, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>144</sup> Arthur Yapp, "The food economy campaign," National Food Journal 1.3 (10 Oct. 1917): 35, and "Notes and comments," National Food Journal 1.4 (24 Oct. 1917): 53, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA; "New food economy campaign: Composition of local committees," Times 15 Oct. 1917: 3.

<sup>145</sup> Arthur Yapp, "The League of National Safety," National Food Journal 1.4 (24 Oct. 1917): 55, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

pounds per week, which still exceeded average working-class consumption, but would necessitate real middle-class economies.

Table 4.4: Arthur Yapp's scale of voluntary rations, 12 November 1917

Bread	lb.	oz.
Men		
Engaged on very heavy industrial work or on agricultural work	8	0
On ordinary industrial or other manual work	7	0
Unoccupied or on sedentary work	4	8
Women		
Engaged on heavy industrial work or on agricultural work	5	0
On ordinary industrial work or in domestic service	4	0
Unoccupied or on sedentary work	3	8

Other staple foods for both sexes	lb.	oz.
Cereals	0	12
Meat	2	0
Butter, margarine, lard, oils, and fats	0	10
Sugar	0	8

Source: "The economy campaign: New scale of voluntary rations," National Food Journal 1.5 (14 Nov. 1917): 74, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA, and "New food rations: Graduated scale for bread," Times 13 Nov. 1917: 6.

By contrast with Devonport and Bathurst, Yapp explained immediately and in detail what fell into each category of food.<sup>146</sup> To facilitate Yapp's campaign, the Ministry of Food began to distribute a series of broadsheets of economical recipes and cooking tips in October and November. Titles ranged from All about Soups to Delicious Stews to How to Use Potatoes to Your Xmas Dinner. Eventually, many of these bore the anchor emblem of the League of National Safety, the centerpiece of Yapp's plan to mobilize the country behind food economy.<sup>147</sup> Meanwhile, Peel and Pember Reeves's "women's service" had transformed into a "speakers' section," which dispatched its missionaries across the country to, in the words of the National Food Journal, preach "the gospel of economy." The ministry's speakers did lecture occasionally

<sup>146</sup> For example, three-quarters pound of flour was equivalent to one pound of bread. Poultry and rabbit counted against the meat ration at 50 percent of their weight. The meat ration included bone and suet. One could exchange half a pound of bread for half a pound of meat or vice versa. See "The economy campaign: New scale of voluntary rations," National Food Journal 1.5 (14 Nov. 1917): 74, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>147</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, M. F. No. 37: How to Use Potatoes (Nov. 1917), M. F. No. 38: All about Soups (Oct. 1917), M. F. No. 39: Delicious Stews (Nov. 1917), F. E. No. 8: Your Xmas Dinner (Nov. 1917), F. E. 28: Vegetables: How to Cook Them (Dec. 1917), F. E. 40: Thirty-Four Ways of Using Potatoes Other Than as Vegetables (Dec. 1917), F. E. 68: Eighteen Very Cheap Dishes, F. E. 79: No Meat! Try These Substitute Dishes (Feb. 1918), F. E. 90: Carrot Cookery (Apr. 1918), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

on dietetics and physiology, but, in light of Spriggs' poor public reception, they emphasized the causes of the food crisis and the best techniques of cooking and preserving.<sup>148</sup>

Following Rhondda's example, Yapp dealt more fairly with the working class than had Devonport and Kennedy Jones. He did not accuse the poor of assisting the German submarine fleet by wasting bread or of threatening the future health and safety of their neighbors by overeating. To the contrary, a new, completely rewritten edition of the Food Economy Handbook advised the ministry's speakers to learn more about their working-class audiences. Before addressing the workers of a particular factory, they should interview the foremen and welfare inspectors about local conditions and sentiments. Above all, they had to "present themselves to their audiences as friendly agents who [had] come to supply information, where necessary, and to help, in such ways as may be possible, in a time of mutual need." In other words, they should speak as "one hard-up housekeeper to another," always keeping foremost in mind the hardships wrought by the war:

Some districts and some industries, such as the cotton industry, are undergoing severe restrictions. It would be unwise to lecture to cotton operatives on the need for economy or to accuse them of wasting food.<sup>149</sup>

This combination of accurate intelligence and a generous attitude met with relative success. The National Food Journal wrote that the ministry's speakers often surprised working-class audiences by "asking them to eat enough to keep . . . in efficiency and health:"

From that moment questions of what is enough, of what constitutes real economy and of what is meant by waste can be discussed on the most friendly terms.

Everything in this campaign depends, first upon arresting the attention of the workers, and secondly upon securing their good will. It is necessary to drop all idea of teaching. The reasons for the shortage can be graphically and definitely laid before them, and once their attention is secured they show themselves to be intelligent, logical and courteous.<sup>150</sup>

Peel echoed the journal in her memoir, recalling that she and her colleagues encountered little heckling about food economy itself. More often, working-class audiences complained about long lines and high prices at food shops or the continuation of brewing and horse racing despite the supposed need to reduce unnecessary consumption. When they realized that the speaker "came not to criticise, but to . . . help" and had "a real sympathy with their troubles," they generally afforded him or her "the kindest reception." As an aside, Peel remarked that she faced her toughest audiences early on in her career at the Ministry of Food because, at that time, "injudicious people had talked and written far too much about the wastefulness of the poor."<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> "The gospel of economy: Propagandist work of the Speakers' Section," National Food Journal 1.11 (13 Feb. 1918): 262, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>149</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, Food Economy Handbook (Dec. 1917) 2-3, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA, or Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>150</sup> "The gospel of economy: Propagandist work of the Speakers' Section," National Food Journal 1.11 (13 Feb. 1918): 262, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>151</sup> Peel 1919 165.

### A revolution must come

The second food economy campaign achieved the same proportions as the first, but probably had no greater impact on Britons' attitudes or dietary habits. The Ministry of Food's speakers' section conducted nearly 1000 demonstrations and lectures from September 1917 to March 1918 for a total of perhaps 200,000 people. The weekly news service issued 8000 columns' worth of material to 500 newspapers. Perhaps 5,000,000 people saw one of the ministry's propaganda films or slide presentations. The League of National Safety enrolled between 3 and 4 million adult and 600,000 youth members, or about one of every ten people in the United Kingdom.<sup>152</sup> However, the impressive scale of the government's food economy campaign notwithstanding, industrial unrest only increased. Britons walked off the job for the equivalent of 3 million workdays in the last six months of 1917; January 1918 was even more tumultuous. Essentially, food economy could not address the inequities at the heart of labor discontent. In the words of Spalding's war savings committee, the poor could not afford to live wastefully. If food economy could not lower prices – or at least make the rich share in the pain – then they had no real use for it.

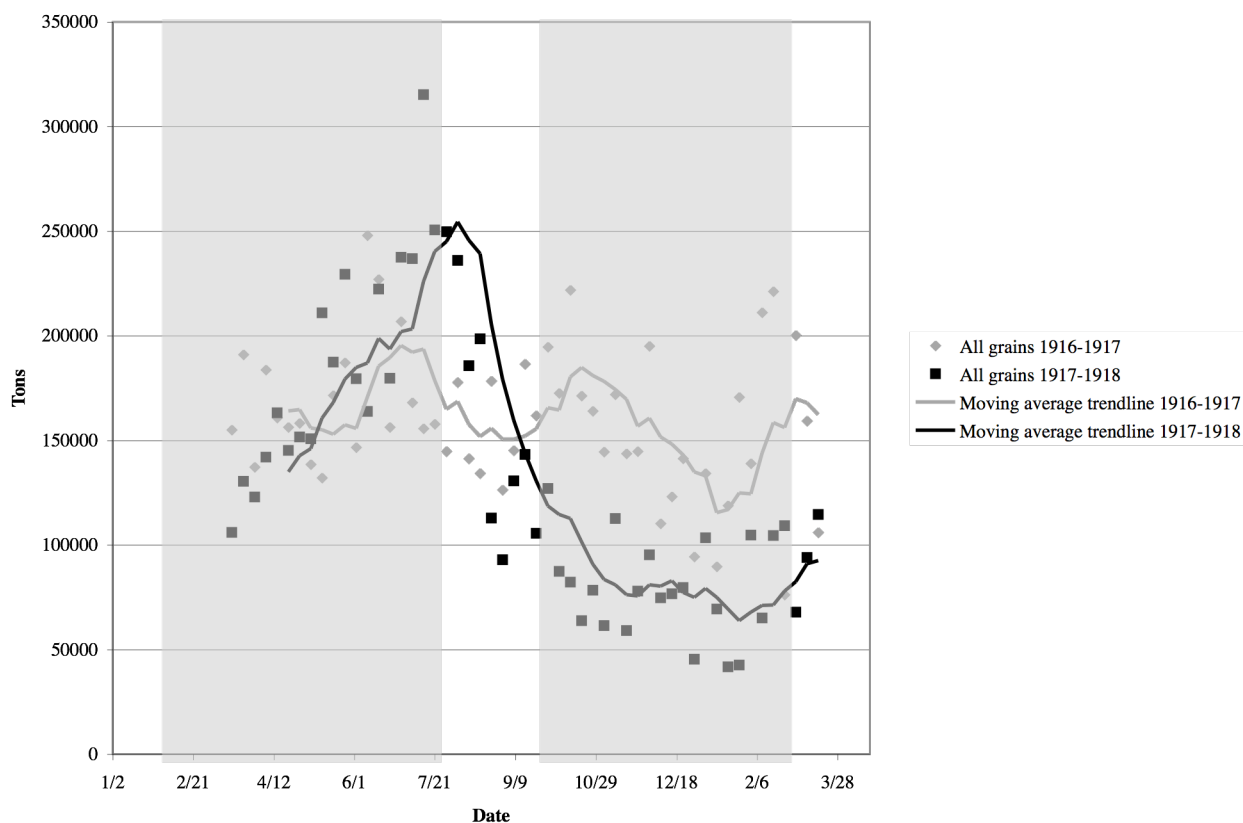
Moreover, food economy could not solve the supply and distribution problems caused by price controls. The Ministry of Food could reduce the price of bread by an edict under the Defense of the Realm Act, but it could not summon up new supplies of grain quite so easily or quickly. As shown in figure 4.2, low prices encouraged consumption to creep up just as imports of grain fell off.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> "Work of the Food Economy Division," National Food Journal 1.13 (13 Mar. 1917): 345, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>153</sup> On the one hand, Britain had more grain in stock in the winter of 1917 and 1918 than it had in the same period of 1916 and 1917. On the other hand, imports sank to such low levels that this buffer wore away alarmingly fast. See United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, consumption statistics, intra-office reports for weeks ending 21 Mar. 1917 through 13 Mar. 1918, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

Figure 4.2: Weekly imports of all grains in tons 1916-1917 and 1917-1918



Source: United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, consumption statistics, intra-office reports for weeks ending 21 Mar. 1917 through 13 Mar. 1918, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

Notes: The shaded areas correspond to the government's two food economy campaigns, the first from February to July 1917, the second from September 1917 to February 1918.

This disconnect between demand and supply left restless Britons waiting in long lines to buy food they could theoretically afford at shops that did not have enough to sell. Meanwhile, the food economy campaign did little to bring demand back down to a sustainable level. It asked the majority of Britons radically to alter their diet, but offered no timely advice on how to do so. It accused them of carelessly wasting food that many of them could only just afford. It mounted multiple pledge drives, which no doubt confused the willing while only antagonizing the unwilling. True, in the teeth of all of these gaffes, a sizeable proportion of the population still felt some sympathy for the campaign, as evidenced by the number of pledges secured even in remote villages in Cornwall and Wales. But, by the time Rhondda and Yapp could make good Devonport and Kennedy Jones's mistakes, Britain's macroeconomic position had worsened.

Nonetheless, food economy did help to lay the foundations of a relatively successful rationing scheme. The NWSC had organized its war savings drive around hundreds of committees, each responsible for a small geographic area and composed of prominent local citizens. For the sake of expediency, Devonport and Kennedy Jones grafted their food economy campaign onto this network. The relatively lean staff at the Ministry of Food and the NWSC set out broad goals and suggested methods for achieving them, but left implementation almost

entirely in the hands of local war savings committees and their food economy auxiliaries. On the one hand, this arrangement made for a cacophonous campaign, with many variations of the same theme all playing simultaneously. On the other hand, it cost little and allowed for the flexibility to meet local circumstances. In either case, it trained a large number of people in the inner-workings of the food trade and, more importantly, of the government bureaucracy. Rhondda adopted this model for food control proper, though he attached it to district and municipal councils rather than war savings committees. Again, the Ministry of Food issued broad orders, then left implementation at the local level to food control committees. Admittedly, Rhondda reined in local independence more than did Devonport. In most cases, food control committees could not choose whether to enforce an order or not. However, they still had surprisingly wide freedom; for example, as early as December 1917, they could impose their own systems of compulsory rationing, subject to the ministry's approval. Local authorities stocked their food control committees with veterans of Devonport's economy campaign, which improved efficiency. The bureaucracy of food control did not work perfectly, but it muddled through comparatively well due in part to the legacy of food economy. By contrast, the Germans attempted to impose compulsory rationing at the same time as they assembled the bureaucracy to manage it, which, predictably, led to plenty of confusion.

Food economy also facilitated a progressive change in the official attitude toward the working class, which had practical implications for rationing. In 1915 and 1916, Lady Chance and Charles Hecht had realized that they had to win over the working class if their private-sector food economy campaign had any hope of success. How much food could the middle and upper classes – perhaps 10 percent of the population – actually save by themselves? In 1917 and 1918, the Ministry of Food underwent the same on the job education. At first, the ministry ham-handedly accused its own citizens of arming the enemy with virtual submarines in a war that, according to the party line, would determine the fate of civilization itself. Not surprisingly, this message fell on deaf ears. In its second food economy campaign, the ministry self-consciously toned down its rhetoric. It conceded that working men did need more bread than sedentary ones, that housewives wanted practical recipes with familiar ingredients, not the carbohydrate and fat content of exotic grains and pulses, and that for some, "economy" meant just more hardship and grief. Unfortunately, this change of heart occurred after industrial unrest had already peaked and the food crisis had grown larger than voluntary measures could contain. Nonetheless, it did affect the ministry's later policies. For example, the compulsory rationing scheme awarded extra food to those engaged in heavy physical labor. The Royal Society's Food (War) Committee had long contended that nutritional requirements varied with age, occupation, and sex, but the debacle of voluntary rationing under Devonport drove home the same lesson more pointedly.

The Ministry of Food's newfound sympathy for the working class was more than a public relations ploy, at least in the experience of Dorothy Peel. Before and after the war, she earned her living as a journalist specializing in middle-class domestic economy.<sup>154</sup> Her prewar writings betrayed no particular class prejudice, but they did accept the hierarchical structure of British

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<sup>154</sup> Over the course of her career, she published at least seventeen cookbooks, several other works of fiction and nonfiction, as well as frequent articles in magazines such as the Queen and Woman. From 1903 to 1906, she edited both Hearth and Home and Woman while serving as a managing director of Beeton and Company, the publisher of the famous Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management. See "Mrs. C. S. Peel: An observer of social changes," obituary, Times 8 Aug. 1934: 12.

society without objection. For instance, her 10/- a Head for House Books referred to domestic servants indifferently as a natural part of the accouterments of a middle-class household, even one on a 10s. per person weekly budget.<sup>155</sup> However, her work at the Ministry of Food required her to interact more intimately with the poor than ever before. According to her obituary in the Times, she inspected coalmines, factories, prisons, reformatories, and schools in addition to speaking before large audiences composed predominantly of working-class housewives.<sup>156</sup> These experiences opened her eyes to the resourcefulness the poor often exhibited in the face of hardship:

The way in which many working-class women keep house and bring up their children on minute and fluctuating weekly incomes resembles a clever conjuring trick, of which I for one have never learned the secret. How many of the worthy people who go and 'talk to the poor' could attempt to house, feed, and clothe a family of six or seven on 25s. to 30s. a week (quite an ordinary pre-War wage); work surrounded by a tribe of little children; be kept awake at night by a teething baby, and remain cheerful and uncomplaining? Many a time I have been asked to go and talk to working mothers. If I have ventured to do it I have returned feeling that I have learned from them far more than they have ever learned from me.<sup>157</sup>

In her postwar memoir, Peel translated this newfound class-consciousness into an enthusiastic endorsement of labor politics:

But this I think I know – revolution must come and it is right that it should come. The working people will no longer consent to be the beasts of burden that they were, to drudge throughout their lives in a never-ending struggle to earn just enough money to make existence possible. Working men and women are now politically important, they are becoming better educated, labour has been raised to a position of influence and authority. And Labour [sic] ask for what? For nothing more than any human being has a right to ask – a wage which will enable him to afford a decent and a healthy home, sufficient food, education, and a share of the pleasures of life, and these not won at such a price as makes of him a bent and broken thing, old before his time.<sup>158</sup>

By "revolution," Peel did not mean Marxist-style class warfare, but rather a more equitable distribution of wealth and work that raised the standard of living for the majority of the population. In her later books, her revolutionary fervor did diminish, but it did not disappear. For Peel and many of her colleagues at the Ministry of Food, the war had fundamentally altered their conception of British society.

Conversely, British society itself gained a new perspective on the patriotism and proficiency of women like Dorothy Peel through the lens of food economy. Throughout the war, the powers-that-be hesitated to promote women into their own ranks. When the physician Elsie Inglis proposed to form an ambulance unit staffed by women, the War Office advised her to "go home and sit still." After she had successfully deployed a surgical team to the Serbian front with

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<sup>155</sup> She usually wrote of servants in the passive voice, as in, "were only two servants kept" as opposed to four, etc. See Dorothy Peel, 10/- a Head for House Books: An Indispensable Manual for Housekeepers, 4th ed. (Westminster, UK: Constable, 1902) 15.

<sup>156</sup> "Mrs. C. S. Peel: An observer of social changes."

<sup>157</sup> Peel 1919 26-27.

<sup>158</sup> Peel 1919 295.



private funds, the War Office still blocked her attempt to expand the operation to Mesopotamia.<sup>159</sup> To take Henry Rew at his word, he hired Peel and Pember Reeves primarily to satisfy public pressure for women at the Ministry of Food. However, at the same time that officialdom held individuals at arm's length, it eventually came to embrace women collectively as mothers and homemakers. The historian Nicoletta Gullace has argued that Parliament extended the franchise to women due in part to their willingness to sacrifice their sons to king and country during the war.<sup>160</sup> Similarly, the Ministry of Food lauded women as the "quartermasters" of the nation who would "kill Kaiserism in the kitchen."<sup>161</sup> Such propaganda linked women's citizenship to their traditional gender roles, which consequently became a source of political power. Of course, at the same time, reinforcing these stereotypes may have worked against women like Elsie Inglis who had untraditional ambitions and talents.

Ironically, liberal England sacrificed its old shibboleths of class and gender, but failed in the moment to save its core values of individualism, market freedom, and personal responsibility. Soon after his appointment as director-general of food economy, Kennedy Jones waxed confident in his countrymen's individual initiative:

I have never found yet if you put it to the English people that it is 'up to them' to do a thing 'on their own' that they will fail to respond to the appeal.<sup>162</sup>

Unfortunately, an economy the size of Britain's, with a supply chain that wrapped around the entire globe, was more complicated than Kennedy Jones assumed. No amount of economizing on the part of the consumer could ensure the proper distribution of a tight supply of food. In fact, as tradesmen pursued their own interests according to the liberal economic model, distribution became more distorted and prices rose even higher. Yet, the British government persevered through nearly four years of war before imposing nationwide rationing. Even J. R. Clynes, the Labour Party M. P. who served as the ministry's parliamentary secretary, counseled against rationing throughout 1917.<sup>163</sup> To its credit, the Ministry of Food gave lower priority to class and gender prejudices than to the free market – in other words, no one suggested hurrying along compulsory rationing to keep workers and women in their place. However, neither did dealing fairly with workers and women shore up the crumbling edifice of liberal economics. Significantly, William Beveridge, the father of Britain's welfare state, witnessed this small failure of liberalism firsthand as a senior civil servant at the Board of Trade and in the Ministry of Food. Victorian values would enjoy a resurgence in the 1920s with the end of rationing and the resumption of the gold standard, but Beveridge and his colleagues would not forget the lessons they had learned during the war.

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<sup>159</sup> Marwick 88-89; Leah Leneman, "Inglis, Elsie Maud (1864–1917)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004) 15 Aug. 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34101>>.

<sup>160</sup> Nicoletta Gullace, The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002).

<sup>161</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, "Kill Kaiserism in the kitchen," Economy News Service 9 Feb. 1918: 1.

<sup>162</sup> "Voluntary food control: A great campaign for economy."

<sup>163</sup> Barnett 147.

### Appendix A

Table A.1: Cost analysis of conforming to voluntary food rations for working-class individuals, February 1917

	Reduction in consumption (lbs)	Calories per lb	Price per pound (d)	Reduction in consumption (calories)	Reduction in expenditure (d)
Bread	2.6	1215	2.5	3159	6.5
Sugar	0.5	1790	5.4	895	2.7
			Total	4054	9.2

Table A.2: Cost analysis of possible replacement foods for bread and sugar in working class diets, February 1917

	Price per lb (July 1914) (d)	Price increase (February 1917)	Price per lb (February 1917) (d)	Calories per lb	Calories per penny (d)	Calories for 9d.	Cost of 4050 calories' worth (d)	Premium over bread and sugar	Bulk of 4050 calories worth (lbs)
Potatoes	0.68*	131%	1.57	310	197.35	1776.17	20.52	123%	13.06
Margarine	7.25	25%	9.06	3520	388.41	3495.72	10.43	13%	1.15
Butter	14	72%	24.08	3510	145.76	1311.88	27.78	202%	1.15
Bacon	11.25	56%	17.55	2685	152.99	1376.92	26.47	188%	1.51
Foreign beef	7.5	103%	15.23	913	59.97	539.70	67.54	634%	4.44
Foreign mutton	6.75	113%	14.38	977	67.95	611.58	59.60	548%	4.15

Sources: Price information for both tables was obtained from Arthur L. Bowley, Prices and Wages in the United Kingdom, 1914-1920 (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1921) 32-61.

Contemporary food values were obtained from Margaret McKillop, Food Values: What They Are and How to Calculate Them, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1922) 54-56.

Notes: As Bowley and the Board of Trade dealt in nationwide averages, their data do not accurately represent prices in any particular location. In fact, local prices could deviate significantly from the national average before the imposition of effective government controls. For instance, in January 1917, farmers in rural West Cumberland charged 1s. 10d. to 2s. 2d. per stone (1.6d. to 1.9d. per pound) for potatoes, or as much as 173% more than the national average.<sup>164</sup> Beef and mutton were treated as composites of the commercially available cuts, the nutritional values of which differed significantly. (For example, brisket contained 1185 calories per pound compared with hind shank's 345.)

\*In the case of potatoes, the price in June was substituted for the one in July. Bowley did not give a price for potatoes in July 1914.

<sup>164</sup> On 13 January 1917, the farmers' attempt to increase prices even further triggered a near riot at the Saturday market in Maryport, West Cumberland. According to the Times, angry housewives pelted the farmers with potatoes and turnips, demanding the "fair" price of 1s. per stone. A few farmers escaped under police protection, but others ended up selling at the housewives' prescribed price. See Anthony James Coles, "The moral economy of the crowd: Some twentieth-century food riots," Journal of British Studies 18.1 (1978): 162-165, and "Soldiers' indignant wives: Rumours of a boycott and field raids," Times 15 Jan. 1917: 6.

Appendix B

## A Song of Food-Saving

Good people, who long for a lead  
 On the paramount crux of the time,  
 I pray you give diligent heed  
 To the lessons I weave into rhyme;  
 And first, let us note, one and all—  
 Whether living in castles or "digs"—  
 "Large people need more than the small,"  
 For that's the first maxim of SPRIGGS.

Now, as most of the food that we eat  
 Is wanted for keeping us warm,  
 The requisite quota of heat  
 Is largely a question of form;  
 And the ratio of surface to weight,  
 As anyone readily twigs,  
 Is the root of the point in debate  
 As sagely expounded by SPRIGGS.

Hence the more we resemble a sphere  
 Less heat on the surface is lost,  
 And the needful supply, it is clear,  
 Is maintained at less lavish a cost;  
 'Tis economy, then, to be plump  
 As partridges, puffins or pigs,  
 Who are never a prey to the hump,  
 So at least I interpret my SPRIGGS.

Next, the harder it freezes or snows  
 The greater the value of fat,  
 And the larger the appetite grows  
 Of John, Sandy, Taffy and Pat.  
 (Conversely, in Midsummer days,

When liquid more freely one swigs,  
 Less viand the appetite stays—  
 This quatrain's a gloss upon SPRIGGS).

For strenuous muscular work  
 A larger allowance of grub  
 We need than is due if we shirk  
 Exertion, and lounge in a pub;  
 For the loafer who rests in a chair  
 Everlastingly puffing at "cigs"  
 Can live pretty nearly on air,  
 So I gather at least from my SPRIGGS.

Why children need plentiful food  
 He nextly proceeds to relate:  
 Their capacity's larger than you'd  
 Be disposed to infer from their weight;  
 They're growing in bulk and in height,  
 They're normally active as grigs,  
 And exercise breeds appetite—  
 This stanza is absolute SPRIGGS.

Last of all, with an eloquent plea  
 For porridge at breakfast in place  
 Of the loaf, and for oatcake at tea  
 A similar gap to efface;  
 For potatoless dinners—with rice,  
 For puddings of maize and of figs,  
 Which are filling, nutritious and nice—  
 Thus ends the Epistle of SPRIGGS.

Source: Punch 14 Mar. 1917: 174.

## 5. An Extraordinarily Wasteful and Extravagant People?

Ethel Wilby, a London barmaid, grew up at the turn of the twentieth century in a working-class household beset with small contradictions. On the one hand, her mother sent her to school each morning with a half-penny to buy a slice of cake for breakfast. On the other hand, the family drank the water left over from boiling vegetables.<sup>1</sup> While food reformers would have frowned upon a daily breakfast of ready-made cake, they would have applauded a regular dose of "green water." Meanwhile, Sophie Bulmer, the wife of a cider magnate, ran her large middle-class home in equally contradictory fashion. On the one hand, she managed to keep accounts of her household expenses for just six months of one year – and then with only passing accuracy. On the other hand, during the war, she amassed an extensive collection of food economy handbooks that purported to help her track and reduce those expenses.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, these two isolated cases did not represent the wide variety of experience in all British households at the time. However, they neatly frame the problem of documenting how Britons responded to the wartime food economy movement. Did they cling to their cake, or did they drink their green water? Did they let household expenses run freely, or did they restrain them with scientific economies?

Unfortunately, none of the available evidence can answer these questions directly or with scientific rigor. In the heat of the war, no one seems to have studied British domestic economy as did Charles Booth or Seebohm Rowntree a decade earlier. However, the available statistics and anecdotes do tell at least part of the story of wartime food economy in the home. Much of the best evidence comes from London, which had the largest, most intensely studied population of any British city. Londoners had access to educational opportunities and social services, through either local government or private charity, that happened to incorporate food economy principles. As a result, how working-class Londoners engaged with – for example – continuing education can shed light on their attitude toward food economy and how it changed during the war. Moreover, London's diverse population, which heralded from across the country and the empire and included both born urbanites and transplanted provincials, hedged itself against geographic bias. Conversely, the less ample, but nonetheless poignant evidence from other parts of the country tends to corroborate the story as it unfolded in London. Though working-class Londoners had greater exposure to food economy and could have benefited from it more than the well-to-do, they seemed to hold it at arm's length during the war itself. Meanwhile, the middle class coped with the food crisis through a mixture of tepid economies, gardening, gathering, and even subterfuge. In both cases, the appeal of food economy hinged more on culture than on personal finances.

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<sup>1</sup> Ethel Wilby, unpublished memoir, ts, 92/49/1, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished papers of the Bulmer family, J65, Herefordshire Record Office, Hereford. Particularly, Sophie Bulmer, unpublished account book, J65/1471, and her copies of National Food Economy League, *Handbook for Housewives* (1917), J65/1476; Association of Teachers of Domestic Subjects, various food economy leaflets, J65/1477; Ministry of Food, "Thirty-four ways of using potatoes other than as vegetables," J65/1478, and National Health Society, "Vegetables and how to cook them," J65/1479.

### Checking those habits of waste

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, domestic economy grew increasingly prominent in the curricula for publicly funded schools. In 1862, the Committee of Council on Education formalized a so-called "payment by results" system in which schools received grant money depending on how many of their students passed standardized exams.<sup>3</sup> Initially, testing covered only reading, writing, and arithmetic, but, from the late 1860s, it expanded to include a variety of optional "specific" and "class" subjects.<sup>4</sup> The committee designated domestic economy as a specific subject in 1874; two years later, it required that a girl taking any specific subjects at all had to include domestic economy as one of them.<sup>5</sup> Cookery by itself became a specific subject in 1882, followed by laundry in 1889 and housewifery in 1900.<sup>6</sup> In 1893, the Committee of Council promoted domestic economy to a class subject and mandated that all girls in elementary school take it.<sup>7</sup> By the turn of the century, "payment by results" had begun to give way to a more equitable, less exam-intensive funding regime, but domestic economy remained a fixture of the official elementary curriculum. By 1909, even girls in publicly funded secondary schools had to take domestic economy.<sup>8</sup>

In London, the domestic component of the elementary school curriculum self-consciously emphasized food economy. In 1878, the London School Board adopted a plan to build cooking facilities for girls taking domestic economy as a specific subject. Thomas Heller – general secretary of the National Union of Teachers – defended the plan specifically because "the want of practical knowledge upon the part of the working women of London caused food to be wasted to the extent of £6,000,000 a year."<sup>9</sup> In summarizing the board's accomplishments in 1878, Sir

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<sup>3</sup> In 1871, the Committee of Council formulated a system of six academic "standards," each denoted by a Roman numeral. Achievement, as opposed to age, determined a student's promotion through the standards. (In 1882, the committee added a seventh standard in recognition of the rapid progress of elementary education after Forster's Act.) At the end of an academic year, the students in each standard took an exam administered in person by one of the committee's inspectors. For each student who passed the exam for his standard, the school received a few shillings in grant money.

<sup>4</sup> Only students in the highest three standards could sit for exams in "specific" subjects, which eventually included algebra, economics, French, geometry, geography, German, Latin, literature, domestic and natural science, and so on. No one student could test in more than two specific subjects. As with reading or writing, the amount of any grant depended on the number of individuals who passed a specific subject exam at a particular school. By contrast, a school had to offer a class subject to all students above standard I. The amount of grant varied by how well groups of students performed as a whole on the exam.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Birchenough, History of Elementary Education in England and Wales from 1800 to the Present Day (London: Clive, 1920) 303.

<sup>6</sup> Jane McDermid, "Women and education," Women's History: Britain 1850-1945, ed. June Purvis (New York: St. Martin's, 1995) 121. "Housewifery" meant primarily cleaning, but also furnishing and organizing a home, sewing, basic personal health and hygiene, and caring for babies.

<sup>7</sup> McDermid 121.

<sup>8</sup> McDermid 121.

<sup>9</sup> "The London School Board," Times 28 Mar. 1878: 6; "The London School Board," Times 30 May 1878: 6; Charles More, "Heller, Thomas Edmund (1837–1901)," Oxford Dictionary of

Charles Reed emphasized that the new cooking curriculum and facilities would "check those habits of waste which so often impoverish the family of the artisan."<sup>10</sup> The curriculum itself consisted of twenty-four lessons, half theoretical and half practical. As per Heller and Reed's vision, the board outfitted its cooking facilities with equipment "suitable for an ordinary artisan's home, with the addition of a gas stove." The board's typical working-class student would learn not to mimic or to serve the wealthy, but to cook better in her own home for her own family. To minimize expenditure, the board built cooking facilities at only twenty-one central locations, each of which served the domestic economy students from surrounding elementary schools.<sup>11</sup>

In the decade immediately preceding the war, the administration of London's state-funded schools changed significantly, but the emphasis on domestic economy in the curriculum remained the same. In 1903, Parliament abolished the London School Board and entrusted its responsibilities to the London County Council.<sup>12</sup> Three years later, the LCC published its first domestic economy syllabus for elementary school girls.<sup>13</sup> As had the school board, the council tailored its curriculum to the economic realities that students faced in their own homes. The syllabus provided for three courses of instruction, each based on a hypothetical family of six with a different weekly income: £2 10s. and up, £1 18s. or so, and £1 8s. and down. The syllabus encouraged teachers to explain the price of each dish, which, in the £1 8s. course of instruction, topped out at 1s. 2d. However, a few particular lessons concentrated on thrifty cooking practices, some of which mirrored contemporary food reformism. For instance, the girls learned about "management of income," "marketing," and "true and false economy" as well as how to bake bread at home, substitute pulses for meat, and recycle leftovers into new dishes. Vegetarianism merited two full lessons, the sample dishes for which cost only 8d.<sup>14</sup>

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National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 3 Jan. 2009 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/46693>>. The board deferred the decision on cooking facilities in March, but approved it more or less in its original form in May.

<sup>10</sup> "The London School Board," Times 3 Oct. 1878: 6. As a member of Parliament for Hackney, Sir Charles Reed had stood in the vanguard of the fight for the passage of the Education Act in 1870. He left Westminster in 1874 to concentrate on his duties as a member of the London School Board, of which he had become chairman in December 1873. See G. C. Boase, "Reed, Sir Charles (1819–1881)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 4 Jan. 2009 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23270>>.

<sup>11</sup> "The London School Board," Times 30 May 1878: 6.

<sup>12</sup> Balfour's controversial Education Act of 1902 did away with school boards in general and transferred jurisdiction for education at all levels – elementary, secondary, and technical – to local governments, primarily counties and county boroughs, but also non-county boroughs and urban districts in some cases. The Board of Education continued to issue general regulations and to oversee Parliamentary grants to schools. The Education (London) Act of 1903 extended the same organizational principles already in operation elsewhere in the country to the capital city.

<sup>13</sup> In its 1911 revision, the syllabus compressed the same number of lessons into two rather than three years.

<sup>14</sup> By contrast with its syllabus, the LCC's cooking textbook deemphasized food economy. It included just a few specifically economical recipes such as "very cheap sandwich cake," "poor man's goose," and "cheap flaky pastry." It advised peeling potatoes minimally, but did not offer any explanation for why. It encouraged recycling the water employed in boiling meats, but not

Occasionally, domestic science education in council schools intersected directly with the private-sector food economy movement. In 1890, the Bread and Food Reform League joined with the London Vegetarian Society in the Educational Food Fund, which provided economical meals to board school students in London's poor neighborhoods. The fund aimed to inculcate the principles of economical diet:

It is believed that the "Educational Food Fund," by practically teaching the advantages of these staple foods, and by encouraging their supply in poor districts, will aid the toiling millions to obtain cheap, healthy, nourishing food, and thus help to check the alarming physical and moral degradation into which such large numbers of our population are sinking, and at the same time maintain those feelings of independence which are essential to national welfare.<sup>15</sup>

To encourage enthusiasm for healthful food, participating students learned to sing a ditty entitled "The Staff of Life is Wheat Meal Bread" to the tune of "The British Grenadiers." The official "quick march" of several army regiments, "The British Grenadiers" exuded energy and strength, which implicitly reinforced the benefits of wholesome diet for physical health. Moreover, the song's patriotic sentimentality helped to elevate brown bread from a question of personal preference to one of national significance. This clever nutritional propaganda even garnered the favorable attention of the Musical Times.<sup>16</sup> In 1890 alone, the Educational Food Fund supplied literally tens of thousands of meals to working-class students. Over the next twenty years, the league periodically renewed its connection with London schools. For instance, in 1908, it sponsored several exhibitions of "pure standard" cooking by local domestic economy students in St. Pancras.<sup>17</sup>

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vegetables. Similarly, it advocated flavoring stock with old bones and meat trimmings, but not with bread or vegetables. Generally, the text concentrated on practice to the near exclusion of theory and so did not explain the few economical recipes or cooking techniques to which it referred. This deficit in the textbook left wider discretion to each teacher in covering food economy. Those teachers who faithfully and competently followed the LCC's syllabus exposed their students to at least some contemporary food economy. However, the textbook could not compensate for teachers who glossed over it.

<sup>15</sup> Educational Food Fund [Bread and Food Reform League and London Vegetarian Society], The Second Annual Report of the Educational Food Fund and Children's Dinners (1891) 2, 08425.ee.13, British Library, London.

<sup>16</sup> The Musical Times actually proposed its own dietary ditty on the economical virtues of margarine:

Come sing of oleomargarine,  
For very like butter it is I ween,  
And only half the price!  
To make it you take from lard and fat  
As much of the stearin as can be got at;  
Then butter you add – very little of that,  
And ain't the resultant nice!

See "Facts, rumours, and remarks," Musical Times 1 Aug. 1890: 470.

<sup>17</sup> Bread and Food Reform League, Report 1910 (London, 1910) 15-17, SP Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

For older women, the LCC's evening institutes offered continuing education in domestic economy with the same goal of improving home life, including nutrition.<sup>18</sup> In general, evening institutes met in the same buildings as did day schools and often employed the same personnel.<sup>19</sup> Their purpose varied between preparation for higher education, technical or vocational training, and personal enrichment.<sup>20</sup> A set of thirty women's institutes offered casual instruction in domestic economy, including cooking, as well as other non-vocational subjects.<sup>21</sup> As did elementary schools, women's institutes concentrated on skills "pressingly required for some home purpose, such as how to cook a meal or how to make or mend clothes," not on preparation for domestic service.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, after 1913, the LCC attempted to spruce up its women's institutes by selling simple refreshments, organizing social gatherings and excursions, and providing reading and writing facilities.<sup>23</sup> A 1 to 2s. fee applied for first-time students, though those with attendance better than 75 percent did not pay for any subsequent sessions in which they enrolled.<sup>24</sup> A young London housewife could in effect pay a few shillings for long-term continuing education in domestic economy with the auxiliary benefit of socializing with

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<sup>18</sup> Before 1913, the LCC referred to its evening education program for older adolescents and adults as "schools" or "centers," not "institutes." However, the evening schools suffered poor attendance and morale, prompting a thoroughgoing reform in spring and summer 1913 with further fine-tuning in 1914. In the reshuffle, the "evening schools" became the "evening institutes," the name by which they went until well after the First World War. See "Report of the Higher Education Sub-Committee, 1st May, 1913" 879.

<sup>19</sup> "Education Committee report, 7th May, 1913," 1159. At least some institutes utilized several different meeting places rather than a single day school. For instance, the East and West Islington Women's Institute held classes at the Canonbury Road Junior Commercial Institute, Laycock Street School, Union Chapel in Compton Terrace, and Belle Isle Mission Hall. The responsible teacher organized classes for groups of women not enrolled formally in the institute at the Girls' Friendly Society on Drayton Road, the Elizabeth Fry Home, the Alma Road Hall, the Convent of Notre Dame de Sion in Eden Grove, and St. Paul's School in Canonbury. See London County Council, Evening Institutes: Record of Character of Area (People, Students, Clubs, Etc.) and of Relations with Business Houses: East and West Islington Women's Institute, record book 1916-1923, LCC/EO/HFE/10/5, London Metropolitan Archive.

<sup>20</sup> Some institutes specialized exclusively in commercial or technical training. Both commercial and technical students younger than eighteen started at "junior" institutes unless they had several years of secondary schooling or another atypical qualification. Commercial students progressed to a "senior" institute, technical students to a polytechnic or a daytime "technical institute." Ideally, senior or technical institutes and polytechnics partnered closely with the junior institutes from which they drew their students. By contrast, general and women's institutes tended to educate for personal enrichment. See London County Council, "Education Committee report, 7th May, 1913," 3 June 1913, Minutes of Proceedings 1913 1158.

<sup>21</sup> "Report of the Higher Education Sub-Committee, 1st May, 1913" 879; "Education Committee report, 7th May, 1913" 1158.

<sup>22</sup> "Education Committee report, 7th May, 1913" 1164.

<sup>23</sup> "Report of the Higher Education Sub-Committee, 1st May, 1913" 886; "Report of the Education Committee, 7th May 1913" 1436.

<sup>24</sup> "Report of the Higher Education Sub-Committee, 1st May, 1913" 888.



likeminded peers. The LCC also organized short courses in domestic economy outside the women's institutes proper, often under the auspices of girls' clubs or mothers' meetings.

The LCC did not supervise the cooking curriculum of the women's institutes as closely as it did that of the elementary schools. Rather, the women's institutes had a less formal, more clubby atmosphere in which "organized courses of instruction" remained "optional."<sup>25</sup> Crafting a curriculum fell to the responsible teacher. Regrettably, the surviving records of individual institutes offer few specifics about the content of instruction. The record book for New Park Women's Institute mentioned curriculum only to single out cooking, health, and physical exercise as "by far the most popular subjects."<sup>26</sup> Likewise, East and West Islington Women's Institute offered at least one cooking class, but its records do not include any curriculum or syllabus.<sup>27</sup> However, many women's institute teachers also worked in day schools. Domestic economy teachers who did such double duty probably brought at least some of the day school curriculum, including food economy, into the evening institutes.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of the quality of instruction, the women's institutes attracted large numbers of students. In the session beginning in the fall of 1914, 26,615 women enrolled at thirty-three institutes; another 4069 took a course in domestic economy from an LCC instructor seconded to a girls' club or mothers' meeting.<sup>29</sup> By comparison, only 20,471 students enrolled in the LCC's thirty-one general institutes in the same session.<sup>30</sup>

Outside elementary schools and evening institutes, working-class women may also have encountered food economy in less official settings. In *A Ragged Schooling*, the memoirist Robert Roberts recalled that his mother, Jane, had gone to work in a textile mill at age nine. Once each week, she and the other weavers had to stay for an extra hour after their shift for a class in "economical cookery" led by their employer's daughter. As an adult, Jane Roberts recalled with a mix of cynicism and whimsy a lecture on "three ways of stuffing a cod's head for a penny."<sup>31</sup> Less pedantically, some working-class voluntary associations sponsored speakers

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<sup>25</sup> "Report of the Education Committee, 7th May 1913" 1164.

<sup>26</sup> London County Council, *Evening Institutes: Record of Character of Area (People, Students, Clubs, Etc.) and of Relations with Business Houses: New Park Women's Institute*, record book 1915-1928, LCC/EO/HFE/10/9, London Metropolitan Archive

<sup>27</sup> *East and West Islington Women's Institute*.

<sup>28</sup> After 1913, the LCC discouraged its evening institute teachers from working full-time in a day school. At the largest institutes, responsible teachers received full-time appointments and so did not have to work during the day. At smaller institutes, teachers could combine part-time work during the day and in the evening into the equivalent of a full-time appointment. See "Report of the Education Committee, 7th May 1913" 1159-1160.

<sup>29</sup> Domestic economy included cooking, dressmaking, first aid, home nursing, infant care, and laundry. See London County Council, Education Committee, "Statement accompanying the report of the Higher Education Sub-Committee dated 3rd December, 1914: Return of attendance for the month of October, 1914, at (1) the Council's evening institutes; (2) classes for government boy messengers conducted in government buildings; (3) classes held apart from evening institutes; (4) the Council's technical institutes and schools of art; (5) institutions aided by the Council," LCC/MIN/2970, London Metropolitan Archive.

<sup>30</sup> London County Council, Education Committee, "Statistics relating to evening institutes – Session 1915-16," LCC/EO/HFE/1/373, London Metropolitan Archive.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Roberts, *A Ragged Schooling* (Manchester, UK: Mandolin, 2003) 5.

from the Bread and Food Reform League. As early as 1881, May Yates met with representatives of working men's clubs to advocate whole-meal bread.<sup>32</sup> In 1908, the league organized a month-long campaign out of the Passmore Edwards Settlement in St. Pancras. The inaugural meeting attracted mostly politicians, scholars, and socialites, but over the course of the month, the league also arranged exhibitions and lectures at local schools. Though it did not offer any specific numbers, the league's annual report for 1910 boasted of high attendance at the campaign's local events.<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately, the pervasive prewar promotion of domestic economy seems to have had little effect on the British diet. In fact, Britons ate less economically at the turn of the twentieth century than they had a hundred years before. The historian E. J. T. Collins has argued that as of 1800, wheat had not yet come to dominate the British diet, but rather continued to vie with a variety of other cereals, especially barley and oats. Early nineteenth-century Britons mixed and matched different cereals in breads and porridges to suit local tastes. However, throughout the 1800s, an increasingly affluent society forsook traditional whole grain cereals prepared at home for cheap white bread bought from the baker. By the time May Yates founded the Bread Reform League in 1880, the "'Celtic fringe' alone offered much resistance" to the dominance of the white wheaten loaf.<sup>34</sup> In 1900, white bread commanded a 95-percent market share in Britain.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, the British adopted few other economical foods to compensate for the loss of whole grains. According to the analysis of the historian Derek Oddy, the British working-class diet in the early twentieth century consisted of bread, meat, milk, potatoes, and sugar as well as butter, dripping, margarine and other edible fats. Cheese, whole grains, nuts, pulses, and vegetables comprised a negligible proportion of both the supply and the demand for food.<sup>36</sup>

Contemporary social scientists unwittingly documented the same dietary trends traced by Collins and Oddy. In his voluminous study of London's poor in the late 1880s, Charles Booth collected budgets over five weeks for thirty East End households representing the low to the middle income range of the working class. Each budget recorded the total expenditure on seventeen different categories of food, but not their unit prices or the amounts actually consumed. Accordingly, Booth's budgets reveal only which foods a working-class Londoner preferred, not how much nutrition he or she obtained from them. As food reformers often complained, these thirty households splurged on the most expensive proteins and the most

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<sup>32</sup> Bread Reform League, Report 1882 (London, 1882) 20, 08425.00.13, British Library, London.

<sup>33</sup> The Passmore Edwards Settlement itself was located on the edge of affluent Bloomsbury, but the campaign targeted gritty St. Pancras, which extended to the immediate north and west.

<sup>34</sup> E. J. T. Collins, "Dietary change and cereal consumption in Britain in the nineteenth century," Agricultural History Review 23.2 (1975): 113.

<sup>35</sup> E. J. T. Collins, "The 'consumer revolution' and the growth of factory foods: Changing patterns of bread and cereal-eating in Britain in the twentieth century," The Making of the Modern British Diet, ed. Derek Oddy and Derek Miller (London: Croom Helm, 1976) 28.

<sup>36</sup> Derek Oddy, "A nutritional analysis of historical evidence: The working-class diet, 1880-1914," The Making of the Modern British Diet 220-221. Essentially, Oddy could ignore whole grains, pulses, and so on in his analysis because they accounted for so little of the British food supply. A "chicken or egg" question does arise from his analysis: did the food supply follow from British tastes, or did British tastes follow from the food supply? Likely, taste determined supply, as until the mid-nineteenth century British farmers had readily grown the sorts of whole grains of which food reformers approved.

nutrient-poor starches and fats, spending on average 27.6 percent of their food budgets on meat, 19.4 percent on ready-made bread, and 10.2 percent on butter and other edible fats.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, only 2.7 percent went to vegetables and 0.8 percent to rice, oatmeal, and other non-wheat grains or pulses. A meager 2.6 percent expenditure on loose flour meant that few of the thirty households did much of their own baking. Moreover, though nineteen of the households ate only at home, those that went out spent between a sixth and a third of their food budgets in restaurants or at stalls.<sup>38</sup>

Seeböhm Rowntree's study of York a decade later delved more deeply into the nutritional details than did Booth's, but yielded essentially the same result. Rowntree published twenty-six budgets for twenty-four working-class households that, unlike Booth's, included the unit prices and the amounts of different foods purchased.<sup>39</sup> On average, Rowntree's subjects derived 43.3 percent of their protein and 41.7 percent of their energy from white bread. Meat accounted for 30.8 percent of their protein and 17.2 percent of their energy. By contrast, economical foods like whole wheat bread, cheese, nuts, pulses, or oatmeal contributed a mere 6.9 percent of protein and 4.2 percent of energy. Of the twenty-six budgets in Rowntree's survey, twelve included dried peas, but all in quantities less than one pound. Similarly, only ten had oatmeal, in an average quantity of just 1.7 pounds. In a single concession to food economy, the working-class residents of York did do their own baking: in the average week, Rowntree's twenty-six budgets collectively accounted for 494.3 pounds of loose flour compared to only 29.3 pounds of ready-made bread.<sup>40</sup> Booth and Rowntree's data depict a diet founded on bland starches, like white bread and potatoes, and adorned with expensive meats, but with few of the nutrient-rich foods advocated by May Yates or Eustace Miles. However, contrary to the opinion of some contemporaries, Rowntree's subjects did consume a relatively large amount of fat. Maud Pember Reeves famously observed in her study of poverty in Lambeth that "the tiny amounts" of butter and dripping the working class could afford served more as "condiments" than as "food." By contrast, Rowntree's budgeters consumed an average of 105.8 grams of fat per day with a minimum of 52.8 and a heart-stopping maximum of 215.1.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> In three cases, meat alone soaked up more than 20 percent of gross income.

<sup>38</sup> On average, Booth's budgeters spent only 4.0 percent of their income on meals out and 14.6 percent on meat. See *Labour and Life of the People*, vol. 1, ed. Charles Booth (London, 1889) 136-137.

<sup>39</sup> Rowntree sampled eighteen budgets from working-class families by his own definition – in other words, those that did not hire servants. Six of the budgets came from families who engaged servants in some capacity. One of Rowntree's families kept a budget for the extraordinary period of twenty-one months. He divided this family's budget into three periods, each of which counted separately in his overall analysis, hence the twenty-six budgets from twenty-four households. See B. Seeböhm Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (Bristol, UK: Policy P, 2000) 224, 263-264.

<sup>40</sup> Rowntree 392-419. Only one of the families purchased more ready-made bread than loose flour.

<sup>41</sup> The United Kingdom's Food Standards Agency no longer sets a specific target for total fat consumption. It only advises limiting saturated fat to less than 30 grams per day for men and 20 grams per day for women. In 2005, the United States Department of Agriculture issued dietary guidelines recommending that total fat account for between 20 and 35 percent of calories consumed. In his study of nutrition in York, Rowntree adopted a standard diet of 3,500 calories,

Of course, some exceptions to the sterility of the British diet did exist, especially in rural areas and small towns. Collins has estimated that perhaps 5 percent of the British population still ate oats regularly as of 1900.<sup>42</sup> The historian Elizabeth Roberts conducted an oral history of the towns of Barrow-in-Furness and Lancaster, both in Lancashire, that revealed a diet surprisingly rich in whole grains and vegetables. At the turn of the century, the residents of Barrow ate mostly starches, but in the form of home-baked bread or porridge. They had no aversion to vegetables, recalling fondly stews prepared from the bounty of their own gardens. Barrow housewives looked askance at "convenience foods," believing that they caused "general malaise" at best and cancer at worst. Independent evidence of the Barrow housewife's skill in making jam, pickles, and other salable foods corroborated their testimony. Roberts concluded that the supposed deterioration in the working-class diet did not necessarily extend beyond the outskirts of London and Manchester:

One begins to suspect that those historians who believed that traditional English peasant cooking disappeared with the Industrial Revolution might well be right about textile areas and large conurbations, but would be wrong about smaller urban areas where 90 per cent or more of married women did not go out to full-time work, where it was possible for traditional skills to be continually handed down from mother to daughter, and where the women had the time to devote to dishes which required both long hours of cooking and of preparation.<sup>43</sup>

To the credit of the women of Barrow, home-baked bread and vegetables did foster longevity and pleasant childhood memories: Roberts interviewed her subjects in the 1970s about their childhoods at the turn of the twentieth century, and almost unanimously, they celebrated their mothers as excellent cooks. However, Roberts' local findings do not square with the nationwide statistics that track the inexorable march of white bread. Perhaps Barrow fell into the 5 percent of the British population that still ate porridge in 1900, but that left an overwhelming 95 percent that did not.

The question, then, becomes did a bread and butter diet meet the nutritional needs of the typical Briton? Could he or she have done better on a more economical diet, such as one that followed the recommendations of food reformers? These two questions beg yet another: what is the best metric of nutrition against which to compare the real British diet and any putative alternatives? In the late nineteenth century, several prominent physiologists proposed standards for the amounts of energy and protein required for good health, most of which fell in the range of 3000 Calories and 100 grams, respectively, for active men. In his study of York, Seeböhm Rowntree adopted the standard formulated by the American W. O. Atwater for men doing

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but no specific amount of fat, per man. Applying the USDA's formula to Rowntree's energy standard, each of his budgeters should have eaten between 77.8 and 136.1 grams of fat. In other words, on average, Rowntree's twenty-four households ate richly enough to meet modern dietary standards.

<sup>42</sup> Collins 1975 114.

<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, "Working-class standards of living in Barrow and Lancaster, 1890-1914," *Economic History Review* 30.2 (May 1977) 315. See also Elizabeth Roberts, "Women's Strategies, 1890-1940," *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850-1940*, ed. Jane Lewis (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 223-247.

moderate work, or 3500 Calories and 125 grams of protein per day.<sup>44</sup> However, the Atwater standard seems too high, both in energy and protein, to most modern readers. In nutritional guidelines published in 2005, the United States Department of Agriculture advised active men to eat between 2600 and 3000 Calories per day, or 14.2 to 25.7 percent less than Atwater's more generous prescription. Likewise, the USDA recommended between 52 and 56 grams of protein per day for active men, or less than half of Atwater's 125 grams.<sup>45</sup> Not surprisingly, the two standards lead to different conclusions about the state of nutrition for the British working class during the early twentieth century. As shown in table 5.1, seventeen of Rowntree's budgets lacked sufficient Calories for Atwater compared with only six for the USDA. For protein, twenty-two budgets failed to meet Atwater's standard compared to none for the USDA's.

Table 5.1: Number of budgets out of twenty-six falling shy of the Atwater or USDA median standards in protein and energy

Standard		Number of households
Atwater	3500 kcal/day	17
	125 gm/day	22
USDA	2800 kcal/day	6
	54 gm/day	0

In other words, Atwater would have deemed more than half of Rowntree's working-class subjects undernourished; today's USDA would have judged most of them adequately or even amply fed. Superficially, modern nutritional standards call into question the fundamental case for food reform in the early twentieth century: if the British working class had enough energy and protein in its diet already, why then did it need to eat differently?

On closer inspection, however, today's nutrition standards do not account for the economic, social, and technological realities of a century ago. Certainly, nutrition science has advanced considerably since Rowntree's day. Though still based in part on educated guesses, the USDA's nutrition standards should better approximate what the human body actually requires than Atwater's did. However, much more than just nutrition science has changed over the past hundred years. Today's hybrid and genetically-engineered grains have different nutrition content than those of the past; in most developed countries, including the United States and Great Britain, staple foods are routinely fortified with minerals and vitamins, nutrients of which Booth and Rowntree had no knowledge. Few people today engage in the same kind of heavy physical work as their Edwardian counterparts did. The USDA defines "active" as the equivalent of sixty minutes of walking at 3 to 4 miles per hour, far less exercise than a whole day of "casual labor" at the London docks in 1914. In the past, the high incidence of low body weight and height encouraged Atwater and his colleagues to aim high in setting nutritional standards. In the last two decades, the incidence of obesity has biased modern nutritionists in the opposite direction. With such a large number of confounding variables, projecting today's nutritional standards onto

<sup>44</sup> Rowntree 86-98. Rowntree converted women and children into equivalent numbers of men so that he had to work with only a single set of nutritional requirements.

<sup>45</sup> United States, Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services, "Table D1-1: Nutritional goals for USDA daily food intake patterns: Goals for macronutrients," Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005 (January 2005), 27 Sept. 2009 <[http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/report/HTML/D1\\_Tables.htm](http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/report/HTML/D1_Tables.htm)>.

the past introduces an unknown and potentially large error into any historical analysis. Besides, if poor Britons by and large had enough to eat, as a retrospective application of the modern USDA nutritional standard would suggest, then why were so many military recruits and schoolchildren physically unfit? Why did so many working-class adults suffer from short stature and bad teeth? In this light, the Atwater standard seems less susceptible to error, more relevant to the historical actors themselves, and thus a more appropriate basis for judging the turn-of-the-century diet.

On that basis, Rowntree's subjects in York would have done better for themselves had they followed the advice of food reformers and switched away from meat and white bread to more economical alternatives. Of possible substitutes for meat, Rowntree's subjects favored cheese and peas the most, buying on average about 2.5 pounds of each per week. As indicated in figures 5.1 and 5.2, investing some or all of the money spent on meat in cheese and peas could dramatically improve a family's nutrition status.<sup>46</sup> For instance, by spending just 25 percent of its meat budget on cheese and peas, family number 4 could have increased its energy intake by 6.5 percent from 2300 to 2450 Calories and its protein intake by 18.6 percent from 59 grams to 70 grams per man per week at no extra cost. Adopting an entirely vegetarian diet would have boosted energy and protein intake to 2670 Calories and 85 grams, respectively. For another instance, family number 8 could have increased its energy intake by 21 percent from 2570 to 3110 Calories and its protein intake by 62.5 percent from 80 to 130 grams by replacing meat with cheese and peas. By becoming vegetarian, in fact, four more households would have achieved the Atwater standard for energy than on the typical working-class diet. Eleven more would have reached the protein standard. Moreover, substituting even cheaper, more energy- and protein-dense oatmeal for meat would have led to even more impressive improvements in nutrition.

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<sup>46</sup> Rowntree's budgeters bought small amounts of several different economical foods, including whole wheat bread and flour, cheese, nuts, oatmeal, and pulses. Of the non-bread foods, nineteen households opted for cheese and twelve for peas compared to two for beans and one each for lentils and nuts. Collectively, the twenty-four households spent on cheese and peas in a ratio of 3.9:1. The analysis presented here preserves that ratio of expenditure in an attempt to approximate, as far as possible, the preferences of Rowntree's budgeters. In other words, it does not alter the pattern of spending beyond shifting money from meats to more economical foods. The unit price of cheese in the budgets varied widely, but averaged out to 7.8d. per pound. The unit price of peas averaged 2.0d. per pound.

Figure 5.1: Energy content of diets replacing meat with cheese and peas

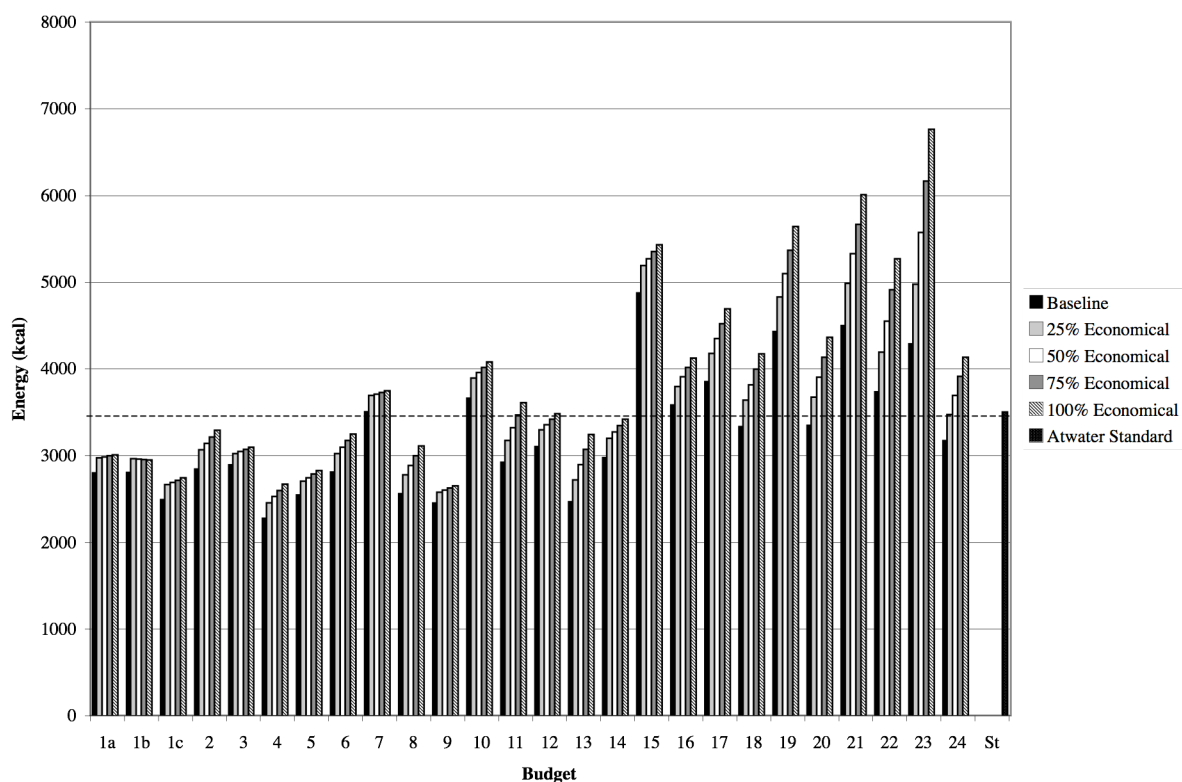
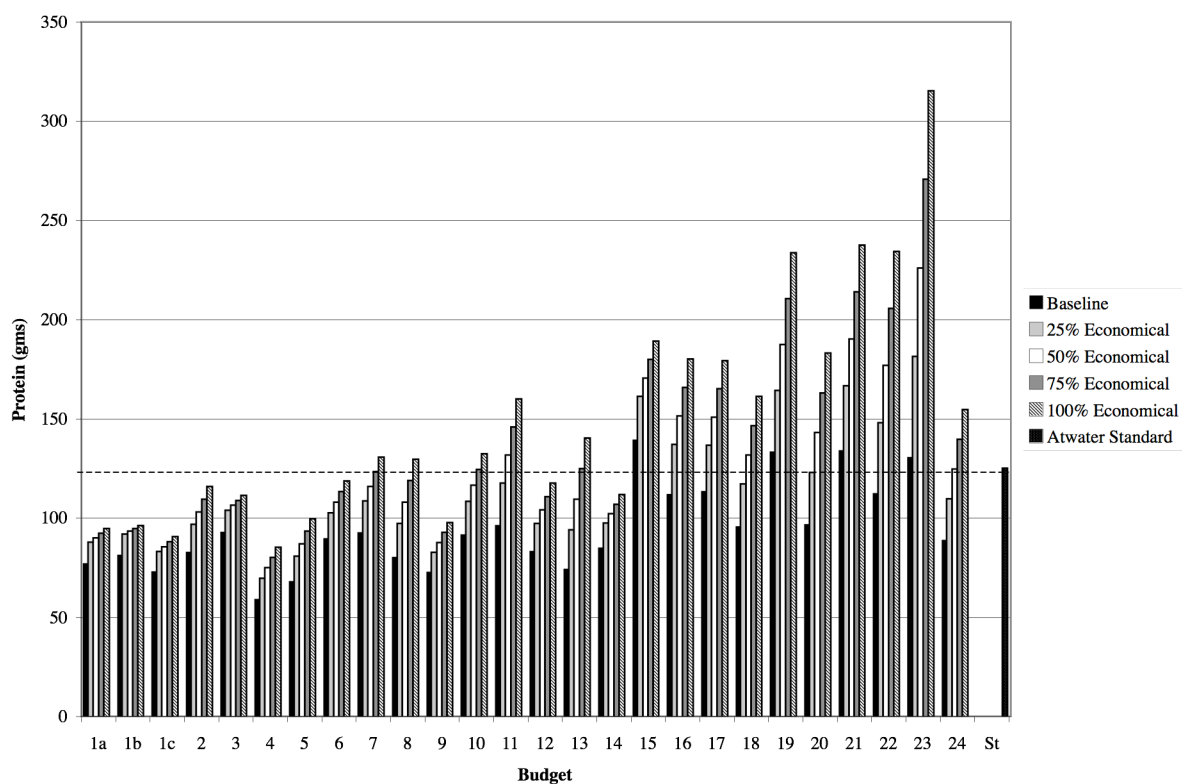


Figure 5.2: Protein content of diets replacing meat with cheese and peas



Unintentionally, Rowntree's budgets made a strong case for food reform. Simply by eating peas rather than meat, more than half his sample could have escaped from chronic undernutrition at no extra cost. Some contemporaries, echoed by modern historians, objected that the poor lacked the facilities to cook economical foods and could not afford to flavor them with spices or sugar. However, as Collins has pointed out, their ancestors managed to subsist largely on whole grains with even more primitive cooking utensils. Moreover, many working-class households consumed literally pounds of fats and sugars each week, some of which could have gone to flavor these supposedly unpalatable foods. Sadly, the prewar white bread and beef diet epitomized the triumph of convenience and convention over health. Ready-made bread needed no preparation and no dishes, it traveled easily, and it went well with many different other foods. By contrast, oatmeal and pulses required long cooking times, during which they could burn to the bottom of cheap pans. To make oatmeal for breakfast, a tired housewife had to wake up even earlier and, in the many working-class British households with no internal plumbing, carry in more water to wash up extra dishes. As for meat, many working-class men regarded it as essential for "strength," though in fact its high cost actually deprived his family of sufficient nutrition by the scientific standards of the day. In addition, the Victorians and Edwardians counted roast beef among their most sacred symbols of respectability.<sup>47</sup> Against these forces, food economy made little headway before the war.

#### No less ready to make sacrifices

The advent of the war quickly changed the dynamics of food reform. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, food reform had permeated British culture, but had never achieved nearly the prominence it did during the war. Within weeks of Germany's invasion of Belgium, aristocrats, government officials, journalists, and music hall comedians joined with the Bread and Food Reform League and the National Food Reform Association to promote economy more widely than ever. The *Times* quoted May Yates and Charles Hecht more often in the four years of the war than in the previous three decades of the food reform movement. On a national scale, the food economy movement probably did no more than high prices to curb the consumption of breadstuffs during the war. Demand for bread tracked closely with the average price of the quartern loaf, leaving little space for the influence of food economy. However, food reform's macroeconomic failures do not mean that it had no effect on British society at all. The evidence that exists indicates that while the distractions and pressures of war interfered with the practice of food economy, an earnest minority did attempt to embrace it.

Ironically, just as the media and the government began to promote food economy so vociferously, interest in formal instruction in cooking tapered off in London. As shown in figure 5.3, enrollment in all evening institutes fell in the first two years of the war by 24 percent from 124,193 to 94,346. However, the decline ended in 1916, after which it reversed itself. Between 1914 and 1918, enrollment in all evening institutes dipped by only 21 percent and had more than fully recovered by 1919. By this measure, enrollment in women's institutes suffered disproportionately, slipping in every year of the war. As depicted in figure 5.4, it eventually bottomed out at 37 percent below the benchmark of 1914, to which it had not returned as late as 1921. As early as June 1917, women's institutes began to advertise instruction in "wartime

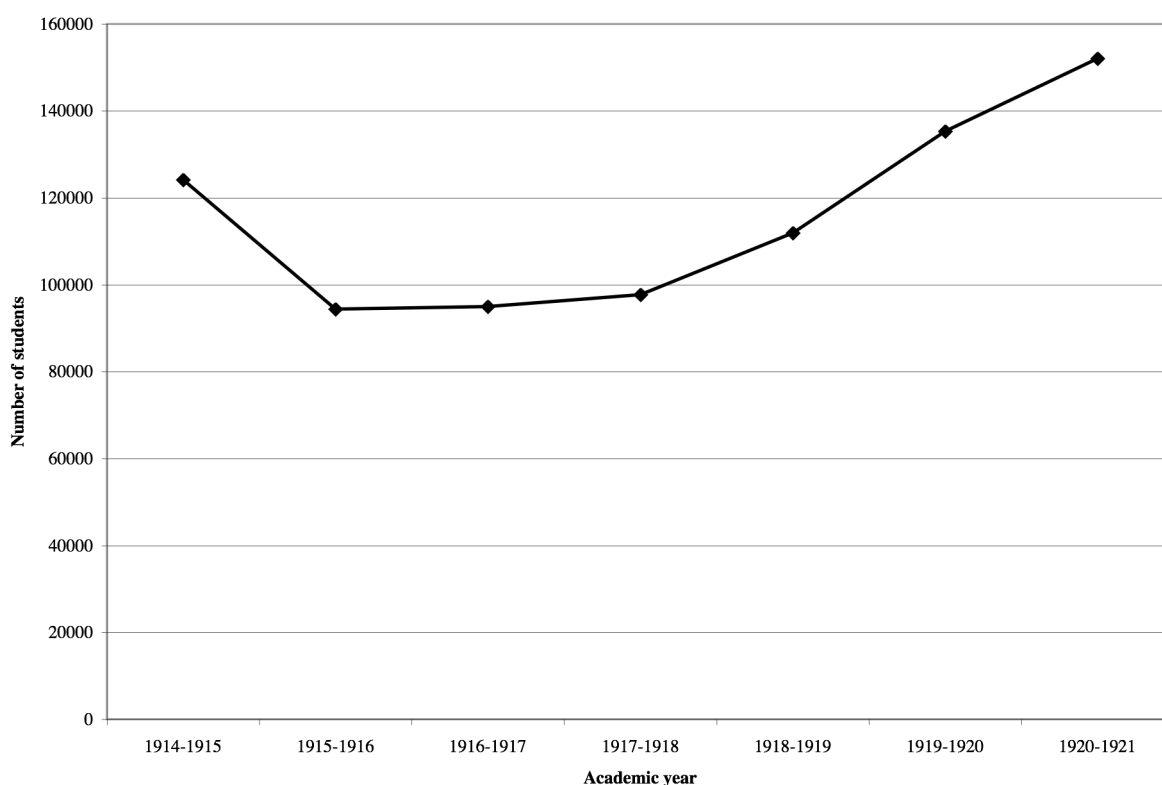
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<sup>47</sup> Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 37-39; Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990*, (London: Penguin, 1997) 7.



cookery," but to little avail.<sup>48</sup> As per figure 5.5, enrollment in cooking short courses dropped 44 percent from 5,725 to 3,200 between 1915 and 1919, although it did rebound thereafter. By contrast, first aid, home nursing, and infant care fell by half or more without any recovery in the years immediately after the war. Meanwhile, attendance at domestic economy courses offered through girls' clubs and mothers' meetings declined 86 percent from 4,069 to just 571 between 1914 and 1918, as indicated in figure 5.6. As in the women's institutes proper, cookery did slightly better, declining just 81 percent from 360 to 67 over the same period. Notably, the war did not uniformly reduce enrollment in all of the courses offered through the LCC; dancing, dressmaking, and laundry short courses actually managed to attract even more students. Dressmaking did not hold up well in girls' clubs and mothers' meetings, but gymnastics and singing did.

Figure 5.3: Enrollment in all evening institutes 1914-1921



<sup>48</sup> London County Council, Education Office, "Evening institutes: Classes for women," June 1917, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

Figure 5.4: Enrollment in women's institutes 1914-1921

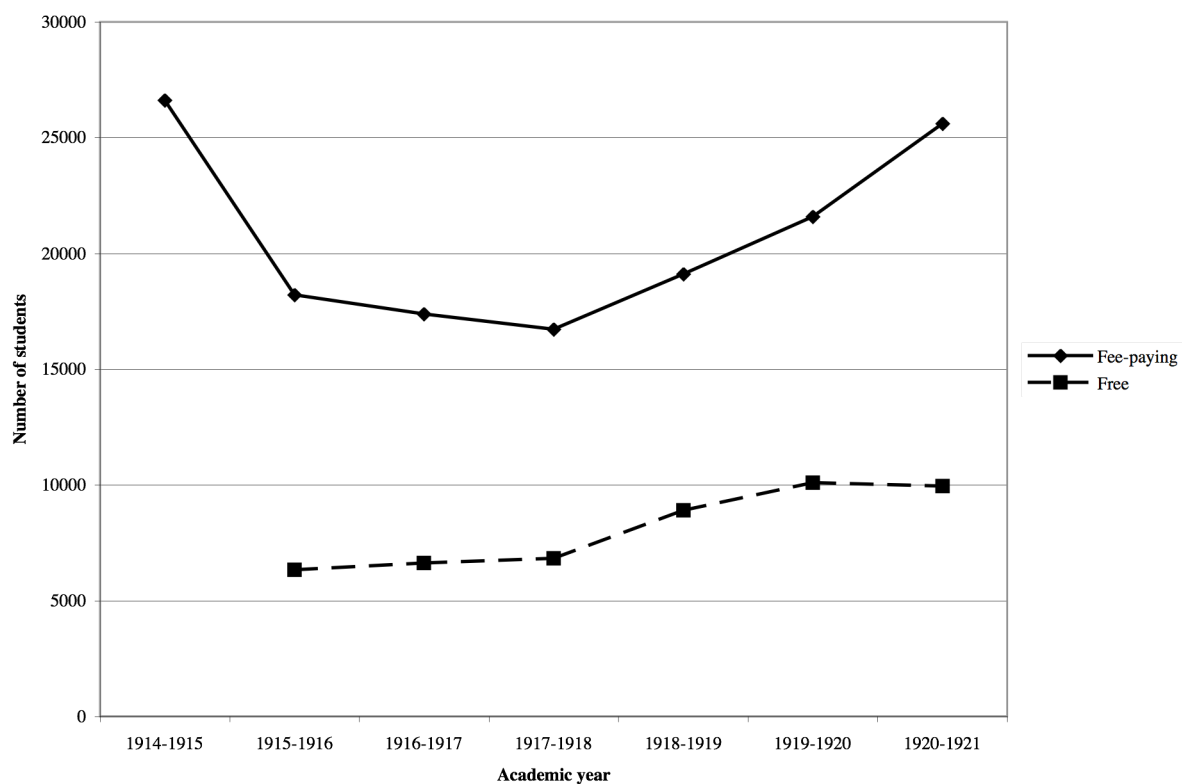


Figure 5.5: Enrollment in evening institute short courses 1915-1921

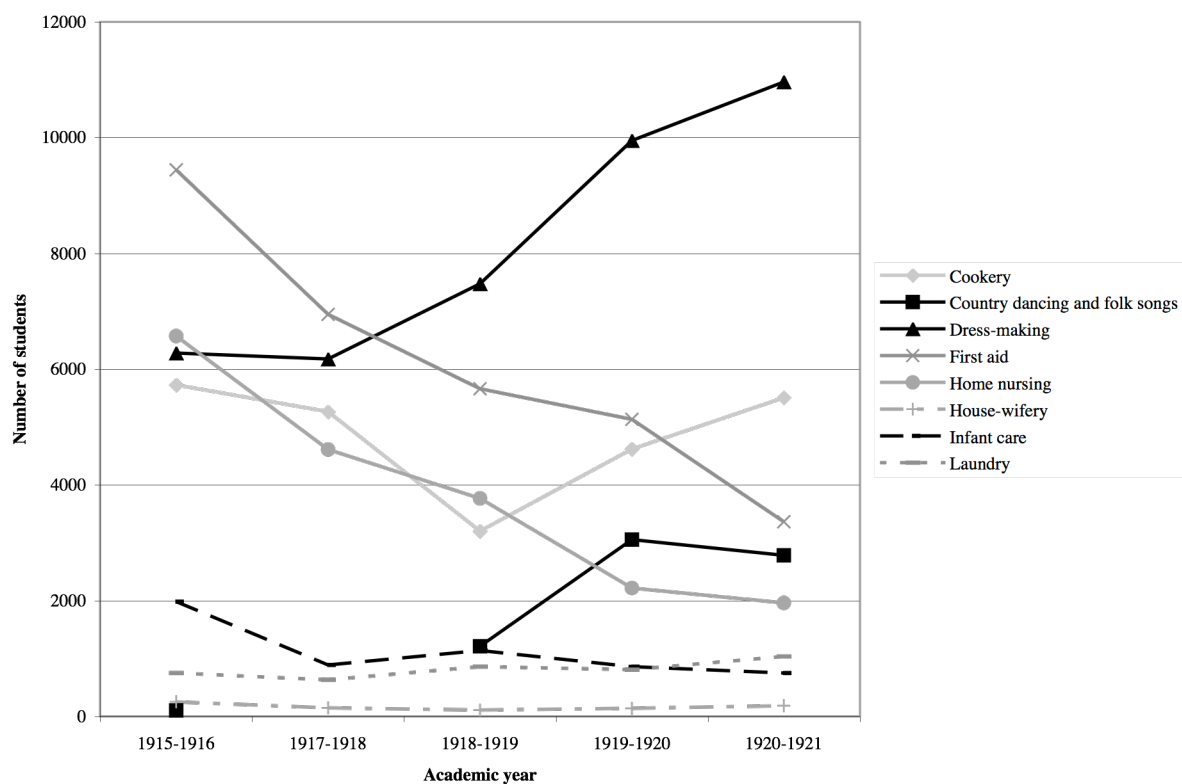
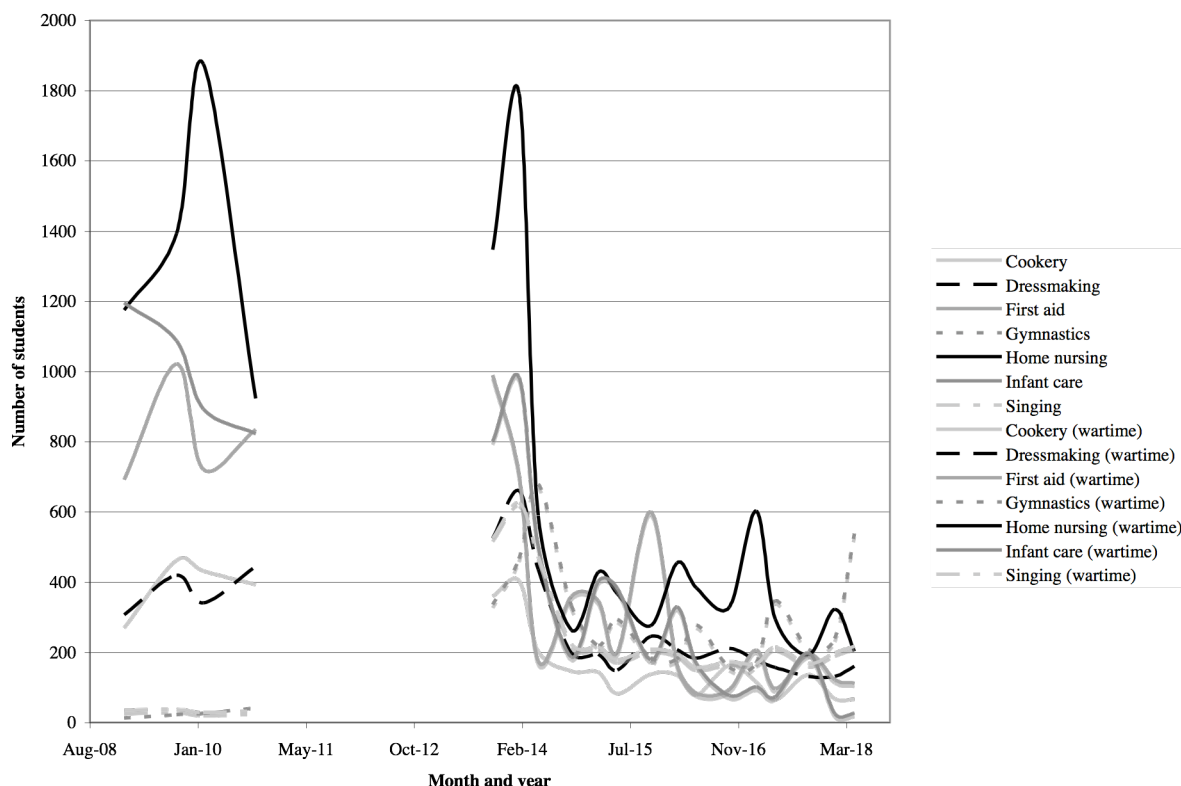


Figure 5.6: Enrollment in LCC-sponsored classes outside evening institutes 1913-1918



The economic and cultural dislocations of war best explain the downturn in enrollment at evening institutes. The LCC itself attributed the decline primarily to wartime upheavals in the workforce. As more women took up full-time employment, fewer of them had the time for classes in the evenings.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, air raids and nighttime blackouts may have frightened some women into staying at home.<sup>50</sup> Of these two official explanations, the increase in women's employment carries greater force. As per figure 5.3, enrollment actually crept up at free

<sup>49</sup> London County Council, Education Committee, "Statement accompanying the report of the Higher Education Sub-Committee dated 6th April, 1916: Return of attendance for the four weeks ended 4th March, 1916, at (1) the Council's evening institutes; (2) classes for government boy messengers conducted in government buildings; (3) classes held apart from evening institutes; (4) business preparation classes for substitutes for men on war service; and for the month of February, 1916, at (5) the Council's technical institutes and schools of art; (6) polytechnics and other aided institutions," LCC/MIN/2972, London Metropolitan Archive. Indeed, women's employment expanded by 1,345,000 nationwide over the course of the war. See Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1994) 20.

<sup>50</sup> London County Council, Education Committee, "Statement accompanying the report of the Higher Education Sub-Committee dated 2nd May, 1918: Return of attendance for the four weeks ended 23rd February, 1918, at (1) the Council's evening institutes; (2) classes for government messengers conducted at Baltic-street Council School and in government buildings; (3) classes held apart from evening institutes; (4) the Council's technical institutes, schools of art and trade schools; (5) institutions aided by the Council," LCC/MIN/2974, London Metropolitan Archive.

women's institutes from 6,382 in 1915-1916 to 6,827 in 1917-1918 while it collapsed at their fee-paying counterparts. In other words, women would still venture out to evening institutes as long as they did not have paid work to keep them busy. Indeed, many fee-paying students continued to attend the institutes, especially for dancing, gymnastics, and singing. The popularity of these classes may have stemmed from the soothing effects of exercise and music, especially amid the stresses of war.

The divergence in enrollment for cooking and for dressmaking classes does not submit to such easy explanation. The collapse of consumer goods industries drove down the availability of women's clothes, which may have fostered interest in dressmaking classes at evening institutes. However, why did not the same women also want to learn to cook more economically, again to stretch thin budgets at wartime prices? Of course, most women already had formal education in cooking, which anyway required less specialized knowledge and skill than did dressmaking. Moreover, many women may have favored educational opportunities in food economy outside of the evening institutes. One or two demonstrations by a representative of the Ministry of Food may have satisfied most women's curiosity. Those disinclined to enroll in a class or attend a demonstration could have turned to any number of food economy cookbooks and pamphlets. Economical recipes could have passed from one housewife to another via word of mouth. Finally, the lower-middle- and working-class women who comprised the institutes' clientele may simply have had little interest in food economy. Before the war, they may have enrolled in evening classes to improve the flavor rather than the economy of their cooking. During the war, a lighter puff pastry may have seemed like a lower priority.

The little direct evidence of working class attitudes toward food economy indicates tepid support. In September 1917, the Central War Savings Committee of King's Lynn, a small Norfolk town with a predominantly working-class population, conducted a door-to-door campaign for pledges to honor voluntary rations. A majority of 55 percent agreed to sign a pledge card, but a large minority of 43 percent refused. Of the latter, many objected not so much to food economy itself as to an intrusive public service campaign. They feared that the canvassers had an ulterior motive – perhaps to count the number of young men of military age that remained in the town. Only an opinionated few refused to sign a pledge on principal. Due to high wartime wages, some of the residents of King's Lynn could afford to eat well for the first time and did not want to give up their higher standard of living. Others refused to economize themselves while hoarding and profiteering supposedly continued unchecked. Surprisingly few complained about the size of the voluntary rations, especially considering the ham-handed way in which the government had at first formulated them. In King's Lynn at least, the recalcitrant few objected to eating less themselves, not necessarily to the concept of food economy in general. Unfortunately, few other war savings committees undertook a survey along these lines nor did King's Lynn accurately represent the United Kingdom as a whole. A rural backwater in an increasingly urban country, it lay forty miles by road from Cambridge and Peterborough, the nearest sizeable towns. The private-sector food economy movement probably had little presence in King's Lynn. Moreover, even the government's own food economy propaganda filtered down to northern Norfolk incompletely and slowly. The Ministry of Food's speakers concentrated their efforts in manufacturing centers, not small country towns like King's Lynn.

The Ministry of Food's chief propagandist, Dorothy Peel, painted an equally ambivalent picture of working-class attitudes toward food economy. In the immediate aftermath of the war, she railed against the typical Briton's supposed ignorance regarding cooking and diet:

As regards food, this great War found us an extraordinarily ignorant, wasteful, and extravagant people, and extravagant not only inasmuch as we threw away into pig-tubs and ash-bins large quantities of wholesome food, but because we cooked so unscientifically that we extracted from the excellent material at our command but a small proportion of the nourishment it contained.

According to Peel, the British public knew little of "where . . . food came from" and "regarded meat, sugar, potatoes, and tea as absolute necessities of life." Some feared that their children could literally die from lack of sugar.<sup>51</sup> Worse yet, few of them seemed inclined to take responsibility for the food crisis. They averred that waste occurred in "the houses of other people" rather than in their own.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, they blanched at modifying their diets to accommodate shortages of familiar foods:

These dear souls had never . . . made a maize pudding, and not infrequently refused to try to do so on the score that maize was pig food. Assured that in . . . America maize was largely eaten by human beings, one was met with the statement that it might 'do very well for people out there, but not for us.' The number of things which people could eat and do in that vast and vague region of 'out there' which it was impossible for us to eat and do was truly remarkable.<sup>53</sup>

This intransigence manifested itself especially in Peel's many meetings with working-class women. Her interlocutors raged about well-fed hunting dogs and race horses, brewing, queues at shops, "war bread," shortages of potatoes and sugar, and hoarding by the wealthy, all of which conspired to starve the poor.<sup>54</sup>

At the same time, Peel came to believe that this bluster lay over the top of a genuine patriotism that patience and sympathy could discover. Before the war, an unsettlingly large proportion of the working class existed on the edge of undernutrition. Now, "for the first time in their lives," many working-class families had enough money to "buy as much food as they desired." This augmentation in working-class incomes worked against the wartime imperative to lower consumption. However, Peel conceded that "in the end the enjoyment of more and better food by those who most needed it doubtless proved the truest form of economy."<sup>55</sup> Moreover, even the free-spending munitionette would rally to the flag if "approached in a fair and sympathetic spirit":

Working people showed themselves no less ready to make sacrifices for the sake of their country than any other persons, and that in spite of the fact that the economies asked of them, both of food and money, often entailed sacrifice, and not, as in the case of richer people, merely a little inconvenience.<sup>56</sup>

Apparently, Peel encountered enough working-class men and women who welcomed food economy to convince her of their goodwill. At the same time, the vociferous minority that did object, often on spurious grounds, cast a shadow over her generally sunny impression of the poor man's patriotism.

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<sup>51</sup> Dorothy Peel, *A Year in Public Life* (London: Constable, 1919) 28.

<sup>52</sup> Dorothy Peel, *How We Lived Then: 1914-1918: A Sketch of Social and Domestic Life in England During the War* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1929) 86.

<sup>53</sup> Peel 1919 28.

<sup>54</sup> Peel 1919 60.

<sup>55</sup> Peel 1919 42.

<sup>56</sup> Peel 1919 43.

Because every patriotic person does so

By contrast with the working majority, the middle class received little education in cooking or nutrition before the war despite the cultural preponderance of traditional domesticity. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the private schools that many middle-class girls attended focused increasingly on academics.<sup>57</sup> Ironically, however, the doyennes of elite girls' education defended a more scholarly curriculum as necessary for the formation of "good wives and mothers." In other words, Josephine Butler and Emily Davies cited marriage and motherhood as justification for studying literature and mathematics rather than cooking and housekeeping. The educational historian Ellen Jordan has explained this apparent disconnect between aspiration and preparation as a progressive twist on the prevailing gender ideology. For Butler, Davies, and others, only an educated woman could fulfill her responsibilities as the intelligent companion of her husband and the moral exemplar for her children.<sup>58</sup> How could she converse with him about his business or current events if she had no knowledge of history, math, or politics? How could she teach her children right from wrong if she had not read Paradise Lost or Pilgrim's Progress?

On a more practical level, middle-class women needed less formal education in domestic economy because they could rely on servants to do much of the cleaning or cooking. Since the 1970s, historians have debated the extent of domestic servitude in Britain in the late Victorian and early Edwardian periods. Often, this debate has overlapped with another about how to draw the boundaries of the middle class. On the one hand, contemporaries defined middle class in part by the capacity to keep domestic servants. In her iconic Book of Household Management, Isabella Beeton anticipated that even her readers of "circumscribed means" could afford to hire at least one "maid-of-all-work."<sup>59</sup> In her 10/- a Head for House Books, Dorothy Peel equated an economical middle-class lifestyle with the maintenance of three or four servants.<sup>60</sup> In Poverty, Seebohm Rowntree distinguished between the working and middle classes by the hiring of domestic servants.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, demographic and economic data reveal that the presence or absence of servants did not neatly correspond with income or occupation. The historian F. K. Prochaska has demonstrated that at least some laborers – defined by the character of their work and their income – did bring in domestic help.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, Patricia Branca and Edward Higgs have argued separately that some small businessmen and professionals did not always have live-

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<sup>57</sup> Jane McDermid, "Women and education," Women's History: Britain 1850-1945, ed. June Purvis (New York: St. Martin's, 1995) 108.

<sup>58</sup> Ellen Jordan, "'Making good wives and mothers'? The transformation of middle-class girls' education in nineteenth-century Britain," History of Education Quarterly 31.4 (1991) 439-462.

<sup>59</sup> Isabella Beeton, Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management, ed. Nicola Humble (New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 16-17.

<sup>60</sup> Peel designed her sample budgets and meals to accommodate two adults, two to three children, and three to four servants. See Dorothy Peel, 10/- a Head for House Books: An Indispensable Manual for Housekeepers, 4th ed. (Westminster, UK: Constable, 1902) 15.

<sup>61</sup> Seebohm Rowntree, Poverty: A Study of Town Life (London: Macmillan, 1901) 14.

<sup>62</sup> F. K. Prochaska, "Female philanthropy and domestic service in Victorian England," Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research 54 (1981) 79-85.

in servants on a permanent basis.<sup>63</sup> According to the economic historian Leonard Schwarz, the proportion of the workforce in domestic service actually declined during the nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup> Essentially, the available evidence does not reveal with much precision who hired servants and on what basis. However, in broad terms, perhaps a million British households earned more than £160 per year in the early 1900s, which enabled many of them to hire some help around the house. The remaining 7 to 8 million households earning less than £160 per year naturally did so less frequently.<sup>65</sup>

According to the popular press, servants often had a baleful influence on the domestic economy of the well-to-do. Nearly a half century before the war, Mrs. Beeton warned against the footman who cut a dashing figure, but also stole "perquisites" from his employers.<sup>66</sup> In 10/- a Head for House Books, Peel alluded darkly to the "incorrigibly careless and wasteful cook."<sup>67</sup> In his Home Cookery in War-Time, Ernest Oldmeadow castigated the servants of the wealthy as the most wasteful sector of the nation's domestic economy:

Speaking broadly, the servants in great houses are the last to respond when an appeal for thrift and frugality is made. Even during sieges and famines, waste goes on in rich kitchens. I admit gladly that there are magnificent exceptions; but the sad truth remains that the servants of the wealthy are generally selfish parasites and that it would be a waste of breath to preach economy to them so long as opportunities for extravagance exist. Happily, many heads of families are turning off the pampered and strapping footmen who ought to be bearing arms.<sup>68</sup>

Oldmeadow's choice words reflected a wider dissatisfaction with domestic service that characterized much of the Victorian and Edwardian periods. The war itself aggravated this tension between servants and their employers by creating better paying jobs in other sectors of the economy. Between 1914 and 1918, from 100,000 to 400,000 women gave up domestic service for alternative employment.<sup>69</sup> This shift in the workforce occasioned much hand-wringing. For instance, the Times repeatedly lamented the "servant problem" on its news pages while, simultaneously, trumpeting the success of its classified advertisements in matching maids with potential employers.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> See Patricia Branca, Silent Sisterhood: Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Home (Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie-Mellon UP, 1975) and Edward Higgs, "Domestic servants and households in Victorian England," Social History 8.2 (May 1983) 201-210.

<sup>64</sup> Leonard Schwarz, "English servants and their employers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," Economic History Review 52.2 (May 1999) 236-256.

<sup>65</sup> See Leo Chiozza Money, Riches and Poverty, 8th ed. (London: Methuen, 1908) 42.

<sup>66</sup> Beeton 392.

<sup>67</sup> In fairness, she also complained about the ignorance of middle-class housewives. See Peel 1902 xiv, 60, 142, 228.

<sup>68</sup> Ernest Oldmeadow, Home Cookery in War-Time (London: Grant Richards, 1915) 5-6.

<sup>69</sup> Woollacott 183; see also Janet S. K. Watson, Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2004) 141-142.

<sup>70</sup> See "Lack of parlourmaids: Girls leaving for new war-time work," Times 9 June 1915: 11; "The passing of the servant: A growing problem," Times 8 Dec. 1915: 13; "Home problems of the service bill: Servants and education," Times 17 May 1916: 11; "Women in industry: Releasing the men," Times 23 May 1916: 11; "Household orderlies: The future of domestic service," Times 7 Nov. 1916: 11; "Domestic Service Corps: Scheme of Women's Industrial

Oldmeadow's invective aside, the food economy movement did attempt to win over domestic servants. In Patriotic Food Economy for the Well-to-Do, the NFEL urged its readers to "secure the intelligent and willing assent" of their servants to economizing around the house. The incompetence of the typical English housewife, not any lack of good sense or patriotism, explained much of the supposed wastefulness of domestic servants. Moreover, the mistress of the house could increase her servants' stake in food economy by giving them a proportion of any money they saved.<sup>71</sup> In this spirit of reconciliation, the National Economy Exhibition in Knightsbridge even staged a debate between mistresses and servants, the latter of whom supposedly had "every encouragement to speak their minds freely."<sup>72</sup> Though he offered no specific figures, the Times correspondent at the exhibition observed that many middle-class housewives attended with their servants.<sup>73</sup> Soon after the establishment of the Ministry of Food, Peel teamed with the music hall star Harry Lauder to host a meeting for domestic servants at London's Theatre Royal. Lauder recalled his own childhood in a large, impoverished family to inspire a nearly full-capacity audience to help their employers honor Lord Devonport's voluntary rations.<sup>74</sup>

Unfortunately, little statistical evidence of the success or failure of these appeals to servants and their employers seems to survive. In a door-to-door campaign in affluent Worthing, a seaside town in West Sussex, 92 percent of residents agreed to sign a food economy pledge.<sup>75</sup> Nonetheless, just as in King's Lynn, the signing of a pledge indicated goodwill toward the economy campaign, but not necessarily any tangible change in dietary habits. Moreover, Worthing did not represent the rest of the United Kingdom any better than did King's Lynn. Anecdotes that survive in the diaries, letters, and memoirs of middle-class Britons can fill in at least part of the void, though they present some of the same problems of interpretation as do the surveys in King's Lynn and Worthing. On the one hand, anecdotes offer intimate insight into the home lives of real families. On the other hand, the small number of them hardly constitutes a representative sample, nor do they lend themselves easily to quantitative analysis. Nonetheless, they suggest how some middle-class families reacted to the food crisis. If they do not pin down the precise "truth," they do conjure up part of the story.

The middle-class dependence on servants exacerbated the difficulties of wartime domestic economy. In her unpublished memoir, Rose Bingham remarked poetically that "pre-war mistresses" such as herself "drank deep draughts from hitherto unknown wells of humility,

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Council," 4 June 1918: 3. See also "The servant problem," advertisement, Times 1 Aug. 1914: 11, 3 Aug. 1914: 9, 4 Aug. 1914: 7, and 5 Aug. 1914: 9; "What mistresses say of the Times Bureaux Service," advertisement, Times 19 Sept. 1916: 11, 28 Sept. 1916: 11, 6 Oct. 1916: 9, 16 Nov. 1916: 11, 11 Jan. 1917: 11, and 13 Jan. 1917: 11; "The Times Bureaux Service and how it has solved the servant problem," advertisement, Times 3 Oct. 1916: 11.

<sup>71</sup> National Food Economy League, Patriotic Food Economy for the Well-to-Do, revised ed., (Apr. 1917) 3-4.

<sup>72</sup> "Saving at home: Mistress and maid on economy," Times 26 June 1916: 4. Unfortunately, the Times did not report on the debate itself.

<sup>73</sup> "Hints on saving: Suggestion book at economy exhibition," Times 6 July 1916: 9.

<sup>74</sup> "Servants' meeting at Drury Lane: Mr. Harry Lauder's advice," Times 27 Mar. 1917: 5. The Times estimated an attendance of 2,000 for a theater that seats 2,205.

<sup>75</sup> Barnett 117.



and had to learn to do many household things undreamt of before 1914."<sup>76</sup> The wife of a high-ranking officer in the army, she had never had fewer than three servants before the war.<sup>77</sup> By the summer of 1916, however, she had only one – a cook named Bessie.<sup>78</sup> A similar fate befell Esmee Mascall, the daughter of a railway engineer and the wife of an artillery officer. Soon after her marriage, she hired a friendly young cook named Harriet who managed to ruin their first few dinners together. "Too dependent" on Harriet to dismiss her, Mascall instead bought a cookbook and hoped for the best.<sup>79</sup> Later in the war, Mascall found herself at the mercy of another servant, Annis. The older, wiser Annis exercised a gruff maternalism over Mascall, whom she "tolerated . . . as a young ignoramus who knew no better."<sup>80</sup>

Some middle-class women went entirely without domestic service for the first time in their lives during the war. Annie Purbrook, the wife of a printer, waxed sanguine in her memoir about having to do most of her own housework, including the laundry. She could "carry on cheerfully" in the knowledge that her small efforts contributed to the "huge enterprise" of the war.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, a young nurse named Helen Harpin wrote to her future husband at the front that she did not mind playing "kitchenmaid" for her wealthy parents, though peeling and slicing rhubarb had "absolutely ruined her hands."<sup>82</sup> To their credit, Bingham, Mascall, Purbrook and Harpin seemed to take the "servant problem" in stride either by accepting the faults of those whom they could hire or by simply doing the work themselves. Even Harpin, who wrote in the heat of the moment itself rather than after decades of cooling off, seemed to laugh off her predicament.

In some cases, shortages of food summoned the same cooperative and generous spirit as did the decline in domestic service. With her husband deployed to Italy, Rose Bingham relocated with her children to Drimnin, a tiny village on the west coast of Scotland, in April 1918.<sup>83</sup> Though Bingham remained subject to compulsory rationing in Drimnin, neighboring landowners nonetheless arranged to supply her with butter, eggs, and vegetables from their own animals and gardens. The Urmstons, who owned a nearby estate known as Glenmorven, even

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<sup>76</sup> Rose Bingham, unpublished memoir of the First World War, vol. 1, ts, 241, PP/MCR/326, Imperial War Museum, London. Born in 1874, Rose Aylmer Cameron was the daughter of Aylmer Spicer Cameron, an officer in the 72nd Highlanders who won the Victoria Cross for his exploits during the Sepoy Mutiny. She married C. H. M. Bingham, a staff officer in the British army and a veteran of the Boer War, in 1905. See "Cameron, formerly of Inch," Burke's Landed Gentry, ed. Peter Beauclerk Dewar, 19th ed, vol. 1, Burke's Peerage and Gentry, 2009, 13 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.burkes-peerage.net>>.

<sup>77</sup> Bingham, vol. 1 241.

<sup>78</sup> Bingham, vol. 1 259, 276.

<sup>79</sup> Esmee Mascall, unpublished memoir of the First and Second World Wars, ts, 93, P.121, Imperial War Museum, London. Fortunately, Harriet proved a quick study; her meals became a "pleasure."

<sup>80</sup> Mascall 97.

<sup>81</sup> Annie Purbrook, unpublished memoir of the First World War, ts, 8, 27, 97/3/1, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>82</sup> Helen Harpin, letter to Charles Overton, 17 June 1918, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>83</sup> Rose Bingham's family hailed from Scotland, hence the choice of such a remote locale to wait out the war.

greeted the Bingham with a basket of fresh eggs.<sup>84</sup> Writing to her son in the army, the Londoner Elizabeth Fernside described a similar network of food exchange:

If we cannot get certain articles someone gets them for us. Last week I managed to get plenty of tea, [and] next door they could not get any. I sold her some. Then she was fortunate enough to get butter, when I couldn't so she sold me some. We do this allround [sic] so some of our goods arrive from the Army [and] Navy Stores, some from High St Kensington [and] some we discover in little out of the way 'generals'.<sup>85</sup>

Annie Purbrook rejoiced at the "strange gifts" she received at the height of the food crisis: two half-pound tubs of lard and a pound of dripping.<sup>86</sup> With the onset of compulsory rationing, such informal exchanges of food could carry fines or other penalties – indeed, the Ministry of Food expected farmers to cancel coupons from their ration books for anything they ate from their own produce.<sup>87</sup> However, Bingham and Purbrook did not acknowledge any sense of impropriety, let alone criminality, in indulging others' generosity. Having accumulated six pounds of sugar, Fernside remarked to her son that she feared burglars and had held a "war council" with the rest of the family to defend the home. Tongue in cheek, she regretted that the council had ended in everyone falling asleep.<sup>88</sup>

Some of the food exchanged between friends came from gardens or from nature itself. At the outset of the war, Esmee Mascall lived with her sister Marjorie on the Island of Sheppey off the coast of Kent. Marjorie's large garden supplied all of the family's fruits and vegetables, from which the two women made their own chutneys and jams. They also attempted to keep a goat for milking, but without much success.<sup>89</sup> Annie Purbrook likewise raised much of her family's produce in her own garden; many of her neighbors dug up their lawns to plant potatoes.<sup>90</sup> Elizabeth Fernside marveled at the expansion of allotments across nearly all of Fulham's public parks and onto the lawns of the Bishop's Palace.<sup>91</sup> Middle-class students joined in the enthusiasm for gardening: young women at Lady Margaret Hall, Newnham College, Somerville College, and the University of Leeds planted gardens on campus or tended their own

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<sup>84</sup> Rose Bingham, untitled memoir of the First World War, vol. 2, ts, 15, PP/MCR/326, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>85</sup> Elizabeth Fernside, letter to F. R. Fernside, 5 Dec. 1917, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>86</sup> Purbrook 20.

<sup>87</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, "Meat Rationing Order, 1918, and other rationing orders, 1917-1918 – Self-suppliers and direct supplies," Apr. 1918, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>88</sup> Elizabeth Fernside, letter to F. R. Fernside, 20 Jan. 1917, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>89</sup> Marjorie's young son, Michael, nicknamed the goat "Misse Goak," as per the literation of his Aunt Esmee: "When we sallied forth with a bucket to make our first attempt at milking, Misse Goak watched our efforts with pale-eyed contempt . . . [her ellipses] The next morning, less hopeful, we substituted a milkjug [sic] for the bucket . . . [her ellipses] The third day we took out a small jam-jar, and Misse Goak quietly collapsed her hindquarters to the ground and sat on the jar. Altogether it was one of our less successful war-time brain waves!" See Mascall 88.

<sup>90</sup> Purbrook 18.

<sup>91</sup> Elizabeth Fernside, letter to F. R. Fernside, 20 Mar. 1918, Imperial War Museum, London.

allotments.<sup>92</sup> Girton College gave up its cricket pitch for hay, as did Royal Holloway College its croquet lawn for potatoes.<sup>93</sup> Small-scale gathering and hunting supplemented the produce of wartime gardens. The Bingham's daughter, Christina, had a knack for finding seagull eggs, and she and her brothers often fished in the Sound of Mull.<sup>94</sup> Elizabeth Fernside even killed songbirds for food, joking that their "voice training" had failed to please her.<sup>95</sup>

Despite their best efforts to grow and gather more food, some middle-class families nonetheless had to fall back on economy out of sheer necessity. As food reformers had long recommended, the Bingham's reluctantly adopted a diet based around beans, oatmeal, and whole-wheat flour. Rose attempted to enliven such bland fare with rarities like eggs and mushrooms or judicious amounts of the family's butter, meat, and sugar rations.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, she and her friends stopped sweetening their tea, though not so much to benefit the war effort as to keep up appearances.<sup>97</sup> Elizabeth Fernside warned her son not to "pass any rude remarks" about her Christmas cake as she had to make do with substitutes for many of its usual ingredients.<sup>98</sup> As the scarcity of sugar set in, Fernside resorted for dessert to "jam roly-poly," a standby recipe for food reformers.<sup>99</sup> She even passed up a lunch at Selfridges as it did not supply a sufficient number of "proteids" and "callories," according to a lecture she had attended.<sup>100</sup> More optimistically, Annie Purbrook recalled fondly how adversity inspired cooperation: she and her friends gathered regularly to trade economical recipes, which forged "more friendliness and real comradeship amongst us than we . . . ever imagined possible."<sup>101</sup>

In addition to necessity, genuine patriotism did motivate some middle-class households to economize. In response to a lecture by Sir Arthur Yapp, the Ministry of Food's director-general of food economy, the students of Newnham College set up a scale to weigh slices of bread at their communal meals.<sup>102</sup> Esmee Mascall and her sister drew up ration cards for themselves and weighed the bread and sugar that they ate to ensure they did not exceed the government's voluntary rations. When the voluntary campaign failed and compulsory rationing began, the two women felt like "mugs," but Esmee nonetheless celebrated their efforts as "well-meant" and

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<sup>92</sup> Henrietta Jex-Blake, "Corporate war work of Lady Margaret Hall," 20 June 1917, ts; Newnham College Club, Newnham College Letter 1916, 5; Emily Penrose, "Corporate war work of Somerville College, Oxford," 15 May 1917, ts; Hannah Robertson, "University of Leeds: Report on the corporate war work of the Women's Department," June 1917, ts, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>93</sup> "War work of Girton College," ts; Royal Holloway College Association, College Letter December 1916, 25, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>94</sup> Bingham, vol. 2 21, 23.

<sup>95</sup> Elizabeth Fernside, letter to F. R. Fernside, 26 Feb. 1918, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>96</sup> Bingham, vol. 2 21.

<sup>97</sup> Bingham, vol. 1 260.

<sup>98</sup> Elizabeth Fernside, letter to F. R. Fernside, 7 Jan. 1917, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>99</sup> Elizabeth Fernside, letter to F. R. Fernside, 20 June 1917, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>100</sup> Elizabeth Fernside, letter to F. R. Fernside, 6 Mar. 1918, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>101</sup> Purbrook 4.

<sup>102</sup> Newnham College Club, Newnham College Letter 1917, 5, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

"patriotic."<sup>103</sup> Viola Bawtree, a young woman living in Surrey, recorded similarly mixed feelings about wartime economies in her diary:

We three girls eat margarine now instead of butter. Sylvia says we do it because we can't afford butter, but I like to imagine we're doing [sic] because every patriotic person does so, and because we're loyal Britons – it goes down easier that way.<sup>104</sup>

One of Bawtree's contemporaries, Joan Strange, kept uniquely comprehensive journals of both the First and Second World Wars.<sup>105</sup> When she donated them to the Imperial War Museum, she included her membership card for the League of the Anchor, the youth branch of the Ministry of Food's League of National Safety. Apparently, she regarded her pledge to eat economically as a meaningful part of her war story, perhaps one in which she felt some pride.<sup>106</sup>

Of course, the food shortage engendered some dishonesty and selfishness, even in otherwise decent people. Rose Bingham hatched a scheme to acquire hard candy as a substitute for pure sugar. She sent her son Dermid as a "decoy duck" into a sweet shop, hoping that his youth and charm would convince the proprietor to give him an unconventionally large allowance of candy. In the end, the proprietor conned Bingham herself, selling Dermid a bagful of marbles and stones disguised as candy with colorful wrappings.<sup>107</sup> In a more successful gambit, Elizabeth Fernside disguised herself in order to buy twice as much as her due. Before the advent of compulsory rationing, Fernside's shopkeeper would only sell a quarter pound of butter to each customer. Fernside evaded the limit by buying her first stick early in the day, changing her hat and fur, then running back for her second just before closing.<sup>108</sup> Ironically, she later praised compulsory rationing for guaranteeing a modest level of food security, though it literally criminalized her own erstwhile behavior.<sup>109</sup>

Though perhaps most middle-class Britons bowed to economy on their own, some simply refused to do so until coerced. Ethel Bilbrough, the wife of an executive at Lloyd's, captured this recalcitrance in her diary:

The idea of our stolid British householders having to forego their everlasting Sunday joint!! (which hitherto has been regarded as unalterable as the law of gravity!) and to do without butter, and to sit down to a baconless breakfast, is all really very comic. There's one thing an English man (or woman) does not shine at, and that is in adapting themselves to changed circumstances. We are all hugely conservative, and imagine that the things which have become habitual are equally unchangeable.

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<sup>103</sup> Mascall 77.

<sup>104</sup> Viola Bawtree, untitled diary, ts, 91/5/1, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>105</sup> The portion pertaining to World War II appeared in print in 1989. See Joan Strange, Despatches from the Home Front: The War Diaries of Joan Strange 1939-1945 (Toronto: Monarch, 1989).

<sup>106</sup> Joan Strange, miscellaneous materials included with her journals, 96/13/1, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>107</sup> Bingham, vol. 1 259.

<sup>108</sup> Elizabeth Fernside, letter to F. R. Fernside, 13 Dec. 1917, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>109</sup> Elizabeth Fernside, letter to F. R. Fernside, 26 Feb. 1918, Imperial War Museum, London.

Bilbrough fit her own description, continuing to feed table scraps to the birds in her yard even as the food controller contemplated making such waste a crime.<sup>110</sup> Esmee Mascall lodged briefly with the Molyneux family, older friends who simply eschewed wartime austerity. A notorious gourmand, Mr. Molyneux cycled into town each morning to purchase fresh fish or meat for dinner; in the afternoon, he descended into the kitchen personally to supervise the cook with an unforgivingly critical eye. Mascall described dinner at the Molyneux home as "ambrosia" to her "untutored palate," which duly received a "liberal education in gastronomy."<sup>111</sup> As a retired banker, Molyneux had enough money to sustain his penchant for fine dining, even at wartime prices. However, by the ethics of the moment, his behavior could only have qualified as selfish.

#### At last taking part in the war

In January 1918, with the full implementation of compulsory rationing still a few months away, Ethel Bilbrough inadvertently encapsulated the popular reaction to the food crisis. As a postscript to a tirade against "dastardly U-boats," she confided to her diary that austerity had finally brought the war home to her:

Meat is getting scarce and we have had no butter or margarine for a fortnight! I am rather glad, because when one is struggling with a slice of horrid dry toast that rebels against going down, one really feels one is at last taking part in the war!!

How poor people live is a mystery!<sup>112</sup>

For the middle-class households discussed here, food economy went down more or less like "dry toast." Some embraced voluntary economy as their patriotic duty, but often with reservations. Indeed, for young Viola Bawtree, patriotism merely deflected her apprehensions about a lower standard of living. She preferred to believe that she and her sisters ate margarine because all "loyal Britons" did so, not because their parents could no longer afford butter.<sup>113</sup> Others economized primarily out of necessity. Their attitudes varied from the cynical to the whimsical, but, in either case, they exhibited admirable ingenuity in muddling through shortages in their favorite foods.

As for the working class, they left fewer clues as to how they managed on dry toast alone. In many respects, the poor arrived at the food crisis better prepared than the well-to-do. In London, at least, working-class young women received a baseline education in cooking economically. After leaving school, tens of thousands of London's working-class women enrolled in cheap continuing education in domestic science through evening institutes or university settlements. Though they constituted a minority of all working-class Londoners, evening institute students proved that many East End households aspired to a higher standard of living based on more efficient housekeeping.<sup>114</sup> Food reformers targeted their propaganda primarily at the working class before the war. Moreover, working-class households generally

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<sup>110</sup> Ethel Bilbrough, unpublished diary of the First World War, 90/10/1, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>111</sup> Mascall 90.

<sup>112</sup> Bilbrough.

<sup>113</sup> Bawtree herself did not seem to know the truth of the situation. Her sister Sylvia believed that the family could no longer afford butter; however, her parents continued to buy it for themselves, just not for their daughters. See Bawtree.

<sup>114</sup> Joanna Bourke has made a similar argument; see Joanna Bourke, "Housewifery in working-class England 1860-1914," Past and Present 143 (May 1994): 167-197.

did not depend on servants, the absence of whom could complicate wartime domestic economy. However, up to 1914, poor Britons had ignored the advice of domestic science teachers and food reformers and adopted an increasingly uneconomical diet. Though eating more cheese, oatmeal, or peas would have improved working-class nutrition, the cultural cachet of meat and the convenience of ready-made white bread prevailed in most parts of the country.

During the war itself, the spotty evidence that does exist seems to indicate that these trends continued. Between 1914 and 1918, Londoners lost interest in formal instruction in cooking at the moment they could have benefited from it the most. Meanwhile, an unsettlingly large proportion of the residents of King's Lynn rejected the notion of food economy. In London, at least, this disinterest in food economy did not extend to other necessities; to the contrary, enrollment in dressmaking classes increased during the war. In other words, the evening institute crowd did not object to economy generally – just when it applied to food. The only significant dip in bread consumption during the war likely derived from necessity, not patriotism or even calculated self-interest. Bread consumption did fall more than 15 percent nationwide from May to September 1917, but as soon as price pressures dissipated in November, it climbed back up.

A temporary shift in purchasing power may help to explain the wartime reticence about food economy among the working class. In *The Great War and the British People*, the historian Jay Winter asserts that high wartime employment enabled working-class households to buy more food, thereby extending their life expectancy. Wages did not necessarily keep pace with rapidly inflating food prices, but more members of a given family had stable, full-time employment so that together, they could afford to eat better than before the war. With its greater purchasing power, the working class as a whole commanded a larger proportion of the nation's resources.<sup>115</sup> Extrapolating from Winter's argument, then, the working class did not economize because it did not need to do so. However, at the peak of the food crisis in 1917 and 1918, trade unions complained about rising prices more loudly than any other interest group. Moreover, the availability of bread did not increase much while that of butter, meat, and sugar actually declined. The working class could not eat more of this smaller pie unless someone else ate less, yet Winter does not show a substantial reduction in middle-class consumption. Perhaps less waste at the wholesale and retail levels could account for some of the difference. More likely, everyone ate more modestly, but the working class suffered less than it would have in the absence of increased purchasing power. At the same time, the inability to achieve a significantly higher standard of living on wartime wages no doubt provoked feelings of frustration and injustice which manifested themselves in part as a rejection of food economy. Compulsory rationing eventually shifted food consumption away from the middle to the working class, but only for the last seven months of a four-year war.

Perhaps Dorothy Peel and Ethel Bilbrough's charges of conservatism amount to more than unsubstantiated stereotyping. Indeed, the shortage of women's clothing did not require anyone to dress differently than they had; rather, they just had to do the sewing themselves.<sup>116</sup> By contrast, food economy meant eating not only less, but differently. One had voluntarily to forgo the foods that not only promised convenience, but also those that signified social stature.

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<sup>115</sup> J. M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>116</sup> Certainly, the popular imagination associates the First World War with the modernization of women's fashion, though that transformation occurred without overt government interference.

The residents of King's Lynn wanted to spend their higher wages on the better food that represented their new prosperity; not surprisingly, they resented that not only could they not afford the roast beef of old England at wartime prices, but also that middle-class busybodies and the government itself attempted to shame them into eating, literally, mush. Oatmeal and peas packed more nutrition for less money, but they did not taste like patriotism to someone who had spent his life in poverty. Perhaps middle-class folk could find the silver lining on the cloud more easily, but, nonetheless, economy entailed a reduction in their standard of living as well. For poor and for rich, change could prove too painful or too inconvenient, even for the sake of king and country.

## 6. Victory Now Depends upon Our Women

What a thousand pities it is that women cannot be entrusted with the national housekeeping. . . . Like to the Queen in the nursery rhyme, the woman of today would serve up bread and honey; and let the financiers in the counting house rake in what was saved.<sup>1</sup>

In the nursery rhyme "Sing a Song of Sixpence," a queen feasts on bread and honey while her husband the king counts out his money. In the suffragist publication the *Vote*, Margaret Hodge wondered why Britain could not follow their example during the First World War: with her domestic expertise, the modern woman would trim the fat from the nation's food budget, thereby freeing resources for men in the armed forces. Hodge's whimsical analogy contained a kernel of logic. First, food fell within the sphere of responsibility allocated to women in British culture. Second, as detailed in table 6.1, several well-known advocates for women's rights also had an interest in food reform. Perhaps this combination of cultural resonance, reformist zeal, and practical knowledge could vault women into meaningful civic leadership. Two of the three principal suffragist organizations – the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and the Women's Freedom League (WFL) – pursued the wartime food issue toward this end. The third – the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) – concentrated primarily on boosting military recruiting and civilian morale.

Table 6.1: Personnel overlaps between food reform and suffragism

	Food reform	Suffragism
Lord Henry Bentinck	• Vice president of the National Food Economy League (NFEL) <sup>2</sup>	• Vice president of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association (CUWFA) <sup>3</sup>
Lady Chance	• Founder of the NFEL <sup>4</sup>	• Member of the CUWFA • Pamphleteer for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) <sup>5</sup>
Rev. John Clifford	• General councilor of the Bread and Food Reform League (BFRL) <sup>6</sup>	• Vice president of the the London Society for Women's Suffrage (LSWS) <sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Hodge, "Women's Freedom League: National Service Organisation: Make women national housekeepers now," *Vote* 1 Oct. 1915: 767.

<sup>2</sup> National Food Economy League, letterhead, food 1/3, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>3</sup> "The following ladies and gentlemen have recently added their names to the list of vice-presidents and honorary vice-presidents of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association," *Times* 21 Nov. 1911: 7.

<sup>4</sup> National Food Economy League, letterhead.

<sup>5</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, "Women's suffrage and morality: An address to married women," by Lady Chance (Jan. 1913) 324.6230941, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, London.



Charlotte Despard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice president of the National Food Reform Association (NFRA)<sup>8</sup></li> <li>• Proprietor of vegetarian restaurant in Nine Elms, Battersea, London<sup>9</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President of the Women's Freedom League (WFL)<sup>10</sup></li> </ul>
Rev. Edward Lyttelton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice president of the NFRA<sup>11</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice president of LSWS<sup>12</sup></li> </ul>
Earl of Lytton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice president of the NFRA<sup>13</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President of the Hitchin, Stevenage, and District Women's Suffrage Society<sup>14</sup></li> </ul>
Neville Lytton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chairman of the NFRA<sup>15</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fundraiser for the CUWFA<sup>16</sup></li> </ul>
Dowager Lady O'Hagan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patron of the BFRL<sup>17</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fundraiser for the CUWFA<sup>18</sup></li> </ul>
Countess of Selborne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice president of the NFEL<sup>19</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice president of the LSWS<sup>20</sup></li> <li>• President of the CUWFA<sup>21</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> Bread and Food Reform League, "Food in war time and recipes for penny meals," SP Gt. Brit., Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>7</sup> London Society for Women's Suffrage, Annual Report 1916, 324.623060421, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, London.

<sup>8</sup> National Food Reform Association, "Reasons for food reform: An account of a private meeting held at 54 Mount Street, Grosvenor Square, London, February 26th, 1908, to hear proposals for a new departure in the movement towards a more rational and humane diet" (London, 1910) 07306.g.39, British Library.

<sup>9</sup> "The Woman Suffrage National Aid Corps: The Nine Elms Restaurant," Vote 11 Dec. 1914: 421.

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Mulvihill, "Despard, Charlotte (1844–1939)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 25 June 2009 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37356>>.

<sup>11</sup> National Food Reform Association, "Reasons for food reform."

<sup>12</sup> London Society for Women's Suffrage, Annual Report 1916.

<sup>13</sup> National Food Reform Association, "Reasons for food reform."

<sup>14</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, Hitchin, Stevenage and District Society, Annual Report 1917-1918, 324.6230604258 NAT, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, London.

<sup>15</sup> National Food Reform Association, "Reasons for food reform."

<sup>16</sup> "Last night's dinners: The demand for women's franchise," Times 13 May 1914: 5.

<sup>17</sup> Bread and Food Reform League, "Food in war time and recipes for penny meals."

<sup>18</sup> "Dinner," Times 20 May 1913: 9.

<sup>19</sup> National Food Economy League, letterhead.

<sup>20</sup> London Society for Women's Suffrage, Annual Report 1916.

<sup>21</sup> Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association, "A meeting will be held at the Horticultural Hall, Vincent Square, Westminster, S.W. on Thursday evening, February 6th, [1913] 8 p.m." FL153, 2LSW/E/12/2/37, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, London.

Christopher Turnor	• President of the NFEL <sup>22</sup>	• Vice president of the CUWFA
Mary Watts	• Vice president of the NFEL <sup>23</sup>	• Vice president of the LSWS <sup>24</sup>
Fanny Rolle Wilkinson	• Vice president of the NFEL <sup>25</sup>	• Vice president of the LSWS <sup>26</sup>

Historians have written extensively about women's employment and electoral reform during the war, which together set the stage for the story of the food crisis and suffragism. Most of the scholarship on women's employment has focused on industry. However, the sociologist Robert Kelsall has chronicled the growth of women's employment in the civil service through the war years. According to his account, the male establishment accepted the principle of women's promotion into the higher ranks of the civil service, but progress came slowly until after the Second World War.<sup>27</sup> Meta Zimmeck has described the many devices that the mandarins of the civil service employed to thwart the advancement of women. In her telling, much of the misogyny in the civil service derived from the fear of top bureaucrats that they themselves would lose their jobs to women.<sup>28</sup> In terms of electoral reform, historians have disagreed as to what degree the war itself influenced the extension of the franchise to women. On the one hand, Martin Pugh, Sandra Stanley Holton, and others have argued that the prewar suffrage movement had essentially succeeded before 1914, even if the decisive vote in Parliament did not take place for four more years.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, according to David Mitchell, John Fair, and Nicoletta Gullace, the war made suffragism seem more justified, without which women may not have won the vote for much longer.<sup>30</sup>

The story of the food crisis and suffragism falls sloppily into the interstices between these scholars' work. Neither the NUWSS nor the WFL linked food economy directly to the vote;

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<sup>22</sup> National Food Economy League, letterhead.

<sup>23</sup> National Food Economy League, letterhead.

<sup>24</sup> London Society for Women's Suffrage, Annual Report 1916.

<sup>25</sup> National Food Economy League, letterhead.

<sup>26</sup> London Society for Women's Suffrage, Annual Report 1916.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Keith Kelsall, Higher Civil Servants in Britain (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Meta Zimmeck, "Strategies and stratagems for the employment of women in the British civil service, 1919-1939," Historical Journal 27.4 (Dec. 1984) 901-924, and "Jobs for the Girls: the Expansion of Clerical Work for Women, 1850-1914," Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England, 1800-1918, ed. Angela John (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 153-177.

<sup>29</sup> See Martin Pugh, Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> See David Mitchell, Monstrous Regiment: The Story of the Women of the First World War (New York: Macmillan, 1965); John Fair, "The political aspects of women's suffrage during the First World War," Albion 8.3 (Autumn 1976): 274-295, and Nicoletta Gullace, The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). Mitchell depicts the franchise as a reward for wartime service while Fair and Gullace credit the imperative to reform the electoral register in favor of servicemen combined with public appreciation for women's patriotism.

rather, both concentrated on the more immediate goal of parlaying women's domestic cachet into meaningful civic engagement, perhaps through filling the burgeoning ranks of academicians and civil servants tasked with reinventing the food sector of the British economy. The WFL in particular sought a larger role for women in government as part of the reorganization of the economy along cooperative lines. On a rhetorical level, the food crisis did help to elevate women's traditional domestic role in society into a new paradigm of citizenship – one that even the government itself wholeheartedly endorsed. A few women did manage to sail this tide of domestic enthusiasm into positions of influence within academia, government, and industry. However, on the whole, the propaganda celebrating women as "quartermasters of the nation" had unfortunately few practical consequences. In the end, women did not rise very far in the ranks of the civil service, let alone take the reins of a radically reformed food industry. Not surprisingly, suffragists soured on food economy when it failed to produce material and political gains for women – and when the men who administered it seemed to perform so poorly. Food economy proved a cultural and psychological victory for women, the tangible benefits of which would not follow until later.

### Patriotic housekeeping

In late 1914 and early 1915, the NUWSS threw itself into a wide variety of charitable and patriotic enterprises intended to further the war effort. According to an internal tally, the union had opened at least forty workrooms by May 1915 to employ women who had lost their jobs due to the war. It had also set up a fund to cover the salaries of unemployed women professionals who went to work for a "patriotic" organization that could not otherwise afford to pay them. Fifty to sixty of the societies within the union had established clinics for expecting mothers. Others had cooked meals or washed laundry for soldiers. The NUWSS had cooperated with the National Union of Women Workers in organizing a women's law enforcement auxiliary with 11,000 volunteers as of May 1915.<sup>31</sup> Altogether, the NUWSS had donated nearly £50,000 to war charities.<sup>32</sup> However, amid this flurry of activity, the union had little direct interest in the impending food crisis in the first several months of the war. The executive committee casually endorsed the National Food Fund once in its correspondence, but otherwise did nothing.<sup>33</sup>

A putative shortage of meat in the summer of 1915 stiffened the union's passive stance on the food crisis. In June, the Board of Trade requested the NUWSS's assistance in distributing a

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<sup>31</sup> The National Union of Women Workers spearheaded the creation of so-called "voluntary women's patrols." Members did not wear uniforms, but did carry identification cards issued by the Metropolitan Police. They focused primarily on curtailing prostitution near army encampments. After the war, a former leader of the voluntary patrols took charge of London's first contingent of uniformed women police. See Frances Heidensohn, Women in Control? The Role of Women in Law Enforcement (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2002) 49-50.

<sup>32</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, "Work of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies since the outbreak of the war," 17 May 1915, box FL364, GB106/2/LSW/7/6/8/5, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, London.

<sup>33</sup> For instance, the NUWSS executive committee reassured a correspondent named J. B. Partridge that many suffragists belonged to the fund and that she need "have no fear as to the lines on which it worked." See National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, executive committee minutes, 18 Mar. 1915, 16, box FL084, 2/NWS/A/1/07, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, London.

leaflet encouraging consumers to eat less meat.<sup>34</sup> The leaflet itself drew a mixed and not altogether positive response from member societies. Only five societies ever acknowledged having received the leaflet to the executive committee. Of those, the Ealing and Acton branch of the London society "unanimously objected" to circularizing the leaflet as long as the "army commissariat . . . carried on in such a culpably wasteful manner." In fact, Ealing and Acton encouraged the executive committee to send "a strongly worded protest" to the Board of Trade. Only the Cockermouth society betrayed much enthusiasm; it actually requested additional information on meat substitutes.<sup>35</sup> However, dissenters notwithstanding, the executive committee did feel external and internal pressure to fall in line with the food economy movement. At the same time as the controversy over the Board of Trade leaflet, a Times reporter called to inquire if the union had done anything to help with the pending food crisis. The staff of the union's own newspaper, the Common Cause, published an edition with a "national economy" theme.<sup>36</sup> Finally, in July, the National Union of Women Workers forwarded a summary of their own wartime domestic economy agenda to the London suffrage society.<sup>37</sup> By mid-summer, the NUWSS's shop in London had put the National Food Fund's penny cookbook on sale and the executive committee had penciled "economy and management of food" into its agenda for the autumn.<sup>38</sup>

In the second half of 1915, the NUWSS drew on its own members' expertise to develop a model "patriotic housekeeping exhibition." Beginning in the summer and ending in the early fall, the union's literature and organization committees drafted an ambitious syllabus of exhibits, competitions, and lectures on economizing in every room of the home.<sup>39</sup> The exhibits on "spending and saving in the kitchen" recommended familiar labor-, fuel-, and nutrient-saving devices from double cookers to meat safes. Likewise, the lectures generally echoed the wisdom of traditional food reform. They began with an overview of dietetics, proceeded to the most nutritious foods and dishes, and finished with economical cooking methods. In keeping with the NUWSS's wide sense of civic responsibility, the lecture series also touched on the role of local government in improving sanitation and providing for expecting mothers. The syllabus's extensive bibliography reflected the savvy and sophistication of its authors by its inclusion of C.

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<sup>34</sup> J. E. Stuart, circular to member societies, June 1915, box FL364, GB106/2/LSW/7/6/8/6, and National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, executive committee minutes 3 June and 1 July 1915, box FL084, 2/NWS/A/1/07, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, London.

<sup>35</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, executive committee minutes 15 July 1915: 5, box FL084, 2/NWS/A/1/07, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, London.

<sup>36</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, executive committee minutes 3 June 1915: 8.

<sup>37</sup> National Union of Women Workers of Great Britain and Ireland, "Summarised report of the meeting of the Consultative Committee," 23 July 1915, box FL363, 2LSW/E/13/20, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, London.

<sup>38</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, executive committee minutes 15 July 1915: 5.

<sup>39</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, executive committee minutes 15 July 1915: 16-17; Helen Wright, letter to Philippa Strachey, 4 Oct. 1915, box FL364, 2LSW/E/08, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, London. Wright's letter explained that the union's literature committee would soon recommend a model "patriotic housekeeping exhibition" to the executive. Though the surviving records paint an obscure picture, the organization committee apparently started work on the exhibition in July with the literature committee joining in somewhat later.

F. Bastable's Public Finance and J. A. Hobson's The Science of Wealth as well as official publications relevant to international trade, to nutrition, and to public health. The syllabus also identified women who belonged to suffrage societies around the country who could lecture on domestic economy, including the scientist Margaret McKillop and the inspirational speaker Helen Fraser.<sup>40</sup> Where suffrage societies themselves lacked the necessary expertise, they could always enlist the assistance of outside organizations such as the NFF and NFRA as well as the British Women's Temperance Association and the Women's Cooperative Guild.<sup>41</sup>

When it actually staged its own housekeeping exhibition in November, the NUWSS did retreat somewhat from the draft syllabus. The patriotic housekeeping exhibition ran from 24 November to 4 December 1915 at the NUWSS's shop on Parliament Street, immediately opposite of the Foreign Office and the Treasury.<sup>42</sup> Though the draft syllabus included thrift in every room of the house, the exhibition itself concentrated more narrowly on the kitchen. Its roughly thirty displays covered basic nutrition science, economical recipes, and substitutes for butter, flour, and meat. Traditionally economical foods such as cheese, nuts, and pulses – the "poor man's beef" – featured prominently, as did war-time culinary curiosities such as maize and margarine. The sample menus had a middle-class bias, prescribing expensive foods like beef, milk, and mutton as well as culturally freighted ones like porridge. At the same time, some of the advice on offer did specifically address families living on 25s. or less a week. As per the rubric of Victorian reformism, the exhibition culminated with a display calculating how small

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<sup>40</sup> Among the first women to excel at Oxford, McKillop served on the faculties of Somerville, Royal Holloway, and King's Colleges. She helped to grow domestic economy into a legitimate academic pursuit. During the war, she worked as a statistician for the Ministry of Food. See Mark Pottle, "McKillop, Margaret (1864–1929)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 17 June 2009 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/51779>>. Before the war, Helen Fraser organized suffrage societies under the aegis of the NUWSS in England, Scotland, and Wales. During the war, she helped to set up women's police patrols and local savings associations, especially in the southwest of England. In the 1920s, she contested several different seats as a Liberal, one of the first women officially to represent a major political party in a Parliamentary election. See Leah Leneman, "Moyes, Helen Miller (1881–1979)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 17 June 2009 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/56230>>.

<sup>41</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, "National economy syllabus: Suggestions for organising a patriotic housekeeping exhibition," box FL364, 2LSW/E/08/17, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, London.

<sup>42</sup> The NUWSS rented the shop from Lady Waterlow, the widow of Sir Sidney Waterlow, Bt., a wealthy printer. Sir Sidney and his brothers had acquired the property on Parliament Street in 1846. Interestingly, it remains a small shop today. See National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, executive committee minutes, 18 Feb. 1915, box FL084, 2/NWS/A/1/07, Women's Library, and Charles Welch, "Waterlow, Sir Sydney Hedley, first baronet (1822–1906)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 17 June 2009 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36761>>. For the dates of the exhibition, refer to Helen Wright, letter to Miss Robinson, 24 Nov. 1915, box FL364, 2LSW/E/08/18, Women's Library.

economies in each household could save the country as a whole £20 million each year.<sup>43</sup> In the week between 24 and 30 November, 250 people signed the exhibition's guest book, representing many different parts of Great Britain and the overseas empire. Live cooking demonstrations attracted an attendance of 617 and earned nearly £8 in admissions fees. Literature sold briskly.<sup>44</sup> Considering the limited space available to it and its location in a section of the city where few women typically went, the exhibition did well.

Through early 1916, patriotic housekeeping modestly expanded suffragism's public profile and tightened its ties to other progressive causes. The NUWSS lent its displays to two other successful exhibitions at Great Missenden and at Salisbury – rural enclaves in which suffragism probably had less purchase.<sup>45</sup> Other putative exhibitors in Winchester and West Essex also expressed interest.<sup>46</sup> In Liverpool, the Women's Industrial Council set up a patriotic housekeeping exhibition on the NUWSS model at a so-called "war economy depot."<sup>47</sup> Due in part to the success of patriotic housekeeping around the country, the public trustee's office invited both the NUWSS and the London suffrage society to participate in the National Economy Exhibition in Knightsbridge, perhaps the largest and best publicized event of its kind during the war.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, the NUWSS cultivated even friendlier relations with traditional food reformers. In its syllabus, the NUWSS specifically recommended the NFRA's speakers and propaganda materials.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the London suffrage society's Women's Service Bureau posted several volunteers to the NFRA office during the war. The NFRA returned the favor with free tickets to its events and, at the conclusion of the war, a public vote of thanks from its executive committee.<sup>50</sup> However, its successes aside, the NUWSS did charge two guineas (£2

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<sup>43</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, "Syllabus for Patriotic Housekeeping Exhibition," 1916, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>44</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, literature committee minutes, 2 Dec. 1915, box FL301, 2/NWS/A/7/1, Women's Library.

<sup>45</sup> Miss Courtland, letter to the secretary of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, and Helen Fraser, letter to the secretary of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 6 Apr. 1916, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>46</sup> M. E. Scotney [Winchester Charity Organisation Society], letter to NUWSS secretary, 6 June 1916, and Nora Walshe [West Essex Food Reform Society], letter to NUWSS secretary, 12 June 1916, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>47</sup> M. E. Manning, letter to the secretary of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 7 July 1916, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>48</sup> Evelyn M. James, letters to secretary of Women's Service, London Society for Women's Suffrage, 8 May 1916, 22 May 1916, 29 May 1916, and 5 June 1916; Philippa Strachey, letters to Evelyn M. James, public trustee's office, 19 May 1916, 24 May 1916, box FL369, 2LSW/D/3/6, Women's Library. The correspondence between James and Strachey does not clearly indicate whether the London Society did in fact participate in the exhibition or not. See also Evelyn M. James, letter to NUWSS London office, 11 May 1916, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>49</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, "National economy syllabus: Suggestions for organising a patriotic housekeeping exhibition."

<sup>50</sup> Charles Hecht, letters to Philippa Strachey, June 1916 and 5 June 1918, box FL363, 2LSW/E/13/13, Women's Library.

2s.) for borrowing its displays, which deterred some interested parties.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, simply pricing the rental fee in guineas rather than pounds may have connoted arrogance to many of the union's correspondents. Moreover, though it would not budge on the pricing of its own display cards, the NUWSS nevertheless attempted to talk its way out of paying exhibitor fees for the National Economy Exhibition.<sup>52</sup>

At the same time as its foray into patriotic housekeeping, the NUWSS began to couple food economy to its long-term commitment to promote women's participation in government. Prior to the war, women had made some inroads into local government and the civil service. By 1914, the civil service employed 59,308 women, or 21 percent of its total personnel. Most of these women worked as low-paid clerical staff, but a handful had what Zemmick has termed a "quasi-administrative" status in traditionally feminine fields like health or education.<sup>53</sup> As a special provenance of women, food economy presented an opportunity to build on this precedent. At its annual meeting in February 1916, the union's general council passed a resolution "protesting against the continued refusal of the government to open the higher posts of the civil service to women."<sup>54</sup>

Unfortunately, the government seemed to respond slowly to suffragist pressure for greater participation in the official food economy campaign. In mid-1916, the Treasury created the National War Savings Committee, among the first official sponsors of wartime thrift. However, the NWSC itself included only one woman – Mona Wilson – who subsequently resigned, prompting the NUWSS to decry the irony of men propagandizing women to economize in the home:

The appeal for "national" economy is usually interpreted by the official mind to mean economy by women! A decided impetus would probably be given to the desire of women to co-operate in War Savings efforts if their representation on official committees with this object in view were more widely sought.<sup>55</sup>

In truth, suffragists gave the NWSC too little credit. Two members of its women's subcommittee, Beatrice Chamberlain and Mildred Musgrave Watson, organized its food economy propaganda campaign in the spring of 1917.<sup>56</sup> They supervised a large, predominantly female staff of domestic subjects experts seconded from the Board of Education and from the

<sup>51</sup> Nora Walshe wrote, somewhat in despair, to the NUWSS that her West Essex Food Reform Society could not possibly afford such a fee. See Nora Walshe, letter to NUWSS, 12 June 1916.

<sup>52</sup> Evelyn M. James, letter to NUWSS London office, 11 May 1916, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London. The public trustee's office apparently waved the NUWSS's fee, but also assigned it a less desirable stall with no wall space.

<sup>53</sup> Zemmick 1984 912.

<sup>54</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, "NUWSS annual council meeting," Weekly Notes Feb. 1916, box FL303, 2/NWS/C/3/2, Women's Library.

<sup>55</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, "Women and war saving," Weekly Notes 24 Oct. 1916; see also National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, "Women and national economy," Weekly Notes 14 Mar. 1916, box FL303, 2/NWS/C/3/2, Women's Library.

<sup>56</sup> In June 1917, George V recognized Musgrave Watson as a member of the Order of the British Empire for her work on the NWSC. See "Order of the British Empire: Birthday honours," Times 13 June 1918: 2.

best cooking schools.<sup>57</sup> However, Chamberlain and Watson labored in relative obscurity, leaving Mona Wilson's resignation as the NWSC's legacy to suffragism.

Much like the NWSC, the Ministry of Food's record of employment seemed no match for its own rhetoric. To a greater degree than its private-sector counterparts, the ministry accentuated the special role women had to play in food economy. Its Food Economy Campaign Handbook declared simply that "victory now depends upon our women."<sup>58</sup> Early in 1917, the NUWSS annual council urged the ministry to include women, because of their "special knowledge" of home life, on "all boards and committees, central or local . . . empowered to deal with food supply."<sup>59</sup> In March, the ministry followed through by hiring Dorothy Peel and Maud Pember Reeves as so-called "directors of women's service." By September 1917, as many as eighty spokeswomen for the economy campaign worked under Peel and Pember Reeves. In the same month, the ministry brought in Kate Manley, a domestic subjects expert at the Board of Education, to head a cooking section. Manley became the ministry's chief culinary scientist, responsible for developing recipes in her test kitchen and for writing the technical parts of food economy propaganda.<sup>60</sup> In a draft report circulated in June 1917, the NUWSS celebrated Peel and Pember Reeves's appointment as a significant achievement for women generally.<sup>61</sup> However, as Peel recalled in her memoirs, the ministry hired her more to assuage public opinion than to avail itself of her expertise.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, in July and August, the London Society for Women's Suffrage undertook a study of the civil service that revealed that the Ministry of Food had done no better in promoting women than had other branches of the government. Indeed, the War Office alone claimed to have 300 women working in its "higher grades," though this dubious statistic may have had more to do with semantics than with enlightened hiring practices.<sup>63</sup>

The formation of food control committees in August 1917 deepened the NUWSS's disappointment in the Ministry of Food. The appointment of Lord Rhondda to replace Lord

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<sup>57</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, Report on Public Kitchens by Dorothy Peel and Maud Pember Reeves, and A. E. Conway, Memorandum on Work in Connection with Food Economy and Control, Carried out by Miss Kate Manley, O. B. E., H. M., Inspector of the Board of Education, During the War 1914-18, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>58</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, The Food Economy Campaign Handbook, (London: Argus, 1917) 1.

<sup>59</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, Proceedings of the Annual Council, February 21st, 22nd and 23rd, 1917, at the Chelsea Town Hall, London, box FL302, 2/NWS/B/1/4, and Violet Eustace, circular letter to secretaries of suffrage societies, 5 Mar. 1917, box FL365, 2LSW/E/08/25, Women's Library.

<sup>60</sup> Conway, Memorandum on Work in Connection with Food Economy and Control, Carried out by Miss Kate Manley, O. B. E., H. M., Inspector of the Board of Education, During the War 1914-18.

<sup>61</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, "Women and the war," June 1917, box FL365, 2LSW/E/08/34, Women's Library.

<sup>62</sup> Dorothy Peel, A Year in Public Life (London: Constable, 1919) 14.

<sup>63</sup> London Society for Women's Suffrage, Women's Employment Committee, "Enquiry as to the employment of women in government offices," July 1917, box FL303, 2NWS/C/4/1, Women's Library.



Devonport as food controller in June 1917 no doubt brightened suffragists' expectations of the ministry. Rhondda evinced the sophistication and thoughtfulness so lacking in the curmudgeonly Devonport. Also, Rhondda's wife, Sybil, had belonged to the Women's Social and Political Union and had even served a day in prison for participating in a suffrage demonstration outside Parliament.<sup>64</sup> Two months after taking office, Rhondda announced that every local authority in Great Britain would select a committee of up to twelve members to supervise food control within its jurisdiction. He specified that each committee had to include at least one representative of labor and one woman.<sup>65</sup> Almost immediately, organized labor began to agitate loudly for greater representation on food control committees, which they feared would favor business over consumers.<sup>66</sup> In Poplar, at least, labor managed to strong-arm the borough council into excluding tradesmen from the food control committee entirely.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, the NUWSS protested that many local authorities had construed the minimum of one woman per food control committee as a maximum. Often, a social worker or the wife of a tradesman took the single seat set aside for women, leaving out the average homemaker, whose domestic knowledge the NUWSS deemed "of the highest importance."<sup>68</sup> An investigation by the Women's Municipal Party discovered that of London's twenty-eight boroughs, nineteen had just one woman on their food control committees and only Poplar and Woolwich had as many as three.<sup>69</sup> In these two boroughs, though, the large representation of women may have reflected the strength of organized labor more than sympathy for suffragism. For instance, Margaret Bondfield ran for local office in Woolwich three times before the war, but always as a trade unionist rather than as a suffragist.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Deirdre Beddoe, "Thomas, Sybil Margaret, Viscountess Rhondda (1857–1941)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 21 June 2009 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/58913>>.

<sup>65</sup> "Lord Rhondda's scheme: Control of sugar: Powers given to local authorities," Times 6 Aug. 1917: 4, and "Sugar control scheme: Bread and meat later: Local committees to deal with prices," Times 6 Aug. 1917: 7.

<sup>66</sup> See "Food control: Workers' demand for more representation," Times 11 Aug. 1917: 3; "Food control committees: The labour demand for fuller representation," Times 16 Aug. 1917: 3; "The local committees: Traders excluded at Poplar," Times 31 Aug. 1917: 7; "Labour and food prices: Threat of 'drastic steps,'" Times 8 Sept. 1917: 4, and "Protest of 100,000 workers," Times 18 Jan. 1918: 6.

<sup>67</sup> "The local committees: Traders excluded at Poplar."

<sup>68</sup> Olive A. Jetley [secretary of women's interests committee], circular letter to secretaries of member societies, 28 Sept. 1917, box FL365, 2LSW/E/08/32, Women's Library.

<sup>69</sup> Olive A. Jetley, letter to T. Gosse, 11 Oct. 1917, box FL365, 2LSW/E/08/32, Women's Library.

<sup>70</sup> Indeed, Bondfield had few domestic charms, having, in her own words, "no vocation for wifehood or motherhood." She pressed for sex equality in the trade union movement and resisted any special treatment of women. See Philip Williamson, "Bondfield, Margaret Grace (1873–1953)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 19 June 2009 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31955>>, and Christine Collette, For Labour and for Women: The Women's Labour League, 1906–1918 (Manchester, UK: Manchester UP, 1989) 99, 130.

In early 1918, so-called "national kitchens" provided the Ministry of Food with a chance to redeem itself in the eyes of suffragists. The national kitchen phenomenon attempted to capitalize on economies of scale by centralizing domestic cooking. Theoretically, a professional cook could prepare a single, large meal for an entire neighborhood with less waste than many individual housewives would generate in their own homes. To avoid the stigma of charity and to limit expenses, customers tended to pay and then to carry the food away. The NWSC recommended organizing "co-operative kitchens" in its first food economy memorandum to local war savings committees.<sup>71</sup> So many expressed interest that another memorandum specifically on "central kitchens" quickly followed.<sup>72</sup> By May, local authorities had opened seventy kitchens and proposed between 150 and 200 more. The Ministry of Food followed suit by establishing its own "experimental state kitchen" near to its offices.<sup>73</sup> The ministry issued guidelines for national kitchens in November and then an order to regulate them officially in February 1918.<sup>74</sup> Though local authorities retained the initiative to establish kitchens, the ministry also began to distribute grants to assist with the costs of equipment.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile in London, the creation of a National Kitchens Division within the Ministry of Food meant more positions of responsibility that women could potentially fill.<sup>76</sup>

As had the NWSC, national kitchens did give rise to opportunities for women to demonstrate practical leadership. Initially, Peel and Pember Reeves ran the ministry's own national kitchen and coordinated official correspondence with others around the country. In October 1917, Peel, Manley, and the cookbook writer Herman Senn even traveled in an official capacity to Paris to investigate its public kitchens.<sup>77</sup> A month later, Manley launched a program that trained literally hundreds of women to work as supervisors of national kitchens. The

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<sup>71</sup> United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, F. C. – 1: Food Control Campaign: Suggestions for Local Authorities and War Savings Committees (Mar. 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>72</sup> United Kingdom, National War Savings Committee, F. C. – 13: Food Economy Campaign: Memorandum on Central Kitchens for the Supply of Cooked Food with a View to Economy in the Use of Foodstuffs (May 1917), GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>73</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, Report on Public Kitchens by Dorothy Peel and Maud Pember Reeves, and Peel 1919 25.

<sup>74</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, "Preliminary memorandum: Central kitchens," Nov. 1918, GD Gt. Brit., Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>75</sup> United Kindom, Ministry of Food, N. K. 1A: The National Kitchens Order, 1918, Mar. 1918, GD Gt. Brit., Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>76</sup> The ministry initially created an independent division for national kitchens. However, in mid-February 1918, Rhondda subsumed the separate national kitchens and economy divisions into a new Food Survey Board. The board worked to improve catering in the armed forces, in public institutions, and in hotels and restaurants. It had direct responsibility for national kitchens and for education and research in nutrition. The reorganization had little effect on the personnel administering national kitchens. See "The Food Survey Board: Economy work rearranged," Times 6 Mar. 1918: 3.

<sup>77</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, Report of Visit to Paris – October 1st to 8th 1917 by Dorothy Peel, Kate Manley, and Herman Senn, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

program persisted until at least October 1919 even though Manley herself had returned to the Board of Education.<sup>78</sup>

Despite Peel and Manley's expertise and energy, however, Rhondda named two men to direct the National Kitchens Division.<sup>79</sup> The director, Charles Spencer, was an accountant and an alderman; the assistant director, Henry Lightowler, was a furniture dealer and a borough councilor. The appointments smacked of cronyism as neither Spencer nor Lightowler had any immediately relevant experience, but both had served together in the Halifax town government. When Lightowler suddenly died less than two weeks after his appointment, the ministry replaced him with another man.<sup>80</sup> Much to the chagrin of suffragists, the government's own propaganda stressed the masculinity of the national kitchens' leadership. A pamphlet by Spencer Hughes, MP, lauded the "practical men at the head" of the national kitchens movement and incorrectly credited Spencer with initiating it:

The technical directors are practical men who understand catering. . . . This Kitchen and Restaurant movement may be described as Mr. Spencer's child, and in developing it he has shown how it is possible for a man to be an expert without being a faddist.<sup>81</sup>

In the same month as Spencer's appointment, Dorothy Peel bitterly complained to an interviewer from the NUWSS that the ministry "showed no serious intention of making use of women's special knowledge" in relation to national kitchens.<sup>82</sup> Philippa Strachey of the London suffrage society wrote directly to Lord Rhondda that she looked "with alarm upon the growth of a . . . kitchen [bureaucracy] . . . entirely directed by men."<sup>83</sup> In response, the ministry promised to recommend that local authorities include women in the management of any kitchens that they established, but Strachey had of course meant the national bureaucracy.<sup>84</sup>

As the number of thwarted ambitions mounted, the NUWSS lost its enthusiasm for food economy. When Sir Arthur Yapp published his scale of voluntary rations, the union complained that it discriminated against women of large stature. With equal measures of joviality and sarcasm, the internal publication Weekly Notes feared that unfairly small rations would

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<sup>78</sup> A. E. Conway, Scheme for Training Supervisors and Cooks for National Kitchens Drawn up by Miss Manley and Memorandum on Work in Connection with Food Economy and Control, Carried out by Miss Kate Manley, O. B. E., H. M., Inspector of the Board of Education, During the War 1914-18, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

Manley's program graduated 222 women between April and December 1918.

<sup>79</sup> "National kitchens," Times 2 Feb. 1918: 8, and "National kitchens: Food ministry's plans for the country," Times 5 Feb. 1918: 9; see also John A. Hargreaves, "Lightowler, Miriam (1875-1958)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 20 June 2009 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/71091>>.

<sup>80</sup> "News in brief," Times 12 Feb. 1918: 3.

<sup>81</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, N. K. 48: National Kitchens and Restaurants: A Plea for Permanency: Good Food at Less Cost by Spencer Hughes (Nov. 1918) 2-3.

<sup>82</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, executive committee minutes, 28 Feb. 1918, box FL084, 2/NWS/A/1/10, Women's Library.

<sup>83</sup> Philippa Strachey, letter to Lord Rhondda, 19 Mar. 1918, box FL363, 2LSW/E/13/13, Women's Library.

<sup>84</sup> F. L. Turner, letter to Philippa Strachey, 8 Apr. 1918, box FL363, 2LSW/E/13/13, Women's Library.

jeopardize the health of the "six-foot beauties" in the chorus line of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, not to mention the "strapping damsels" employed by the government itself.<sup>85</sup> A month later, the union headquarters turned away a representative of Yapp's League of National Safety, pawning her off on the London suffrage society instead.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, from November 1917 onward, the NUWSS executive committee essentially ignored any correspondence regarding food economy. It agreed to advertise the Ministry of Food's speakers bureau in the Common Cause, but did not distribute a circular to member societies. It tabled without action requests of assistance from the BFRL and from the NFRA.<sup>87</sup> The union's annual council considered several resolutions on food in 1917, but none in 1918.<sup>88</sup> Of course, the Representation of the People Act had received the royal assent just a month before the 1918 meeting, so understandably the union had other priorities in that moment. Nonetheless, the union persisted in its other wartime activities during the bill's passage through Parliament. Moreover, the Commons had concluded its third reading of the bill in June 1917, but the Lords did not begin its until mid-January 1918. The union had disengaged with food economy in the intervening downtime when it could have paid more attention to ancillary issues.

### The best is yet to be

Like the NUWSS, the Women's Freedom League committed itself to public service during the war. The league's founder, Charlotte Despard, had run a charity in the Nine Elms neighborhood of Battersea before joining the WSPU in 1906. A year later, she left the WSPU in protest of its "autocratic" leadership. While technically more democratic in its organization, the WFL nonetheless functioned as a cult of personality centered on Despard.<sup>89</sup> Smaller than the NUWSS and less belligerent than the WSPU, the league struck a tactical compromise known as "constitutional militancy" that rejected violence, but still relished public spectacle.<sup>90</sup> Despard and her colleagues had little enthusiasm for the war in 1914 but chose to set aside any militancy

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<sup>85</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, "Rations for all," Weekly Notes 13 Nov. 1917, box FL303, 2/NWS/C/3/2, Women's Library.

<sup>86</sup> C. May Beeman, letter to Philippa Strachey, 17 Dec. 1917, box FL363, 2LSW/E/13/13, Women's Library.

<sup>87</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, executive committee minutes 22 Nov. 1917, 3 Jan. 1918, and 14 Feb. 1918, FL084, 2/NWS/A/1/10, Women's Library. The first of the two letters officially came from the Educational Health and Food Campaign, a partnership of civic organizations headed by the BFRL.

<sup>88</sup> National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, Final agenda: Annual Council Meeting, Wednesday, February 21st, Thursday, February 22nd, and, If Necessary, Friday [morning], February 23rd, 1917, and Final Agenda: Annual Council Meeting, Tuesday, March 12th, Wednesday, March 13th, Tuesday, March 14th, 1918, box FL302, 2/NWS/B/1/4, Women's Library.

<sup>89</sup> She served as the league's president for more than a decade without interruption; her birthday celebration became a fixture on the WFL event calendar until her death in 1939. See Margaret Mulvihill, "Despard, Charlotte (1844–1939)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) 22 June 2009 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37356>>.

<sup>90</sup> For example, league activists chained themselves to the metal grille fronting the ladies' gallery of the House of Commons. See Mulvihill.

for the duration out of solidarity with the rest of the country. In fact, they established the Women's Suffrage National Aid Corps to assist those negatively affected by the war.<sup>91</sup>

Despard's abiding personal interest in food informed much of the corps's work. A longtime food reformer, Despard helped to found the NFRA in 1908; ten years later, she became the first woman to serve as president of the London Vegetarian Society.<sup>92</sup> She ran a vegetarian restaurant in connection with her charity in Nine Elms that fed more than 200 people per day by mid-1915. According to the WFL's official publication, the Vote, the restaurant had shaken "the faith of Nine Elms in a pennyworth of bones." The restaurant's clients supposedly marveled that such cheap, tasty soup could consist entirely of vegetables.<sup>93</sup> During the war itself, two of the Women's Suffrage National Aid Corps's goals hinged on food: first, to open "depots" to feed and advise expecting and nursing mothers, and second, to cooperate with local care committees to feed poor schoolchildren.<sup>94</sup> In both cases, the corps could simply build on Despard's prewar charity work in Nine Elms, though it did attempt to extend its geographic reach. By September 1914, a mothers' depot had opened in Harrow on the western edge of London. In early 1915, the WFL set up another communal kitchen at a settlement in Sheffield. Its patrons allegedly asked to watch the meals in preparation so as to replicate them at home.<sup>95</sup> Before the war, Despard had envisioned her mission not so much as reforming the poor as relieving them from the depredations of modern industrialism. However, her advocacy for food reform did push the edges of this paradigm by seeking to educate the denizens of Nine Elms into giving up meat-eating.

In addition to its practical charity work, the WFL attempted to empower women through their traditional gender roles. In a September 1914 edition of the Vote, the veteran suffragist Dora Montefiore protested that men had removed domestic industries from the home and recast them as capitalist enterprises. The profit motive had since reduced the quality of food, rendering it in some cases into nothing more than poison. For instance, bakers had processed essential nutrients out of bread while brewers had adulterated their beer to engender an "artificial thirst" in their customers. Healthy homemade jam had given way to a concoction of "coloured compounds . . . glucose, pips and flavourings." Moreover, commercialization had reduced many women into "ill-paid wage-slaves" in industrial-scale food-processing plants. Montefiore proposed that women should reclaim their "queenship" of the home by abrogating the profit motive:

We women . . . desire to re-found on a stable basis for the future the . . . Domestic Industries [sic] which have been removed from the home. We desire, at the same time, to re-establish the dignity of women who work in these industries as the feeders, and the nurturers of the race. In order to do this, food and clothing must be produced by us under absolutely pure conditions, and its production and distribution must be organised on a co-operative basis.

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<sup>91</sup> "The Women's Freedom League and the national crisis," Vote 14 Aug. 1914: 278; C. Nina Boyle, "The Women's Freedom League and the national crisis," Vote 21 Aug. 1914: 286, and "Women's Suffrage National Aid Corps (Women's Freedom League)," Vote 4 Sept. 1914: 304.

<sup>92</sup> "The London Vegetarian Society welcomes a woman president," Vote 2 Aug. 1918: 344.

<sup>93</sup> "The Woman Suffrage National Aid Corps: The Nine Elms Restaurant," Vote 11 Dec. 1914: 421.

<sup>94</sup> "Women's Suffrage National Aid Corps," Vote 4 Sept. 1914: 304.

<sup>95</sup> "Woman Suffrage National Aid Corps: Penny dinners at Sheffield," Vote 26 Mar. 1915: 543.

Montefiore did not mean that women should retreat into their homes to bake bread and bottle jam; to the contrary, her reorganized "domestic industry" would operate on a large, semi-commercial scale and lead to the emancipation of women:

The suggestion is that we should . . . begin with bread-making from stone-ground flour, thus ensuring the use of all the nourishing constituents of the wheat. Our customers must be from the first the thousands of organised women whose aim is the political, social and economic freeing of women in order that they make take their place with men in the conscious evolution of the race.<sup>96</sup>

On the one hand, Montefiore encouraged women to shake of their shackles and to remake society in their own image. On the other hand, she willingly played the traditional role of "nurturer," infusing it with the food reformer's enthusiasm for proper cooking. Indeed, the WFL as a whole commended the women voters of Australia and New Zealand for insisting that girls study domestic economy and hygiene in school.<sup>97</sup> The WFL's own publishing company even put out the occasional cookbook, including one specifically geared to wartime circumstances.<sup>98</sup>

Beyond the domestic industries, women's role as nurturer entitled them to full citizenship, including the vote, education, and property. Anti-suffragists argued that as women could not physically fight in war, they did not deserve a vote by which they could influence military policy.<sup>99</sup> The WFL responded that the patriotism of women lay in their natural interest in the welfare of the next generation:

Let no mistake be made. The patriotism of women is no less than that of men – it may even be greater, for they are the mothers of the race that is to be. We believe there is no woman in Great Britain who, if it were put to her, would not willingly make any sacrifice rather than risk the independence of the nation whose traditions are her children's heritage and whose free and harmonious development will make for their happiness in the future.<sup>100</sup>

Implicitly, motherhood strengthened a woman's commitment to national security and hence her claim to the vote. In similar fashion, household management legitimated a woman's interest in education. According to Emily Phipps, a contributor to the Vote, a good housewife needed "great organising power, attention to detail, and resourcefulness in emergencies." Women developed these qualities best through formal schooling in academic subjects. Indeed, higher reasoning took precedence over domestic skills: an intelligent woman could learn her way around a kitchen from a cookbook, but reading a cookbook would never make a woman intelligent.<sup>101</sup>

Superficially, the food crisis seemed like an avenue along which the WFL could pursue its ambitions to revamp domestic industries and to realize women's citizenship. First, the disruption of food markets left them susceptible to reform, perhaps according to the league's cooperative, feminist design. Second, who could accomplish this reform better than women

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<sup>96</sup> Dora B. Montefiore, "How domestic industries can be re-organised by women," Vote 18 Sept. 1914: 321.

<sup>97</sup> "What other women have done," Vote 20 Oct. 1916: 1217.

<sup>98</sup> War-Time Cookery by Mrs. Walter Carey, advertisement, Vote 30 Nov. 1917: 64.

<sup>99</sup> Nicoletta Gullace's The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War

<sup>100</sup> C. Despard, "War service," Vote 26 Mar. 1915: 544.

<sup>101</sup> E. Phipps, "Give the girls a chance," Vote 2 Apr. 1915: 551.

themselves? The WFL reacted to the economy campaign – the first public reaction to the food crisis – with caution. The league recognized the necessity to do more with less but worried that a policy based on nothing more would fail in practice:

The question of . . . how to economise is now the question of the hour. . . It is, obviously, a thing that women can be fairly asked to do, and that they should be and are only too willing to do. Unfortunately, these matters are practical, not sentimental matters. It is not so much a question of what one would, could, or should do, as what would be the most effective thing to do. . . . One's brain reels with the effort to grasp it all.<sup>102</sup>

The creation of the Ministry of Food in late 1916 drew a more optimistic response. In November 1916 and again in June 1917, the league wrote an open letter to the government requesting the appointment of a women's board to advise on food control.<sup>103</sup> In February 1917, the league published a mock king's speech in which an imaginary female prime minister called for "the appointment of women to co-operate with the Food Controller [sic] in view of the urgent necessity of safeguarding the food supply of the country."<sup>104</sup> In particular, the WFL supported the national kitchens movement as a first step along the path to cooperation in what it termed "domestic industry." The league's annual conference in February 1918 passed a resolution advising the Ministry of Food to accelerate the opening of new kitchens.<sup>105</sup>

However, the WFL's tepid acquiescence to food economy soured into cynicism. On the one hand, the league never challenged the moral rectitude of economy in the home on principle.<sup>106</sup> On the other hand, the mishandling of the official economy campaign shook the league's faith in the government. Indeed, the league's wits quickly found weaknesses in the government's armor through which to jab their barbs. The pamphleteer Eunice Murray charged the men running the economy campaign with hypocrisy due to their own venality and wastefulness. She observed wryly in the Vote that MPs paid themselves £400 per year, well above the average income in Britain. The two law officers of the crown, the attorney and solicitor general, earned together an astounding £35,000. From Murray's point of view, Parliament should have economized in its own pay before encouraging the poor to eat less at the risk of their health.<sup>107</sup> In the same sarcastic tone, Nina Boyle decried waste in supplying the armed forces:

We are sadly in need of . . . man's strong guiding hand in the cooking pot and the market basket. He has made such a successful job of catering for the 'new Army'

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<sup>102</sup> "Our point of view: Advice gratis," Vote 6 Aug. 1915: 705.

<sup>103</sup> "Food control: An advisory board of women wanted," Vote 24 Nov. 1916: 18; "An open letter to Lord Rhondda, food controller," Vote 22 June 1917: 257.

<sup>104</sup> "The king's speech: As women would amend it," Vote 9 Feb. 1917: 105.

<sup>105</sup> Women's Freedom League, "Transcript of shorthand-writer's notes taken verbatim at the eleventh annual conference held on February 23rd and 24th, 1918," box FL057, 2/WFL/2/09, Women's Library.

<sup>106</sup> Despard herself wrote, "Thrift, in its full signification, is noble and right." See C. Despard, "National thrift," The Vote 27 Aug. 1915: 728.

<sup>107</sup> Eunice G. Murray, "Preaching and practice," Vote 30 July 1915: 696-697.

that now we are to have the benefit of his light and leading in our domestic affairs and our most intimate housekeeping operations.<sup>108</sup>

As early as December 1915, the league had already dismissed the government as "worse than useless" in promoting economy. Rather than leading by the example of its own careful economy, the government had instead indulged in "flagrant and conspicuous extravagance."<sup>109</sup> In fairness, the league did not present much hard evidence of government waste beyond sniping about salaries and repeating rumors about the army. However, the government's dependence on voluntary economies in individual homes chafed against the league's collectivist tendencies. In its correspondence with the league, the Board of Trade pointed out that private consumption accounted for a far greater proportion of the British economy than did public spending. By dint of size alone, households could tighten their belts more than could the government.<sup>110</sup> The WFL countered that only the government had the organizational capacity to coordinate any meaningful program of economy.

The government's reluctance to impose such a solution elicited the full force of the league's vitriol. Devonport's intransigence did not surprise the leadership of the WFL. However, they may have had more faith in Rhondda due to his wife's aggressive suffragism and to their own previous interactions with him. For example, during his term as president of the Local Government Board, Rhondda had expressed sincere sympathy for a league deputation against compulsory detention of women suffering from venereal disease.<sup>111</sup> As food controller, he tried to maintain a good relationship with the league by replying quickly and politely to Despard's letters and personally receiving more deputations.<sup>112</sup> Nonetheless, Rhondda's charm availed him little when the Ministry of Food revived the economy campaign under Sir Arthur Yapp. A contributor to the Vote identified only as X. Y. Z. denounced the League of National Safety as "a plaything for those who have nothing better to do with their time and energy . . . and who have a weakness for badges and fancy buttons and certificates."<sup>113</sup> Another anonymous writer railed that the ministry simply let food spoil on the London docks for lack of proper storage. Women, by contrast, would never "have thus mismanaged and wasted the nation's food."<sup>114</sup> The imposition of compulsory rationing – the sort of collectivist solution that the league might have favored – won Rhondda and the ministry few plaudits. For example, Nina Boyle dubbed the duplication of registration for sugar rationing a "truly idiotic mistake."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> C. Nina Boyle, "Wilful [sic] waste," Vote 18 June 1915: 646-647; see also A. S. Byett, "Feeding the army," Vote 21 Apr. 1916: 1007.

<sup>109</sup> Eunice G. Murray, "Waste not, want not!" Vote 24 Dec. 1915: 868, and S. A. Mustard, "War and economy," Vote 7 Jan. 1916: 881-882.

<sup>110</sup> "Our point of view: Advice gratis," Vote 6 Aug. 1915: 705.

<sup>111</sup> "Deputation to Lord Rhondda on venereal disease," Vote 2 Feb. 1917: 99.

<sup>112</sup> A. P. Hughes Gibb, letter to Charlotte Despard, 28 June 1917, in "Our daily bread," Vote 13 July 1917: 281, and "Deputation to the Ministry of Food," Vote 3 May 1918: 239.

<sup>113</sup> X. Y. Z., "A warning to women," Vote 16 Nov. 1917: 43.

<sup>114</sup> "The same old tale," Vote 3 Aug. 1917: 310.

<sup>115</sup> C. Nina Boyle, "National economizers," Vote 28 Dec. 1917: 92. Initially, the ministry had proposed to register each household for a sugar ration. However, this scheme quickly unraveled due to the instability in the composition or location of households, especially during wartime. (People moved into and out of households as their employment changed, for instance.) So, though many consumers registered as part of a household in October 1917, they all had to do so



Ironically, despite its own dissatisfaction with government food control, the WFL clung to a socialist and utopian vision of the postwar future. As early as the summer of 1916, the league trumpeted the supposed successes of government intervention in the munitions industry:

[The government] has commandeered factories, it has controlled labour, it has broken up monopolies; it has ridden rough-shod over all the sacred shibboleths of the old Politico-Economic School to which the members of the Government for the most part belong. The result is before us. The Army and Navy have been fully supplied with the material they require. . . . Surely this is an indication of what well directed and practical organisation might effect for the nation.<sup>116</sup>

In truth the government had not removed any monopolies; rather, it had imposed one. In Despard's mind, however, such details disappeared in a dream of post-industrial social harmony under rational, central management of the economy. She proposed "national control over the land" not only to increase domestic food production, but also to resettle families out of miasmic slums and back into the countryside. Free of negative environmental and social influences, children would again grown up "vigorous and beautiful."<sup>117</sup> As for industry itself, the "spirit of co-operation" would inspire laborers to work together to "beautify the world" rather than to sully it with pollution and poverty.<sup>118</sup> Even in late 1918, with the "truly idiotic mistakes" of compulsory rationing fresh in the collective memory, the Vote declared that "the best is yet to be." In the wake of the war, Britain would no longer tolerate a "stupid social order" that left 12 million people "on the verge of starvation."<sup>119</sup>

#### Reflect for a moment on the great food campaign

At the beginning of the food crisis, both the NUWSS and the WFL genuinely embraced the traditional role of housewife, but with the intention of parlaying it into wider political and social change. The relative success of the patriotic housekeeping exhibition around the country revealed the domestic enthusiasm and expertise of the NUWSS's members and sympathizers. At the same time, though, the NUWSS attempted to imbue housekeeping with sophistication. Its draft syllabus included not only economical cooking, but also political science and public finance. On the one hand, the union intended to educate women for citizenship through the medium of cooking. On the other hand, it sought to exalt women's knowledge of the home into a science with national implications. Beyond the patriotic housekeeping exhibition, the NUWSS hoped that domestic science might unlock access to the civil service for women, thereby serving as one of many stepping stones on the way to equal citizenship. The WFL understood domesticity as less of a science than a frame of mind. Certainly, the league did tepidly support the education of girls in domestic economy. Moreover, it did argue that formal education prepared young women for marriage and motherhood. However, its utopian ambitions hinged

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again as individuals in December. See "Lord Rhondda's scheme: Control of sugar: Powers given to local authorities," Times 6 Aug. 1917: 4, and "Individual sugar tickets," Times 19 Nov. 1917: 8.

<sup>116</sup> C. Despard, "War discoveries," Vote 29 Sept. 1916: 1192.

<sup>117</sup> C. Despard, "After-war economy: Education," Vote 28 July 1916: 1120-1121, and "Honesty," Vote 14 July 1916: 1104.

<sup>118</sup> C. Despard, "After-war economy: Labour," Vote 11 Aug. 1916: 1136-1137.

<sup>119</sup> F. A. Underwood, "The best is yet to be," Vote 27 Dec. 1918: 28.

less on women's expertise than on their cooperative instincts. Indeed, the league aimed to soften science and technology with domesticity, not to harden domesticity with science and technology.

Frustratingly, neither the NUWSS nor the WFL achieved its goals with respect to the food crisis. From the NUWSS's point of view, the food crisis called for the expertise of women at the highest levels of the civil service. However, neither the National War Savings Committee nor the Ministry of Food promoted many women into public positions of responsibility. The union and its sympathizers particularly resented the appointment of two undistinguished men to head the National Kitchens Division. Two women – Dorothy Peel and Maud Pember Reeves – had laid the foundation for the division over the course of half a year only to have the food controller pass them over in favor of an accountant and a furniture dealer from rural Halifax. This apparent reluctance to engage the expertise of women may have contributed to the bungling of the government's first foray into food economy. The WFL also supported the hiring of women into the civil service, but, as relative eccentrics unused to the corridors of power, did not have the same expectations of success as did the NUWSS. Rather, in regard to the food crisis, the WFL pursued socialism as vigorously as suffragism. To this end, compulsory rationing proved a disappointment in that it came so late and did not meet the league's standard of efficiency.

However, from a broader perspective, the suffragists' disappointment may have stemmed in large part from high expectations. Perhaps only one woman sat on the National War Savings Committee itself, but, behind the scenes, women organized and conducted its part in the food economy campaign. The NUWSS did succeed in pressuring the Ministry of Food to hire women into public positions of responsibility. Moreover, those women performed admirably, helping to rescue the government's flailing food economy campaign and to establish the National Kitchens Division. Only a few men in the ministry – perhaps Devonport, Rhondda, and Yapp – had a higher public profile than Peel and Pember Reeves. In addition, Peel rebuilt her career as a journalist on the foundation of her experience in public service. Though she continued to write cookbooks, she also ventured into history, politics, and sociology after the war.<sup>120</sup> Other women, such as Kate Manley and Margaret McKillop, also served with distinction in the Ministry of Food. Later, Rhondda insisted that women have a voice on local food control committees. His successor, J. R. Clynes, increased the minimum number of women to two when reconstituting the committees in the fall of 1918.<sup>121</sup> As for the WFL's collectivism, the government did institute an unprecedented degree of cooperation in the economy, especially in the food sector. Moreover, British economic interventions worked better than did German ones.<sup>122</sup> Perhaps suffragists had a right to feel slighted that food, which lay within their sphere of cultural authority, had not facilitated an even greater advance for women. Nonetheless, food did

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<sup>120</sup> See Dorothy Peel, *A Year in Public Life* (London: Constable, 1919), *A Hundred Wonderful Years: Social and Domestic Life of a Century, 1820-1920* (London: Lane, 1926), *How We Lived Then, 1914-1918* (London: Lane, 1929), *The Stream of Time: Social and Domestic Life in England 1805-1861* (London: Lane, 1931), and *Life's Enchanted Cup: An Autobiography* (London: Lane, 1933).

<sup>121</sup> J. R. Clynes, circular letter to chairmen of food control committees, 3 Oct. 1918, and United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, *M. G. L. A. 1: Memorandum on the Re-Appointment of Food Control Committees*, Sept. 1918, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>122</sup> See Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2000).

contribute in slight measure to the wartime expansion in women's civic engagement, perhaps the largest in British history to that time.

After the war, the reorganization of the civil service mirrored the successes and disappointments of food economy. In the mid-1950s, Roger Kelsall emphasized that the war compelled male bureaucrats and politicians to drop their open antagonism to women civil servants:

Widely-varying figures were quoted of the number of women who had actually been engaged on strictly administrative work; but whatever doubts about its true extent, the barriers that had been temporarily and partially removed could not, in post-1918 Britain, be reimposed.<sup>123</sup>

The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 ostensibly opened all professions to women on the same terms as men. Three years later, the civil service initiated a formal process for women to apply for administrative positions.<sup>124</sup> Finally, in 1925, women could sit for competitive exams for hiring and promotion more or less on the same basis as men. Sadly, powerful men did conspire to limit the practical effect of these reforms. As Meta Zimmeck has documented in detail, they barred the employment of married women, exploited postwar jingoism to promote unqualified veterans, limited the frequency of competitive exams, and so on.<sup>125</sup> As a result, the proportion of women in the civil service declined from 56 percent in 1918 to 25 percent in 1928.<sup>126</sup> As of 1931, the highest rank of the civil service – the administrative class – included only twenty women, or just 2 percent of its total personnel.<sup>127</sup> Oddly, this institutional misogyny coexisted with personal civility. In retrospect, at least, female civil servants of the interwar years commended the politeness of their male colleagues.<sup>128</sup> This muddled picture suggests that much as they had at the wartime Ministry of Food, male powerbrokers in the postwar government bureaucracy conceded that women could serve in leadership positions with distinction, but only in small numbers.

In June 1917, at the tail end of the government's first food economy campaign, the House of Commons considered the Representation of the People Bill in committee. The debate danced artfully around the question posed by the fourth clause of the bill: did women deserve the Parliamentary vote or not? By their own account, anti-suffragists had no prejudice toward women. One of their best spokesmen, Alexander MacCallum Scott, disavowed "the intellectual or moral inferiority of women" and regarded any such beliefs as "relics of the dark ages."<sup>129</sup> Suffragists did not construe the franchise as a reward for women's service during the war. Sir John Simon maintained that he had "heard that parody, and a very insulting parody, of the real argument put forward," but he had "never heard it put forward by a supporter of woman's suffrage."<sup>130</sup> With those empty provisos on the record, anti-suffragists argued that women could not fight in the armed forces and so should not vote; suffragists countered that women had

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<sup>123</sup> Kelsall 170.

<sup>124</sup> Previously, a woman could not apply for an administrative position on her own; someone else had to nominate her.

<sup>125</sup> See especially Zimmeck 1984.

<sup>126</sup> Zimmeck 1984 912.

<sup>127</sup> Kelsall 170.

<sup>128</sup> Zimmeck 1984 921.

<sup>129</sup> Hansard 19 June 1917, vol. 94: 1687.

<sup>130</sup> Hansard 19 June 1917, vol. 94: 1675-1676.

performed admirably during the current war and thus had earned the vote. For most MPs, women's wartime service meant volunteering as a nurse or working in a munitions factory. However, in the second half of the debate, Sir Alfred Mond made the first and only allusion to the food crisis:

Without the assistance and the help and cooperation of the vast female population of citizens a country in a modern war would soon become helpless, and could not even conduct [efficient] military operations. That is not merely so in the sphere of the creation of munitions, although there the work of women has been sufficiently remarkable. It is still more so in the field of domestic economy. I would ask the Committee to reflect for a moment upon the great food campaign that has been inaugurated in this country. Who are the most able helpers on the question of economy of food? Two women. To whom have they addressed themselves? To the women of the country. Who is it who can save the country from starvation and practise economy as a whole? The women. It is not the men fighting at the Front . . . or the men in this country who are the vital factors when it comes to a food economy campaign. It is the women in the household, who, by their use of food, will do so much to help us to win the War. The conservation of food has become practically as important as the production of munitions and fighting in trenches. To enlist in this one direction alone the active support of the women in order to conduct your War to a successful conclusion is a great thing.<sup>131</sup>

A few hours later, the Commons divided overwhelmingly in favor of women's suffrage. The Lords would follow suit on 10 January 1918. Of course, food economy played a small role in the triumph of suffragism. Still, food propelled Peel and Pember Reeves first to fame and second into the debate that led in the end to their enfranchisement. Moreover, it apparently convinced Alfred Mond at least to cast his vote in their favor.

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<sup>131</sup> Hansard HC Deb. 19 June 1917, vol. 94: 1712-1713.

## Epilogue

At its most basic, the story of British food reform is about endemic hunger and trade imbalances. By itself, hunger was an old problem, but, at the end of the nineteenth century, scientists redefined it as a set of quantifiable variables, which made it both easier to describe and, apparently, to control. Armed with this new scientific knowledge, amateur sociologists discovered that the number of hungry people was surprisingly large – as much as 25 to 30 percent of city-dwellers by the count of Seebohm Rowntree. Meanwhile, Britain was becoming increasingly dependent on food imported from overseas. Since the repeal of the corn laws in 1846, domestic agriculture had faced ever-greater foreign competition, especially with the advent of the steamship, the railroad, the mechanized reaper and the vapor compressor. Due to their peculiar cultural and economic institutions, British farmers failed to compete efficiently with scrappy frontiersmen in America and Canada. During the agricultural depression that followed, imports of grain and frozen meat took the place of declining domestic production. Meanwhile, the Boer War and the rise of economic competition from America and from Germany seemed to call into question Britain's future power and prosperity. Together, these troubling economic and geopolitical trends prompted a spate of soul-searching just before the war, including official commissions on wartime food supplies, the poor laws, and physical degeneration. In short, Britain found itself afflicted with intractable food insecurity at both the local and the national levels.

Unfortunately, the most obvious solution to the trade imbalance would have made the endemic hunger even worse. Importing cheap foreign food lowered the cost of living for the poor. According to the anti-corn law tradition, any measure to protect domestic agriculture would have led to higher food prices and to more poverty. Joseph Chamberlain's campaign to revive import duties on grain revealed that popular faith in free trade derived at least in part from fear of hunger. In Chamberlain's eyes, tariff reform was the first step in a grand project to unify Britain's fractious empire into cohesive whole. Yet the British public would not buy this majestic vision at the price of a tax on food. Frustrated by his opponents' lack of imagination, Chamberlain cynically compared his own proposals to a political assassination:

Now there is the murder. The murder is out. . . . That is the only thing of all that I said that my opponents have thought it particularly interesting to quote, and you see that on every wall, in the headlines of the leaflets of the Cobden Club, in the speeches of the devotees of free imports . . . all these, then, put in the forefront that Mr. Chamberlain says you must tax . . . food.<sup>1</sup>

However, who could blame the Liberals for attacking tariff reform at its weakest point? Who could blame poor, hungry people for looking askance at the prospect of paying more for food? The Royal Commission on Supply of Food and the elections of 1906 and 1910 duly rejected tariff reform and left the trade imbalance in food – and lower cost of living it seemed to provide – intact. In fairness, Liberals and free traders were not necessarily reckless cynics who would sell out their nation's security for the hungry man's vote. They truly felt confident that the Royal Navy and the normal operations of the market would maintain food supplies in the case of a war. As a result, Britain did very little to prepare for wartime food shortages before 1914. By contrast, France enacted two tariffs to protect domestic agriculture in the decades before the war,

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<sup>1</sup> "Mr. Chamberlain's campaign: The meeting in St. Andrew's Hall" *Times* 7 Oct. 1903: 5.

and as result produced 88 percent of its own wheat and 99 percent of its own meat in the period 1909-1913.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Germany imposed a tariff on imported food in 1902.<sup>3</sup>

Endemic hunger also proved difficult to solve, but for ideological rather than political reasons. Even after social scientists discovered so-called structural poverty, Britain remained wedded to the classic liberal conception of society as a collection of free individuals, each responsible more or less for himself. Under this rubric, the poor were to blame for their own predicament and could escape it only by their own initiative. To facilitate such "self-help," organizations like the BFRL and NFRA chose to fight hunger not by boosting wages or handing out food, but by teaching the poor how to feed themselves better on less money. Controversially, this strategy presumed that many of the poor were "ignorant." Some contemporaries and many historians have argued that, in its proper context, this supposed ignorance was actually a subtle form of genius – a counterintuitive, but nevertheless effective system of household management tailored to the financial constraints, nutritional requirements, and culinary preferences of the working-class family. However, the prevalence of alcoholism does cast a dispiriting shadow over this more optimistic interpretation of working-class domesticity: perhaps to escape the drudgery of factory work and slum life, perhaps in the misguided pursuit of manliness, many poor men spent at the pub the money that would have bought a healthy, productive future for their children. In truth, working-class housekeeping suffered not only from low wages, but also from the self-destructive elements of its own culture. Moreover, many of the reformers who condemned working-class ignorance genuinely sympathized with the poor and wanted to help them. Reformers were not necessarily self-conscious ideologues, but rather products of contemporary British culture.<sup>4</sup> Due to their influence, Britain did not build any robust collective institutions for relieving hunger before the war. Some local education authorities provided meals to their students, but on widely variable terms; the workhouse was a punitive and dehumanizing last resort for the truly desperate. Britain did stand out among its European contemporaries in this regard: as Dorothy Peel discovered for herself on a wartime trip to Paris, France had many more workplace canteens and school meal programs, most of them of decent quality.<sup>5</sup>

As a result of its peculiar circumstances, Britain had not prepared in an institutional or an economic sense for the food shortages that came with the First World War. However, it had developed a large, sophisticated set of ideas for food economy in the home on which it could fall back. In a characteristically liberal maneuver, the British responded to the wartime food crisis by trying to teach each other to make do with less. At the same time, the war changed the variables on which food economy had originally been formulated. Suddenly, food insecurity affected a much larger proportion of the population, including some members of the middle class. Also, under the submarine siege, hunger went from a sad, but long-term problem to an

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<sup>2</sup> W. F. Ogburn and William Jaffé, The Economic Development of Post-War France: A Survey of Production (New York: Columbia UP, 1929) 471-472; see also Eugene Owen, The Méline Tariff: French Agriculture and Nationalist Economic Policy (New York: Columbia UP, 1944).

<sup>3</sup> Avner Offer, The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 1991) 331-334.

<sup>4</sup> This idea is not new. Probably its most ardent advocate is Gertrude Himmelfarb; see Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians (New York: Vintage, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, Report of Visit to Paris – October 1st to 8th 1917, by Dorothy Peel, Kate Manley, and Herman Senn, Women, War, and Society Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

existential, short-term one. Many years later, David Lloyd George himself told Parliament that "we came nearer to defeat owing to food shortage than we did from anything else."<sup>6</sup> These dire circumstances seemed to demand single-mindedness of purpose from all social classes in all endeavors, including food economy. This collectivist mindset informed how food reformers wrote and spoke about the poor. At its most mature, the food economy campaign did not try to reform anyone so much as to draw her into a collective effort, to make her an equal partner in a common patriotic endeavor. For Dorothy Peel, this change went more than skin deep – she actually developed genuine Labour political sympathies, at least in the immediate context of the war. Though the fundamental idea behind food economy was still traditionally liberal, it was softer in its formulation and in its delivery.

For much the same reason, food economy forced a temporary adjustment in prevailing attitudes about women. Catering and cooking were clearly "women's work" by the gender division of labor at the time. For food economy to succeed, it had to appeal first and foremost to the women who would put into practice. To this end, the official food economy campaign lionized women in grandiloquent, nearly hyperbolic language. According to government propaganda, the country depended on women, the quartermasters of the home front, to save it from starvation and guarantee victory in the war. Admittedly, this sort of rhetoric was not entirely new. Mrs. Beeton had compared the mistress of a well-run home to the "commander of an army" back in the 1850s and 1860s.<sup>7</sup> Food reformers had long believed that working-class housewives had the power to restore the imperial grandeur of the British "race," if they would just learn how to cook and keep house properly. However, the government itself had never before empowered women as veritable soldiers, let alone with such enthusiasm. The food economy campaign symbolically conferred citizenship – or a meaningful role in the life of the nation and in the fight against tyranny as soldiers on the kitchen front – to British women. Food economy even convinced Sir Alfred Mond to speak up in favor of women's suffrage in the debate over the Representation of the People Bill in 1917. Despite its rhetoric, food economy unfortunately did not lead to a larger role in civic leadership for women. Indeed, suffragists eventually gave up on food economy as the men in charge seemed to make a mess of it. Only a few women – Dorothy Peel, Kate Manley, Maud Pember Reeves, Lady Chance, and Florence Petty – managed to mould a successful wartime career around food.

Despite its ideological significance, food economy simply could not compensate for the shortages that Britain faced during the war. Few of the surviving sources lend much insight into how or whether average Britons followed the advice of the food economy campaigns. A few pledge drives and opinion surveys yielded positive results and one – in King's Lynn, Norfolk – did not. A surprisingly large proportion of people did not seem to know much about food economy at all, despite the large scale of the campaign, especially once the government took the lead in 1917. Moreover, even if someone made a food economy pledge, he or she may not have done anything tangible to follow through on it. Indirect measures – such as interest in cooking instruction and autobiographical anecdotes – paint at best a mixed picture of food economy in practice. More generally, food economy did little to arrest rapidly rising prices, to straighten out

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<sup>6</sup> Hansard HC Deb. 10 March 1936, vol. 309: 2030-2031, also quoted in Alan Wilt, Food for War: Agriculture and Rearmament in Britain before the Second World War (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2001) 1.

<sup>7</sup> Isabella Beeton, Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management, ed. Nicola Humble (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2000) 7.

kinks in the supply chain, or to assuage the anger of organized labor. Consumption tracked more closely with price than with the presence or absence of food economy propaganda. When prices spiked in the spring and summer of 1917, consumption fell accordingly. When the Ministry of Food cut prices by nearly 25 percent, consumption climbed back up to normal levels despite the best efforts of Sir Arthur Yapp and the second official food economy campaign. Sadly, most British propaganda on diet and health in the interwar period fared no better than did food economy. Britons tended to respond more favorably to commercial advertising of questionable veracity than to the advice of physicians and scientists.<sup>8</sup>

In the end, of course, food economy gave way to its antithesis – compulsory rationing. Food economy was a decentralized, market-oriented, education-based solution to a temporary economic dislocation. It strove to maintain, if at the same time to shape, individual liberty. By contrast, rationing was a centralized, state-oriented, coercion-based solution. It abrogated individual liberty for the good of the entire community. In other words, the imposition of rationing was the complete failure of food economy and a setback for British liberalism generally. However, rationing was not a panacea and did measure up to the fears of its many critics. It was staggering in its scale and complexity. The paper trail started at the home, went to the retailer, the wholesaler, and then to the importer or domestic marketer, with stops at the local food office or maybe even the Ministry of Food itself in London. In general, the entire population had to register with a local food office and with one or more retailers for the purchase of rationed foods, though special provisions existed for those who traveled, moved houses, performed heavy physical labor, lived in a residential institution, grew their own food, and so on.<sup>9</sup> A large black market did not emerge, but tens of thousands of people were fined or jailed for contravening food regulations.<sup>10</sup> Rationing and its associated food production schemes undoubtedly caused a number of market distortions, some of which were counterproductive to the goal of feeding the population at a lower cost.<sup>11</sup> Yet, for all its shortcomings, rationing was somewhat popular, especially because it leveled consumption across all social classes. Working people no longer felt as if they alone had to bear the brunt of the food crisis. Lord Rhondda came in for considerable criticism during his tenure as food controller, but was remembered fondly after his untimely death in July 1918. His funeral procession stretched on for nearly a mile.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> James Vernon, Hunger: A Modern History (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007) 196-235.

<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, no one has written a scholarly description of how rationing worked at the local level during the First World War. This account is drawn from studying the extensive collection of documents from the Ministry of Food at the Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>10</sup> In the fairly typical week ending 27 April 1918, the Ministry of Food counted 748 successful prosecutions for violations of its own orders. See United Kingdom, Ministry of Food, Weekly Enforcement Guide 4 May 1918: 1, GD Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>11</sup> For example, a scheme to regulate the trade in domestic meat unwisely including a schedule of falling producer prices at the end of 1917 and beginning of 1918. In other words, over the course of the winter, prices for meat would fall. Logically, most farmers rushed their animals to market to take advantage of higher prices at the front end of the schedule, leading to a dramatic fall off in supplies at the back end. See L. Margaret Barnett, British Food Policy During the First World War (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985) 137-141.

<sup>12</sup> "The late Lord Rhondda: Funeral at Llanwern," Times 8 July 1918: 11.



After the war, older food reformers returned more or less to their pre-1914 habits. The NFRA changed its name to the Food Education Society (FES) to reinforce its traditionally liberal outlook. One of its first postwar publications compared the First World War to the Boer War. In both cases, recruiting for the armed forces had revealed the poor physical health of Britain's young men. In light of this revelation, the FES intended to redouble its effort to educate the public about the health benefits of a proper diet.<sup>13</sup> As late as 1937, its indefatigable secretary, Charles Hecht, still held out hope against all experience to the contrary that typical Britons would heed his advice, though he also recognized the powerful forces aligned against him. In a speech before a conference much like the ones he had organized before the war, Hecht remarked that people had come to trust too much in medicine to cure what ailed them:

The gravest obstacle to education in nutrition is that the present generation is content if its symptoms of disease be relieved; it feels no urge to seek the source of the trouble, to grapple with its roots. . . . The hope of the future lies in education in dietetics and in preventive medicine generally, coupled with the instruction of the children and adolescents of to-day, whose minds are still plastic, in the elements of biology and physiology and food values.<sup>14</sup>

Though his faith in education and individual initiative remained intact, Hecht did deemphasize the old rhetoric of "ignorance." He spared housewives and instead excoriated doctors and scientists, the Board of Education, the Ministry of Health, the BBC, advertisers, and the press in general for creating an environment of misinformation about nutrition in which anyone, no matter how well-intentioned, could hardly succeed in eating right. The FES also ramped up its campaign for legislative reforms that would facilitate its education-based program. It secured the pledges of more than 100 members of the postwar Parliament to protect the purity of food, to improve the quality of institutional and school meals, and to require basic cooking and food storage facilities in homes.<sup>15</sup> In the meantime, the BFRL passed off the Educational Health and Food Campaign to another organization, but continued to lobby for a "standard" for bread, ideally enforced through legislation. The war had not completely revolutionized the FES or BFRL, but rather, had morphed them slightly into more sympathetic, more legislatively proactive versions of their former selves.

The next generation of food reformers was even more attuned to the cultural implications of diet and led a large postwar expansion of nutrition science. In the 1920s, increasing official interest in nutrition led to the construction of state of the art laboratories in Aberdeen and in Cambridge. Moreover, British scientists studied diet and health across Africa and Asia and had a hand in crafting policy on colonial development. Some of this interwar research "blamed the victim" – whether in Britain itself or abroad in the empire – for his or her unhealthful and unreasonable dietary habits. However, much of it pushed past old shibboleths and took seriously cultural and economic constraints on individual behavior. The anthropologist Audrey Richards recognized that her subjects often chose what to eat for reasons entirely different from health. Rather, the value system in which a society operated could determine its diet to a large degree.

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<sup>13</sup> Food Education Society, Lessons of the War, rep. from National Health Oct. 1919, SP Gt Brit, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford, CA.

<sup>14</sup> Food Education Society, "Some obstacles to education in nutrition," by Charles Hecht, 25th Annual Conference of Educational Associations, 8 Jan. 1937, 42-43, 7391.r.22, British Library, London.

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Though Richards's own research focused mostly on Africans, she nonetheless believed that it applied equally well to westerners. This concept of social nutrition was integral to the rise of new surveying and planning methods in the 1930s and during the Second World War. Richards probably did not take her cue directly from Lady Chance or Dorothy Peel, who had tried to accommodate working-class culture in the food economy campaign two decades earlier. However, she shared with them a common appreciation for the part society played in shaping diet, which suggests that the slow shift away from Victorian individualism initiated during the war continued into the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>16</sup>

The advent of social nutrition led to disappointingly few changes in collective feeding and, unfortunately, did not immediately resolve the stubborn problem of hunger among the poor. Overall, the number of collective feeding institutions probably contracted in the 1920s. Many factories had opened their own canteens during the war, but promptly closed them after the resumption of peace. The experiment with national kitchens also died out quickly. Bad cooking and lack of facilities plagued the school meals programs of most local education authorities. Meanwhile, the bleak interwar economy brought relatively high unemployment, especially in those areas of the country dedicated to traditional export industries like coal mining and cotton textile manufacturing.<sup>17</sup> Under these conditions, the number of families with precarious food security remained discouragingly high. According to John Boyd Orr, who published Food, Health and Income in 1936, as much as half of Britain's population suffered from malnutrition. Even if their diet met minimum needs for energy, it was still deficient in the minerals and vitamins necessary for good health. Plain hunger had not entirely disappeared either. In The Road to Wigan Pier, George Orwell lamented the difficulty of feeding the typical working-class family on unemployment assistance – or, for that matter, on prevailing wages. True, the working-class aversion to brown bread, fruits, and vegetables contributed significantly to the problem. Like many before him, Orwell condemned his countrymen, rich and poor alike, as "exceptionally ignorant about and wasteful of food." Nevertheless, he also lamented the physical toll wrought by a sterile diet of white bread, margarine, and sugary tea:

The physical average in the industrial towns is terribly low, lower even than in London. In Sheffield you have the feeling of walking among a population of troglodytes. . . . The most obvious sign of under-nourishment is the badness of everybody's teeth. In Lancashire you would have to look for a long time before you saw a working-class person with good natural teeth. Indeed, you see very few people with natural teeth at all, apart from the children; and even the children's teeth have a frail bluish appearance which means, I suppose, calcium deficiency.<sup>18</sup>

To protest their plight and prove their strength, unemployed men in Britain's industrial centers staged a series of "hunger marches" between the wars, culminating with a highly-publicized and sympathetic one from Jarrow to London in 1936. The historian James Vernon has argued that

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<sup>16</sup> Vernon 118-158.

<sup>17</sup> In the period 1921-1937, British unemployment hovered between 10 and 20 percent – not far off the European average, but historically high. See Barry Eichengreen, "The inter-war economy in a European mirror," and Tim Hatton, "Unemployment and the labour market in inter-war Britain," The Economic History of Britain Since 1700, 2nd ed., vol. 2: 1860-1939 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1994) 304-306, 312-313, 359-387.

<sup>18</sup> George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (London: Harcourt, 1958) 96, 98.

memories of the "hungry thirties" helped to prop up the incipient welfare state when it finally came in the mid-1940s.<sup>19</sup>

At the national level, a more robust agricultural policy did not necessarily redound positively on food security. Soon after the war ended, the government began to dismantle the economic controls and interventions it had put in place, including those for food.<sup>20</sup> The Ministry of Food itself shut down on 31 March 1921 and its remaining staff and stocks were rolled into the Board of Trade.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the new Ministry of Agriculture phased out most incentives for greater home production of food. A scheme to guarantee a minimum price for domestically-grown wheat collapsed almost immediately due to a postwar crash in global food prices. Indeed, through most of the 1920s, the government avoided protecting or subsidizing agriculture directly.<sup>22</sup> However, as food prices slid even further in the early 1930s, the government finally extended a safety net for domestic farmers. It created marketing boards with broad powers to regulate production and quality and implemented outright subsidies and other price supports.<sup>23</sup> The intention was mostly to protect farmers from the Great Depression and not necessarily to boost domestic food production. In 1937, William Morrison, the minister of agriculture, actually spoke of the two goals as mutually exclusive:

The two objectives – of producing the maximum quantity of food to meet our requirements in time of war on the one hand, and of the efficient development of our agriculture in time of peace on the other – not only demand very different methods but, to a material extent, are opposed to each other. . . . In the opinion of the Government, to put agriculture on a war-time footing with all the regulations, the regimentation of the farming community, and the heavy costs that it would unavoidably involve, would not be practicable at the present time.<sup>24</sup>

In the end, British farm policy accomplished neither of the objectives Morrison had outlined. According to the historian Richard Perren, the agricultural depression of the 1920s and 1930s was even worse than the one of the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>25</sup> As farm incomes and production sagged at home, imports had to increase correspondingly. In the late 1930s, food accounted for 32 percent of all imports – more than any other category of goods, including industrial feedstock. In 1938, Britain imported 50 percent of its meat, 70 percent of its cheese and sugar, 80 percent of its fruit, and 90 percent of its cereals and fats. Altogether, about 60 percent of calories consumed in Britain originated overseas.<sup>26</sup> Superficially, food security was lower in 1939 than it had been in 1914.

However, the government had learned from the experience of 1914 at least to plan for the economic dislocations that would inevitably accompany a modern war. Hitler's rise to power in Germany prompted a great deal of anxiety across the English Channel. Less than a year after the

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<sup>19</sup> Vernon 236-271.

<sup>20</sup> Eichengreen 294.

<sup>21</sup> Hansard HC Deb. 6 April 1921 vol. 140: 264.

<sup>22</sup> Edith Holt Whetham et al., The Agrarian History of England and Wales, vol. 8: 1914-1939 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1978) 129-132, 163-165,

<sup>23</sup> Whetham et al. 241-263.

<sup>24</sup> Hansard HC Deb. 27 May 1937 vol. 324: 432.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Perren, Agriculture in Depression 1870-1940 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> "Food defence: Imports and their control: The help of the traders," Times 29 Jan. 1938: 13; Wilts 86-87.

remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936, the Board of Trade established a Food (Defence Plans) Department that, true to its name, tried to arrange for feeding the country if another war broke out. The department built up an extensive "shadow" organization for food control, identifying key personnel who could quickly step in to administer a revived system of centralized procurement and rationing. At the outbreak of a war, food control committees would convene in most local authorities. Knowledgeable tradesmen would take over the buying and distributing of food for the state through a revived Ministry of Food. On a more practical level, the government stored up about a month's supply of wheat, sugar, and oil in 1938 and 1939 – not much, but more than in 1914.<sup>27</sup> When war finally came in September 1939, the British government was far more ready to handle the accompanying food shortages. Indeed, rationing itself began on 8 January 1940, only eighteen weeks after the fighting began.<sup>28</sup> By contrast with the First World War, no serious debate about whether the free market could provide enough food under war conditions ever materialized. In other words, the experience of the First World War had discredited the faith in the free market that had guided the Royal Commission on Supply of Food in 1905.

Broadly, the progress of the women's movement after the war mirrored that of food security. On the surface, it seemed like women should have made a fantastic leap in social standing after the First World War. The press and politicians alike had lauded them for their distinguished wartime service – for filling shells in Woolwich, harvesting apples in Herefordshire, tending the wounded in Flanders, even directing the food economy campaign from London. Some suffragists expected that these successes would translate into a long-term change in gender attitudes. A few parliamentarians even argued that women needed the vote to protect their newfound prominence in public life after the war. Of course, in 1918, Parliament did extend the franchise to women over thirty; only ten years later, another Representation of the People Act equalized the terms of suffrage for men and for women. Despite these momentous improvements in women's political fortunes, however, many women seemed to retreat into their homes again after the war. A slightly smaller proportion of adult women worked in 1921 than in 1911.<sup>29</sup> The interwar boom in consumer-oriented light industries notwithstanding, women's employment did not bounce back until after the Second World War.<sup>30</sup> The historian Jane Lewis has estimated that only 10 percent of married women engaged in paid employment during the interwar period.<sup>31</sup> By 1921, all of the women's armed forces auxiliaries had been disbanded. Even the women's movement itself seemed to place the domestic before the economic or the political in its advocacy and rhetoric.

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<sup>27</sup> Wilts 67.

<sup>28</sup> "Rationing to-day: Directions in use of coupons: Meat registration," *Times* 8 Jan. 1940: 6.

<sup>29</sup> In 1921, 5,701,000 of 18,483,000 women of working age had jobs, or about 31 percent. In 1911, 5,424,000 of 16,789,000 women of working age had jobs, or about 32 percent (United Kingdom, Board of Trade, *Statistical Abstract for the United Kingdom for Each of the Fifteen Years from 1911 to 1925* (London: HMSO, 1927) 74).

<sup>30</sup> Jane Humphries, "Women and paid work," *Women's History: Britain 1850-1945*, ed. June Purvis (New York: St. Martin's, 1995) 85-105; Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars* (London: Pandora, 1989); Miriam Glucksmann, *Women Assemble: Women Workers and the New Industries in Interwar Britain* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1969).

<sup>31</sup> Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Brighton, UK: Wheatsheaf, 1984) 150.

Historians have explained this apparent reversal of fortune as the result of both external and internal forces. On the one hand, men worked to exclude women from the workforce. Parliament passed some small measures of social reform that purported to aid women as housewives and mothers, but also defined them as such. Jobless men, especially veterans, staged sometimes violent protests against the employment of women.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, many women did not mind giving up paid employment and going back to keeping house, which could be a personally rewarding and socially-prestigious undertaking.<sup>33</sup> The experience of food economy during the First World War lends some credibility to the second argument, though it does not necessarily detract from the first. At least in the context of food, the war glorified women's role in the home, elevating it to the level of national consequence. Suffragists themselves had played along with the official line about the importance of housewives to the defense of the nation. In other words, women had not objected to traditional gender roles and had even indulged in them to some extent. Indeed, suffragists may have drawn the lesson from the war that traditional domesticity was a vehicle for improving the political position of women. Wartime suffragists such as Eleanor Rathbone, who had experienced the food economy campaign firsthand, led the women's rights movement in the postwar decade. The domestic turn in the suffrage movement cannot be directly linked to the experience of food economy, but the two had similar visions of women's part in national life.

Despite the apparent restoration of the pre-1914 gender balance, women's wartime service had left an impression on British society. In 1914, the political leadership had not welcomed women's participation in the war effort. Women demonstrated their mettle in voluntary service, but the reticence to engage them officially lingered on for an unfortunately long time. By contrast, the government co-opted women into official service far more quickly during the Second World War. Six days before the war even began, the Times ran an article about the imminent mobilization of a large number of women. The British Red Cross had lined up 60,000 volunteers for auxiliary nursing. The Women's Land Army had already enlisted 9000 to which it hoped to add a further 5000. Moreover, the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), a women's adjunct to the armed forces, was already recruiting, offering up to 28s. 8d. per day for a commandant.<sup>34</sup> In December 1941, the government actually began to conscript childless women between twenty and thirty to work either for the armed forces or in industry. Eventually, a

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<sup>32</sup> See Deirdre Beddoe, Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars (London: Pandora, 1989); Miriam Glucksmann, Women Assemble: Women Workers and the New Industries in Interwar Britain (New York: Routledge, 1990); Martin Pugh, Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 2000) 159, and Susan Kent, Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993).

<sup>33</sup> Joanna Bourke, "Housewifery in working-class England 1860-1914," Past and Present 143 (May 1994): 167-197; Judy Giles, "A home of one's own: Women and domesticity in England 1918-1950," Women's Studies International Forum 16.3 (1993): 239-253; Judy Giles, Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain 1900-1950 (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), and Alison Light, Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism between the Wars (New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> "Women's part in emergency: Many volunteers: Training the land army," Times 28 Aug. 1939: 7.

majority of women joined in some sort of war work, whether on a volunteer or paid basis.<sup>35</sup> Women doctors were even permitted to join the ATS and serve near the front, though they could not be commissioned in the Royal Army Medical Corps.<sup>36</sup> There had been progress – if complete equality had not been achieved – since the War Office had told Elsie Inglis to "go home and sit still."

The story of early twentieth-century food reform demonstrates the resilience of the liberal value system. The British political class adhered to free markets and individual initiative even in the face of the discovery of structural poverty and of the existential threat of a world war. Rationing was a last resort after all liberal measures had decisively failed. At the same time, resilient is an appropriate description because it implies not only strength, but also adaptability. In this case, food reformers were willing to cast aside their class and gender stereotypes in order to preserve the economic and personal liberty that mattered to them most. This attitude adjustment may have failed in the moment, but it nonetheless persisted after the war had passed. Certainly these subtle shifts did not lead immediately to justice for the poor and for women. Many trade unionists, socialists, and suffragists were dismayed at the slow pace of change in British society. The transition to social democracy had to wait until after another depression and world war. Even then, old-fashioned liberalism did not die out completely, as the careers of Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair can attest. For its part, social democracy did not solve all of Britain's problems, especially its declining economic competitiveness. Rather, Britain muddled through, keeping some convenient old ideas, throwing out others as necessary, and then retrieving them later. In the words of Edmund Burke, it had both a disposition to preserve and an ability to improve, taken together.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Sonya Rose, Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945 (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2003) 109; Jose Harris, "War and social history: Britain and the home front during the Second World War," Contemporary European History 1.1 (Mar. 1992): 23.

<sup>36</sup> Mark Harrison, Medicine and Victory: British Military Medicine in the Second World War (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2004) 34.

<sup>37</sup> Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, ed. Frank Turner and Darrin McMahon (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2003) 133.

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