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AMERICA AT WAR: THE FIRST YEAR

U.S. Citizen Begins to Learn the Universal Impact of War

**Era of Austerity Brings
Uniforms, Taxes, and Rations
to Favored Land of Plenty**

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This was the land of extravagant plenty. The family's food bill had shot up 21 per cent in 27 months, but at that price the larder was full and tastes could be indulged as usual. Priorities—a strange term much in the news and having to do with national defense—made delivery of the new automobile and refrigerator and washing machine a bit uncertain, but no doubt they'd be along in time. The family had leisure and comfort. There was plenty of fuel in the basement and plenty of gas for the car. And a man could have as much coffee as he wanted while he read of shortages overseas in the Sunday papers of Dec. 7, 1941.

Defense was America's slogan and the catchword for everything. Defense on the grand scale. For defense, the papers said, 850,000 men had been called up for training by Selective Service—but people still turned in the streets to look at uniforms. For defense, Congress had appropriated some \$100,000,000,000, including \$13,000,000,000 for the defensive device Lend-Lease. For defense, the nation's current monthly expenditures were 17 per cent of its income, as against only 1 per cent during the peaceful 1930s. And all this was going to mean higher taxes for the family.

It was costly beyond a man's power to calculate, but the figures of defense were as nothing alongside the statistics of war abroad. And it was the comparison of human values especially which made Americans grateful to be living in the land of inexhaustible plenty. Even aside from death and destruction, every family in Europe had felt the impact of war in dozens of ways that couldn't happen here. Millions of men had gone into war, rather than tens of thousands into defense training; millions of women had filled their jobs. War which cost everything, rather than defense which cost only a part, had reduced the comforts, lowered the living standards, and changed the habits of an entire continent. Life was governed by ration cards. But in America there was plenty.

In the twelve months since Pearl Harbor the American family has *begun* to experience war on the home front. Almost a full year passed before gasoline rationing was extended to the entire country. More than a year will have passed before meat rationing begins next month. The sugar pinch



has been only a gentle nip. The full extent of the fuel shortage has yet to be measured against the severity of the weather. The sign "one per customer" appears on more and more shelves in the corner grocery, but except for extra cups of coffee the average menu isn't too far from prewar. Thanksgiving of 1942 was hardly less than the usual feast day.

More of the story is told by what has happened to the members of the family themselves: the son in the armed forces, the father in civilian defense, the mother in a war job, and the daughter in one of the volunteer services. The vast tasks and migrations of war have affected countless millions of homes beyond the power of statistics to reveal. As in Europe, the impact is falling on every family. But the full force of it has hardly been guessed.

Among the many causes contributing to the November election results were a feeling over much of the country that Washington was not fighting the war hard enough and a paradoxical complaint from some quarters that there was undue interference with civilian life through rationing and other "nuisances." Both Washington and the country will fight a harder war before it's won. And our experience so far with rationing and the diversion of manpower has been only the merest rehearsal.

The bottom of the bin has appeared in many places under the pile of America's former plenty. Recent surpluses have been reduced to present and future shortages by the unceasing and enlarging demands of our military requirements. The strong weapon of Lend-Lease needs constant recharging. The new setup of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation will pile burden upon burden as we undertake to feed and supply and rebuild the areas recaptured from the Axis. For the family, this adds up to more rationing and still higher taxes.

The war has given the worker a fat pay envelope which is reflected in the national income at an all-time high. But out of the envelope he has to pay the costs of war, and they're at an all-time high too. The country plans to put up to 7 per cent of its population into uniform before the war is over, and the man in uniform in this mechanized conflict requires a vastly larger number of men in war industry than ever has been the case before. To supply the need, the new manpower setup announced by the President last week end (see page 62) will henceforth assign the members of the family to the tasks war requires.

Fighting on fronts all over the world, America by its impatience with official reticence has shown that it can take the hardships of war. The hardships will pyra-

mid as the flow of men and materials increases to push the United Nations' offensive to victory. Main Street will bear visible scars before the victory comes, but, as in British experience, the people of America are more likely than not to find austerity is a benefit rather than an injury.

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