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THE IMPORTANCE OF PROPER NOURISHMENT OF WORKERS IN HEAVY INDUSTRIES

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The reduction of meat protein, fat, and vitamin B₁, due to the new rationing system, is a potential danger for the hard-working home front.

The energy requirements for men doing heavy work are above 4000 calories daily with adequate amounts of protein, fat, carbohydrate, water, and salts in suitable proportions and rich in vitamins. A minimum of 80 Gm. of protein is required, a part of which (not less than 30 to 40 Gm.) should be of animal origin. The remaining 40 to 50 Gm. may be supplied by protein of vegetable origin and by the non-rationed foodstuffs, such as eggs, milk, poultry, and fish. Taking into account an average amount of meat protein of 18 per cent and the full allotment of two pounds of boneless meat a week, we get only 23.1 Gm. of protein a day. The lacking 6.9 Gm. to 16.9 Gm. of protein of animal origin from the required daily minimum must be considered as a serious deficit.

Another important fact has to be considered here. The weekly purchase of meat, fat, and cheese must not exceed 16 points. After deduction of 3 points for six ounces of butter and two for one-fourth pound of cheese, 11 points are left for two pounds of meat. Meat of this quality will contain some bone and fat, and therefore, will not have the full amount of protein mentioned above. Six ounces of butter per week, i.e., 25.7 Gm. a day, for cooking and eating are not sufficient. The Inter-Allied Food Commission adopted 57 Gm. daily as the minimum fat ration during the World War. The difference between the given amount of 25.7 Gm. and the required 57 Gm. can be only partly made up by the rationed products meat and cheese and the unrationed milk, eggs, and fish.

The substitution of the animal source of vitamin B₁ in pork meat by increased intake of other products rich in thiamine, such as whole wheat or enriched bread, nuts, eggs, legumes, etc., will partly relieve the need for the necessary daily minimum. Usually large amounts of bread, milk, eggs, beans, soybeans, peas, potatoes, etc., will have to be consumed in order to provide the required quantity of protein and vitamins. It can, therefore, be expected that very soon a shortage of those foodstuffs will arise. Recent reports from England emphasize an increase in the occurrence of certain deficiency diseases.

The involuntary experiment in Great Britain and in the Central European states during World War I, with reduction of food, both in quantity and quality, brought about a marked deteriora-
tion in health and endurance of the whole population.

The need for larger amounts of calories for persons performing heavy manual work is well known. The lowering of this standard may cause deleterious results for the individual himself as well as for the whole country.

At the beginning of the new nourishing system, no marked changes will be noticeable, but in a few months many complications will appear. With the lessened degree of physical resistance, more rapid exhaustion and decrease in vitality, the total output in industry will markedly decrease hand in hand with an increase in the number of accidents, prolonged duration of disability, and general morbidity. Lack of adequate rest periods, morbidity, and the weakened general physical condition will be responsible for acute and serious forms of absenteeism.

A comparison of the general situation in this country with the present situation in Great Britain, and the so often pronounced similarity shows many basic errors. The mental attitude of the working class in England, despite poor nourishment, is altogether different and must be given proper consideration. Personal contact with the dangers and cruelties of the war, and the continuous threat from aerial warfare, the short distance from the past and probably coming battle front, the scarcity of all kinds of food and other needed articles unobtainable for all without exception, developed in those men and women a peculiar mental resistance and national unity, putting the common interest far above the personal. The distant front, the lack of any kind of war experience, the low losses in life—lower than losses suffered in industry—the high income, and the false feeling of security, prevented, up to now, the average working person in America from a realization of the real dangers. The lowering of customary food habits, without a radical change in other conditions, will hardly cause an increased zeal for work.

The real physical disadvantages must be counteracted in order to prevent the previously mentioned possibilities from becoming actual. An increase in food rations, especially of meat and fat, for people employed in heavy industry and mines, is of vital importance. Two ways seem to be practicable:

1. The issuance of ten separate points per week to each person employed in national defense and doing manual work, on presentation of an acknowledgment of the factory management that no days were lost, or

2. One full meal, prepared on factory premises, planned and supervised by an experienced dietitian, using the extra meat and fat ration, plus fresh vegetables, bread, and milk, the price of which should not exceed the self costs. Those measures require a new and unexpected drain on food products, but would greatly diminish the impending danger and attract
more persons to the essential war jobs.

The distribution of artificial vitamins was abandoned in Great Britain and substituted, a long time ago, by one hot, carefully prepared, and well-balanced meal for the day and night shift. Nearly 96 per cent of all British factories employing more than 250 workers have their own cafeterias. The distribution of cooked meals in factory canteens, instead of an increase in rationing points, has the advantage that the surplus food is consumed by the persons for which it is intended and not shared with other members of the family who can manage with the general weekly allowance.

SUMMARY

The authors point to the impending danger in American industry due to the new rationing system because persons doing heavy work lack adequate amounts of protein and fats. A suggestion is made to increase the weekly meat and fat rations of miners and manual workers on defense jobs.

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OBLIGATIONS

The doctor's first duty, a very serious one, which begins, in fact, in his student days, is to acquire a reasonably full and competent knowledge of the science and art of medicine. Besides this medical knowledge, the medical student and qualified practitioner (I am speaking especially to Catholics) must see to it, that they know the correct ruling on the ethical points that may be involved in their practice. This is a really grave obligation.—Fr. A. Bonnar, O.F.M.