

GAS MASKS FOR ALL IN THE NEXT WAR

Europe's Civilians Being Equipped
for Air Raids on Great Cities



England's social leaders advocate preparedness

In 1925, the nations of the world signed a treaty which forever banned the use of poison gas in war-time.

This year, the nations of the world are feverishly preparing for an expected gas assault not only on armies, but on civilians miles behind the lines as well.

Horror-stricken people read daily of mysterious invisible substances, a few drops of which could bring instant death to a whole city. They know that military technicians, their own as well as others, are working hourly to find the "perfect gas." In their agony of fear, the people turn to their governments, and the governments respond by digging air-tight shelters and conducting gas-mask drills, teaching bewildered children and even animals to stumble about like grotesque gargoyles.

Last week, Britain raised the international hysteria to a new high. She announced that within two years she would provide gas-masks for the island's 40,000,000 men, women and children. As a small initial investment toward the gigantic cost, she demanded \$4,250,000.

New Device—Meanwhile, British officials trotted out the "perfect respirator." Weighing only one and a half pounds, it is small enough to slip into a coat-pocket. Under government supervision, private English firms will turn out the head-pieces at a cost of two shillings (50 cents) apiece. They consist of chemically treated rubber, with glass goggles and a flexible tube which connects the mouth with the container. The masks will be made in three sizes—small, medium and large—and adjustable head-straps insure their fitting. The respirators will be stored in arsenals, issued before air raids.

The containers, consisting of charcoal and unrevealed chemicals, filter in life-giving air for six hours. Experts can change them in five seconds, tyros in ten. The new design eliminates the old painful nose-clip which *Tommies* used during the War.

Even babies will be protected in covered perambulators, into which masked *Nannies* can pump air, forcing it through filter cans.

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Researchers are also working on an infant's mask with a nipple attachment.

For months, Englishmen have been hardened to gas drills. Trucks loaded with tear gas were sent throughout the kingdom. Civilians practised donning the masks, then stepped into gas-chambers to see how they worked.

Siege Preparations — Meanwhile nervous housewives pored over "The Householder's Handbook" issued by the Air Raid Precautions Department, then pasted brown paper across the windows of a garden-room, stretched a blanket over the door, stuffed up the keyhole, and laid in a supply of canned foods. Officials prepared a motion-picture illustrating the job, to be shown in every cinema in the country.

The British were the first to plan a mask for every inhabitant. France planned to issue them only to soldiers, nurses and civilians mobilized for war duties. For the general public, the State provided underground shelters; at one Paris subway station, 8,000 can now find refuge.

Paris department stores, however, stocked masks this spring at prices ranging from \$5.40 to \$9. The demand remained low, altho it grew a little after Hitler remilitarized the Rhineland in March. Enterprising French designers tried to improve the hideous bulky protectors so they would match a woman's gowns. One manufacturer prepared a sort of suitcase where mothers could store their babies during raids. An inventor demonstrated a balloon-like, air-tight contraption he could crawl into during trouble.

In Berlin, the Nazi-sponsored Air Protection League this year rejected masks, which cost \$6.40 there, as extravagant, contending they are quickly outmoded. It advised its 10,000,000 members to construct air-tight rooms in their cellars, while the Government built steel shelters at central points. Some Germans, however, bought miniature masks for their dogs.

Lloyd's of London quoted a rate of five shillings per £1,000 against an enemy air raid on London. They offered the same



rate for New York and San Francisco, but the popular wave of fear failed to engulf the United States. New York department stores did not stock a single mask. They referred purchasers to Francis Bannerman & Sons, which quoted them at 50 cents and \$1—the outworn relics of 1918! San Franciscans, often haunted by the invasion nightmare, could find masks only at equip-

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ment companies, and they were designed for mines, not war.

American Situation—Even the Army, which pays \$11.50 for soldiers' khaki-colored protectors, buys none for civilians. If the need arose, however, American factories could turn out millions of \$5 masks for home protection.

Masks now in use in most armies act as absolute safeguards against all the known agents of chemical warfare. "I want to say categorically a thing I know for a fact," Dr. H. D. Woodroffe told the British Medical Association's convention at Oxford last week. "Our British respirator will be a 100 per cent. protection against any gas that can be used in war-time."

Some of the poisons, such as blinding tear gas and arsenic compounds like adamsite, which force sneezing sufferers to tear off their respirators, have no lasting effects in themselves. But the greenish-yellow clouds of chlorin choke victims in a terrible slow suffocation; phosgene, often mixed with it, floods the lungs with blood. In their agony, dying Canadians at Vimy ripped their throats open with their own hands to get useless air.

Mustard gas is the worst of all. The "golden rain" Il Duce sprayed on Haile Selassie's unprotected subjects lingers long after all trace of it has passed, and burns deep wounds wherever it touches.

These are the chief known gases. As for the mysterious lethal drops, chemists insist they are non-existent, spawned by sensation-mongers.

War Experience—Indeed, experts assert that the popular fear of gas is based on hysterical misinformation. Even during the War, they argue, when 70,752 American soldiers were listed as gas casualties, only 200 died of it on the battle-fields, 1,221 in hospitals. Yet men packed in trenches a hundred feet from the enemy proved an ideal target. Army men insist gas would be useless against a family playing bridge on the sixth floor of an apartment building, because gas sinks, never rises. Aside from the still unsolved technical question of an enemy's ability to concentrate gases on a large city, cost of the attempt would be prohibitive.

Thus, of 350,000 mustard gas casualties during the World War, only 2.5 per cent. died, at a cost of a ton and a half of gas a man. At that rate, to "wipe out" London's 8,208,942 men, women and children would require 12,305,913 tons sprayed from 6,000,000 planes!

Among the experts who scoff at the danger of gas attack is Dr. Francis A. Freeth, distinguished chief research chemist of Imperial Chemical Industries, Ltd. A year ago, he advised a London audience to close the windows and put out fires in case of a raid. "You would be practically completely safe," he added cheerfully, "if you simply got into a hot bath, smoked a pipe and laughed."

British Liberals and Laborites stubbornly refuse to be frightened by the Government's war bogies. In boroughs ruled by

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Socialists, officials decline to cooperate with public drills and decontaminating squads.

They believe the demands for gas masks and civilian training were merely a ruse to popularize the rearmament program, for which the country is pouring out the stupendous sum of \$940,000,000 this year, shattering all peace-time records. Left-wingers would rather see the money spent on unemployment relief.

They taunt the Government with exaggerating the war danger. Will Thorne, Laborite, futilely called out in the House of Commons debate last week to know when the Cabinet expected its war.

Press Comment—The Liberal London *News Chronicle* protested that the masks would prove small protection against mustard gas, which burns through clothes, and other blistering gases. "They will be effective only against tear gas."

In New York *The Times* also regarded Britain's latest defense measure cynically. "An appropriation of £100,000,000 to provide a gas mask for every man, woman and child in Great Britain would be inadequate," it pointed out. "Add this to other even more staggering sums for military and naval preparation, and the utter financial hopelessness of defending a great nation becomes evident. . . . Even where dictators rule, public opinion can not be wholly ignored.

"So the British estimates, the Government pamphlets on gas attacks, the few underground shelters thus far provided, must be regarded as psychological sops rather than practical measures of defense against a weapon which undoubtedly has its dangers, but which is less terrible than a Big Bertha or a bomb charged with a ton of explosive."

The New York *Herald Tribune*, however, took the measure more seriously: "There are many arguments, of course, to prove that the air danger to civilian populations is grossly exaggerated; but then, nobody in 1913 had the faintest picture of the real horror which the World War was to bring, while governments seldom spend time and money on gross exaggerations. Nobody really knows.

"But history, technical advance, the processes of militant democracy and insane nationalism have already brought Europe to gas masks by the million and a kind of helpless resignation."

In London, *The Evening Star* voiced bitter objections. "If what the government spokesmen told us about the helplessness of London under air attack is true, then gas masks are so much waste of time and money," the Liberal daily proclaimed. "There is only one form of defense of which the Government could avail itself—to remove the civil population of London to the war area."

THE LITERARY DIGEST