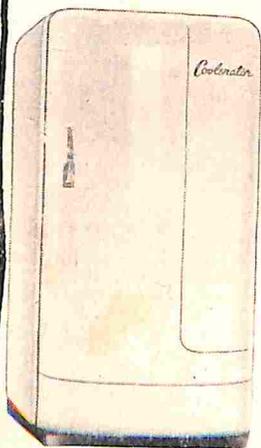


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## What goes on here

by PAYSON S. WILD, JR.

After eight bleak years of "austerity," the British are facing a changed position in the world. Professor Wild tells us what's behind their difficult situation and why aiding them now is vital to our own security



Almost everybody knows that the British have been having a tough time at home. The word for it in England is "austerity," but that cold expression means in human terms that the outlook is pretty bleak and that real privations are the order of the day. The English themselves always hasten to say that they aren't starving and that they are getting along, but their traditional habit of understatement can't hide the fact that life is extremely uncomfortable in many respects.

If American housewives had to get along with about twenty cents' worth of meat, two ounces of butter and two ounces of bacon per person a week, they would probably be tempted to use some words more colorful and explosive than "austere." In addition, with only one fresh egg per person a month, little sugar and an extremely limited milk supply, planning meals and preparing food for a family would tax the ingenuity and patience of a saint. But that's the way it is in England now. Furthermore, standing in line ("queuing up") for virtually everything that's sold is a regular part of the daily routine.

And clothes: They're strictly rationed too, on a point or coupon system so stringent that the purchase of a suit just about exhausts the allowance for fourteen months. Gasoline (petrol) for pleasure driving was no longer available after October 1, and money for travel abroad was likewise out of the question. Fresh fruit is rarely obtainable and canned goods, including fruit juices, are rationed on a point basis. A can of salmon, for example, takes more points than one person is entitled to for a whole month.

The British have to "make do" with potatoes, vegetables (very often Brussels sprouts), slender bits of meat and unappetizing (to many Americans) puddings for dessert. On top of all this is the matter of heat. Coal is short, electric

power uncertain and, therefore, trying to keep warm becomes almost a full-time occupation.

Living isn't much fun under these conditions. If you have to be forever standing in line for meager bits of food, if you can't get warm in your own house, if small pleasures like smoking or an occasional cocktail or other drink come too high, if using the car is impossible, and if your clothes become patched and threadbare, then it takes a superhuman disposition to remain cheerful or to discover anything besides drab monotony in the daily round. And income taxes are terrific.

Of course this somber state of affairs in Britain is only part of the larger situation in Europe as a whole, and that's a subject to be discussed another time in connection with the so-called "Marshall Plan." Our relations with Britain — political, economic, historical and intellectual — have been so special, and the United Kingdom occupies such a key position in our global strategy, that particular attention to England alone is virtually a must if we are to keep our bearings in this muddled world. Probably most Americans are aware of the fact that Britain is in trouble, but the reasons for her current plight are more obscure. Why is it that the British suffer from such shortages more than two years after the end of hostilities? What's the matter, and what does it mean to us?

Britain for so long was top-dog in the world, the greatest power throughout the 19th century, that adjusting to the changed circumstances isn't easy, particularly for Englishmen. To find themselves dependent upon the United States, which in the past was very much the junior partner and also a fairly constant critic, is perplexing and humiliating, but most British people are plodding doggedly on, weary and worn after nearly eight years of very plain living, and struggling to prepare themselves for a totally different kind of world position from anything they have previously known.

#### The "Why" of Austerity

As to the basic weakness there is virtually no dispute: Britain is like a family

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