

Dear Doctor Goebbels—Your British Friends Are Feeding Fine! George Orwell

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The disappearing raspberry, the invisible egg, and the onions which can be smelled but not seen, are phenomena we are all familiar with. Only because of the deadly harm they are capable of doing to morale are these stale conjuring tricks worth mentioning.

When an article is controlled in price it promptly disappears from the market. Now fruit, fish, eggs, and most vegetables cannot be kept for an indefinite time.

If they suddenly disappear it is a safe bet that they are being sold on the Q.T. at an illegal price, and, in fact, any one with moneyed acquaintances knows very well that they are being sold.

Eggs, for instance, are available in large quantities at 4d. each; I am informed that they always figure in the bill as "tinned peas."

Petrol, also, seems easy enough to get if you can pay about twice the proper price for it.

And apart from downright law-breaking, you have only to put your nose inside any smart hotel or restaurant to see the most obvious evasion of the spirit of the food regulations.

The "one dish" rule, for instance, is habitually broken, but the infringement does not count, because the extra dish of meat or fish is renamed hors-d'oeuvres.

In any event the fact that food eaten in restaurants is unrationed favours the man with a large income and abundant spare time. It would be easy for anyone with more than £2,000 a year to live without ever using his ration book.

But does this kind of thing really matter? And if so, why and how does it matter?

It doesn't matter because of the extra material consumed. And since this fact is the favourite get-out of selfish people who buy under-the-counter raspberries and use up petrol in going to the races, it is necessary to admit it, and then put it in its place.

The actual wastage of material by the wealthy is negligible because the wealthy consist of very few people.

It is the common people, who are and must be the big consumers of all the commodities, who matter.

If you took away all the extra meat, fish and sugar that find their way into the smart hotels, and divided them among the general population, no appreciable difference would be made.

For that matter, if you taxed all large incomes out of existence, it still would not make much difference to the taxes the rest of us would have to pay.

The common people receive most of the national income, just as they eat most of the food and wear out most of the clothes, because they constitute the enormous majority.

The raspberries now disappearing down favoured throats in Harrogate and Torquay do not have much direct effect on the Battle of the Atlantic. Therefore, it is argued, what does it matter if there is a certain amount of minor unfairness? Since the food situation as a whole is hardly

affected, why shouldn't half a million fortunate people have as good a time as circumstances permit?

This argument is a complete fallacy, because it leaves out of account the effect of envy on morale, on the "we-are-all-in-it-together" feeling which is absolutely necessary in time of war. There is no way of making war without lowering the general standard of living. The essential act of war is to divert labour from consumption goods to armaments, which means that the common people must eat less, work longer hours, put up with fewer amusements.

And why should they do so—at any rate, how can you expect them to do so—when they have before their eyes a small minority who are suffering no privations whatever?

So long as it is known that the rarer kinds of food are habitually bootlegged, how can you ask people to cut down their milk consumption and be enthusiastic about oatmeal and potatoes?

"War Socialism" can have an important moral effect even when it is of no importance statistically. The few shiploads of oranges that reached England recently are an example.

I wonder how many of those oranges got to the children in the back streets of London. If they had been shared out equally it would only have been a question of one or two oranges apiece for the whole population.

In terms of vitamins it would have made no difference whatever; but it would have given a meaning to the current talk about "equality of sacrifice."

Experience shows that human beings can put up with nearly anything so long as they feel that they are being fairly treated.

The Spanish Republicans put up with hardships which we as yet have hardly dreamed of. For the last year of the civil war the Republican Army was fighting almost without cigarettes: the soldiers put up with it because it was the same for all of them, general and private alike.

And we can do the same, if necessary.

If we are honest we must admit that, air raids apart, the civil population has not had to suffer much hardship—nothing compared with what we went through in 1918, for instance.

It is later, in the moment of crisis, when it may be necessary suddenly to impose the most drastic restrictions of every kind, that our national solidarity will be tested.

If we guard against that moment now, crack down on the Black Market, catch half a dozen food-hogs and petrol-wanglers and give them stiff enough sentences to frighten others of the same kind, prohibit the more blatant kinds of luxury, and, in general, prove that equality of sacrifice is not merely a phrase, we shall be all right.

But at present—and you can test this statement by having a look round the grillroom of any smart hotel, should you succeed in getting past the commissionaires—Dr. Goebbels's endless gibes about "British plutocracy" are hardly needed.

A few score thousand of idle and selfish people are doing his work for him unpaid.

The End