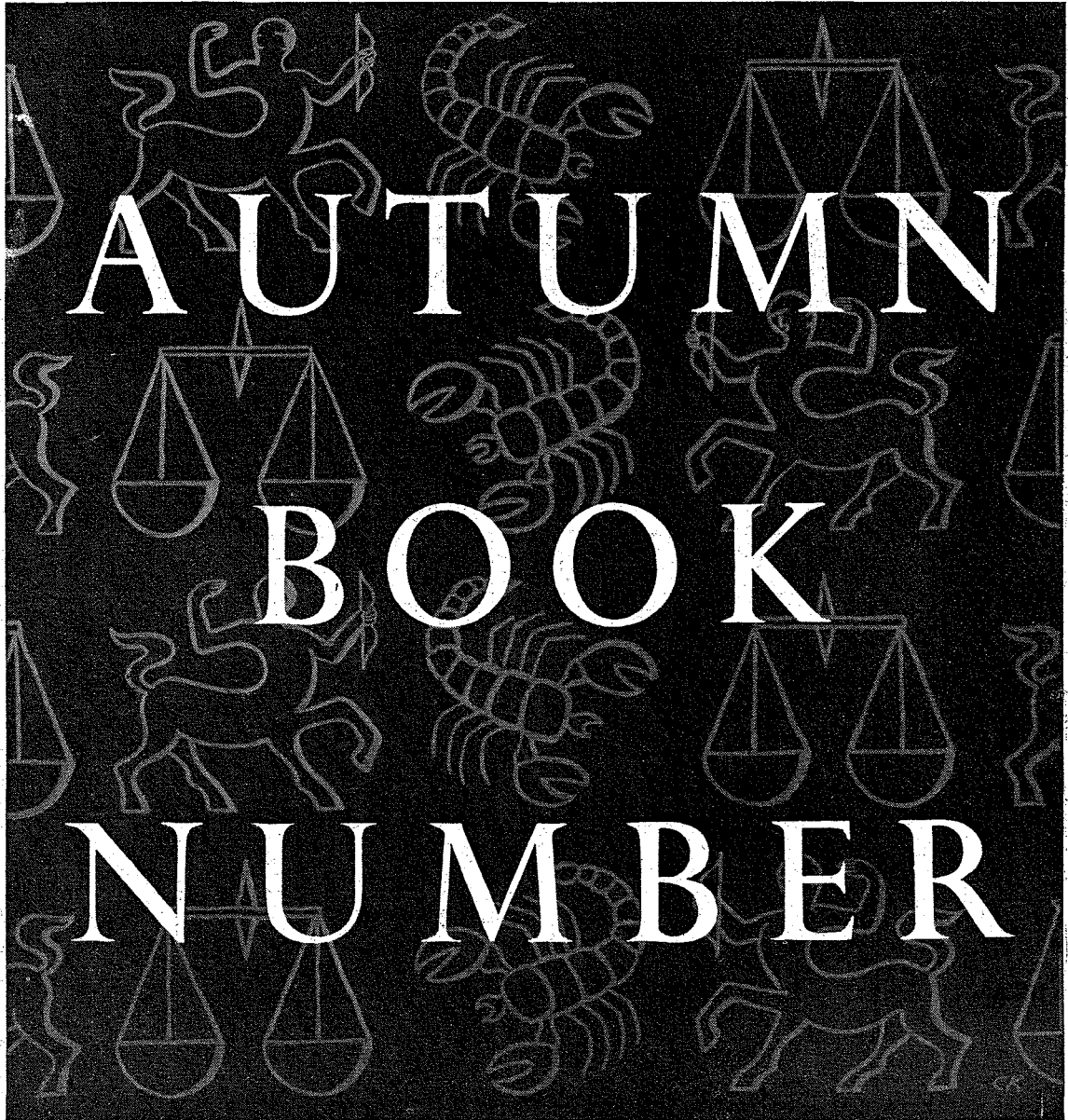


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'The Starting-Handle to World Recovery'

By the Rt. Hon. S. M. BRUCE

MANY of you will remember Sir John Boyd Orr's interesting and inspiring broadcast address* in which he outlined the proposals he recently submitted to the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations held at Copenhagen. The Conference unanimously endorsed Sir John's objectives of raising standards of living and stabilising prices, and an international Preparatory Commission was appointed to work out the practical steps necessary to give effect to Sir John's great conception. It was provided that this Preparatory Commission should have an independent chairman and this post I have recently accepted. I wish now to give you the background to Sir John's proposals, in the hope that I may enlist your interest and support in the difficult task which the Preparatory Commission will undertake when it meets in Washington on the twenty-eighth of this month.

The first move in connection with food and agriculture was initiated by the Australian delegation at the meeting of the Assembly of the League of Nations in September 1935. Australia's action was inspired by the fact that it was established beyond any

question that millions of people in the world, including a high percentage of those in the richer countries, such as the United States and Britain, were not receiving the food necessary for health. Side by side with this lack of food, world agriculture was producing food far in excess of what it was able to sell and was passing through a period of grave depression and even disaster. In face of this situation, the idea was conceived of attempting to remove the agricultural depression by improving the food standards of those who were suffering from undernutrition. This idea was summarised in the short and effective phrase, 'the marriage of health and agriculture'. The reception which the Australian proposals received far exceeded the expectations of those of us who were associated with them. An authoritative report was prepared by a mixed commission, appointed by the League of Nations, which substantiated all the facts we had put forward and is still regarded as the textbook on this important subject. Warm support was received from the majority of the member nations of the League of Nations and nutritional committees were formed in over twenty countries to raise the standard of food of their people.

* Published in THE LISTENER on September 26

tre. But this Christian Democrat victory does not fit the pigeons at all, and it only goes to prove that we should not be too ready to believe that religion in Europe is always right-wing, and therefore, inference, obsolete and reactionary. A closer view of the political scene will show that that is pure fantasy.

Well, politics are important, but I saw no sign that the Germans as a whole were vitally interested. You cannot expect people to be politically awake on 1,500 calories a day. That does not refer to the political leaders, they are active and voluble enough—but the masses, no. The ordinary people are apathetic and disillusioned. I could see a marked difference in them after being a year away from Germany. For one thing their attitude to us is much more sullen, non-co-operative, and they have lost confidence even in our will to put them on their feet. There have been too many unfortunate setbacks, too, and I am certain that the closing down of one of the principal steelworks owing to a lack of coal has blackened the outlook all the more. Up till recently the Germans had some faint hope of increased production with all that it might mean for desperately needed consumer goods at the beginnings of an export trade. Now that has vanished.

We must face this I think: that both the morale and the physique of the Germans in our zone are on the downward slide. I am not talking only from hearsay; I spent all the time I could amongst the people themselves, seeing how they lived and how they ate and slept. Not only everything I have heard but everything I have seen confirms the belief that this next winter is going to be the worst of a problem and by next spring things may be disastrous. Rations are better now than they were a year ago. Clothes, blankets, boots, shelter—all these things the masses are worse off for. Resistance to disease is definitely weaker, and there are no longer any prize reserves left. That is very significant. Last winter the Germans were able to live on their own fat to a great extent and that undoubtedly helped a great deal to win the winter battle.

And large there is nothing left of that now. I am sure this is the correct picture. People who come out to the British zone and have dinner at the Atlantic in Hamburg, and then possibly stroll into one of the few remaining black-market night clubs, may get a different impression, but it would be mistaken.

What is to be done about it? I know there are some in England who would say: why worry, the Germans asked for it, let them get what's coming to them. But that simply cannot be the view of anyone who looks ahead, and of course not of the Military Government. It is a question at all of being soft-hearted or sentimental. Personally I have not changed my mind about the German character, and I am under no illusion about German bad faith and deliberate deception after their defeat in 1918. But the dominant fact surely is this: the European situation, and the world position for that matter, is radically different from what it was in 1918. If we have any faith in our western concepts of civilisation, we have got to see that they prevail in our part of Germany. And then even from the material point of view, from the point of view of our own survival, we cannot afford a stagnant pool of misery and disease in the middle of Europe. There is no ring-fence to be put round that sort of thing. If a rot sets in it will spread.

And now I have to admit that all the evidence shows that there is very little that can be done effectively within the framework of the local zonal economy as it is at present. Whatever aspect you take—coal, food, housing, consumer goods, currency, employment—the resources of the zone itself are not equal to the job. Any attempt to concentrate on one vital need simply means a crisis elsewhere. For instance, as things are, any allocation of coal for domestic consumption in winter will mean a further cutting down in factories. So it comes to this: no genuine relief can be brought about except by decisions made outside the zone,

in the highest quarters. No matter what the local administration may do, the machine is running down. And so one is simply forced to the conclusion that the time has come for a reconsideration of the whole position and a forthright clarification of policy, right from the top.

There is one thing at any rate that must be obvious, and that is that the Potsdam Protocol, which has hitherto been the guide for the Allied Control Council, was founded on assumptions that were unwarranted. The basic idea of the protocol was that Germany should be treated as a single economic unit. Well, it is not being treated as a single economic unit, and there does not seem the slightest chance of it.

This alone makes the other clauses unworkable—the reparations clause, for instance, and the level of industry clause. Why cannot there be a frank recognition now of this fact? Nobody wants to see an even more rigid line drawn between the eastern and western zones, but anything is surely better than deadlock. Owing to one-sided interpretation of the original directives no one in the British zone can do any systematic planning ahead; no one can see daylight, the whole area is under an artificial fog. This *Potsdämmerung* ought to be got rid of. There are quite enough obstacles without it.

There is one more thing I should like to refer to. The Americans have been much quicker off the mark than we have in giving the Germans responsibility for their own affairs. I know some of our own objections to this. But I cannot help feeling that Schumacher, the very capable leader of the Social Democrats, as well as all the other German leaders I met, had some right on their side when they spoke to me about the impediments to action, the multiplication of forms and permits, and the duplication of officials. As long as we have to work the existing system these things can hardly be avoided. There may be some danger in handing over too much and too soon, but we have to take risks some time. Why not let the Germans have a freer run and take more responsibility, keeping control only at the top level? That would not mean a change in policy, but merely that the process of handing over would be speeded up. I do not for a moment suggest that this is the key to our problem. Far from it. The main impression I brought back from Germany is that the machine of central control is creaking in all its joints, and that only drastic measures can prevent the western zone from degenerating into a slum.—*Home Service*



Ruhr miners collecting safety lamps before going down into the pit. 'Whatever aspect you take—coal, food, housing, consumer goods, currency, employment—the resources of the British zone itself are not equal to the job'

Sonnet

Winter's white labyrinth, Poseidon's power,
The solemn, moonless night, the coiling mist,
Could not deny, only delay, that hour,
When we along the darkness crept and kissed.

The great ice closed upon each beast and bird,
And we lay mute and warm in its embrace,
The soft disturbances of night we heard
Seemed only shadows rustling to their place.

They found their place, lay quiet, and were still—
Momentously the night reigned; phantomwise
The hours progressed upon their way; until
There, in the glacial silence of sunrise,

We saw the ranks of serried archers stand,
Their arrows sharp and pointed, hand by hand.

HENRY REED