

How the Germans Take It

By W. B. Courtney



Clothes ration cards for a man, girl, boy, small child and woman, the latter in detail. The coupons, becoming valid as dated, are for purchase of articles listed on the card: handkerchief, 1; stockings, 4; woolen dress, 40, etc.

Rich or poor, a woman in Germany can buy no more than one pair of silk stockings every two months. Food and clothing are doled out meagerly on ration cards—and you had better get in line early in the morning to get yours. Watch Hans and Gretchen tightening their belts to help Hitler win the war

FRAU TENNY ECKERTH was called from her home in such a rush, and felt so sure the whole affair wouldn't take more than a few minutes, that she had not bothered to dress or primp. She was decent, of course, with a long coat thrown over her nightgown; but she wore only slippers, and had not stopped to pull stockings on, because she never dreamed that she would have to get out of the car. It was all in the careless manner of a young wife who, having a lot of things to do around the house, and finding the morning slipping away from her, will sometimes run out to do the marketing or to drive her husband to the station.

The police had run up just after breakfast and told her to fetch her car immediately to a downtown point, where its availability for army use would be checked. Frau Eckerth and her friends in Berlin's West End knew their cars were subject to "*kommandieren*." They expected the leisurely processes of bureaucracy. So it was without anxiety that Frau Tenny drove the Eckerth family's little car—it was practically brand-new and had cost 8,000 marks, and she and her lawyer husband were very proud of it—along Tiergartenstrasse this winter morning. But there was a surprise for Tenny.

Instead of dull policemen, whom a pretty girl can always *schmeichel*, or bookish civilian *unterschreibers*, whom she might intimidate, here were soldiers running this commandeering business. Crisp fellows, with no nonsense about them as they marshaled the arriving cars like squads on a parade ground. Also, many were there ahead of Frau

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Tenny, who now regretted her thoughtless haste in a gush of apprehension. But she could not retreat from the crowded *Platz*. She knew suddenly that she had been sucked into the hard, bright gears of war.

And No Backtalk, Please

A middle-aged sergeant was the final authority here. One at a time he looked the parked cars over, the way that old army men have of making everything seem like a horse for the cavalry. He would look at the wheels, and feel the hubs, and run his hands across the radiator—"as if," thought Frau Eckerth, "he is counting teeth!" Lastly, he would chalk a figure on each car: that was the price the army would allow. There were all kinds of cars; small and large, open and closed; some with liveried chauffeurs. Altogether they represented a good deal of money, for in Germany automobiles are very expensive and even the Eckerth's little one cost more than four times what a similar one in the United States would cost.

The sergeant worked steadily, but he was so deliberate that poor Frau Tenny fretted as she thought of housework undone, the way she was dressed and the few marks in her purse. Could the sergeant please make an exception for her now, or allow her to come back later? The sergeant's military pride was so outraged that he gave Frau Eckerth a regular drill-hall bawling out; delivered at a formal distance of five paces from her car and at the top of his voice. The sum of it was: no exceptions here, madame, rich and poor, important and nobodies, all alike in the eyes of the Reich's army! Poor little Frau Tenny Eckerth, with her face as red as the paint on her sports car, shriveled into her coat.

It was past noon before the sergeant got to Frau Eckerth. Yes, the army could use this car, and 400 marks would be paid by the government for it. Frau Tenny choked with quick tears. Four hundred marks in September for a car that in August, new from the dealer, had cost twenty times that much. Moreover, the car must be delivered at once.

Frau Tenny Takes a Ride

Perhaps Frau Tenny should have known better; at any rate she tried again. Would the sergeant be good enough to let her go home to dress and put things in order, and she would get back in almost a jiffy, to go wherever he ordered? This time the sergeant walked closer to her car, and his manner was grim. Did the frau want to find herself in serious trouble? Could the war be stopped, and the work of the Reich's army be relaxed, for an impatient woman? Frau Eckerth was frightened and said no more, but even in her worst misgivings she was not prepared for what came. When, at two o'clock, the sergeant decided a large-enough cavalcade had been formed, the owners were instructed to drive in a group to Stettin

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Most difficult job of the hausfrau is balancing economical purchasing against interesting meals. Here, buying sauerkraut, she provides the container, as paper in the Reich is scarce. Below, housewives go personally to market because friendship with tradesmen results in better bargains; there is still class distinction in Germany, despite strenuous Nazi efforts toward regimentation



and turn their cars over to the military depot there. Stettin! A hundred miles away by road.

Well, it was a good road—one of the fine *Reichsautobahnen*—and despite traffic and formation driving they made Stettin in less than four hours. This was one of the only two breaks Frau Tenny got that day. The other was that she had kin in Stettin, who lent her clothes and gave her food—neither of which she could have got, lacking travel ration cards—for the journey third class by train back to Berlin. It was past midnight before she groped out of the black-out, into the home where Herr Eckerth, informed by telephone from Stettin, waited anxiously.

It would be nice to believe such experiences could only happen in a far country. Unfortunately, this is a fair sample of how modern war falls on the common people of every land. This same thing could happen to your wife in the United States under our "M" Day Plan, which Mr. Davenport explained to you in *Collier's* recently. Whether it would happen in the same way is beside the point—a human equation. Another German sergeant might have been less strict with Frau Eckerth.

The important thing is that war used to mean all the able-bodied men in arms but now it scoops up not only the

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Field Marshal Goering solicits funds in a "Winter Help" drive. These drives are held once a month, on Sunday, and reach 98 per cent of the people

able-bodied—it makes imperative the full, active, unremitting participation of every man, woman and child in the nation. This is a corollary of the industrial, or machine age. This is what Ludendorff meant by "Totalitarian War." And this is the kind of war the one in Europe is.

Nearly 2,000 years ago Chinese emperors began construction of a Great Wall to insulate their countries against enemies. After seventeen centuries of progress, modern European civilization reaches the old Chinese practice; builds Maginot, Siegfried, Mannerheim and other lines against one another. The natural interest Americans customarily feel about how average people of other countries meet everyday problems of life is now intensified with respect to Germany, because she is the most shut-off country on earth. She is cut away from normal intercourse with us by the world's greatest navy, in what Germans call "England's Hunger Blockade," and "England's Starvation Control." Obviously, for their own very good strategic reasons, the Allies are fighting German stomachs rather than German soldiers. Germany's U-boats and planes try to do the same to England.

Behind the Battle Lines

The surprise is that behind these 20th Century Great Walls life goes on more or less normally. People laugh, cry, make jokes, quarrel with their in-laws, spank their children, scramble for bus seats, walk in the country on Sundays. Yet because Germany has less commercial access to the outside world than her enemies, I think the efforts of the German people to keep roofs over their heads, clothes on their backs, food in their children's stomachs, affords the sharpest picture of what modern war means. What it could mean to us—with political and geographical modifications, of course.

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In Germany as in, I suppose, all major countries save Russia, if you are utterly poor, unable to support yourself and lacking in kin you are better off than if you have just a little. The party, following the old German political and social tradition, does care well for the nation's helpless margin. In Berlin alone, for example, this winter 8,000 gallons of hot food are sent out daily in thermos containers from a central welfare kitchen to more than a hundred distributing points in the city. One Sunday a month throughout Germany the party workers and Hitler youth turn out for a "Winterhilfe" (winter help) drive, and probably less than two per cent of the total population miss paying 20 pfennigs each for the lapel gadget that shows you have come across.

One such collection reached a national total of 15,000,000 marks. It's like the poppy drives at home. In each block in every German city the party appoints a "counselor" whose job it is to visit all families living in that block; and see that none is uncared for. The Germans do this sort of thing with characteristic thoroughness; and it is the opinion of diplomats, and of foreign welfare experts who have investigated, that less abuse, waste and favoritism exist here than in many other great nations.

Every correspondent who has visited the soldiers in the Westwall or in reserve areas remarks on the apparently high morale. One reason for this is that no soldier, whatever his peacetime circumstances, need fear that his family will be out on the street while he is in service. The government pays every soldier's rent.

Strangely, with all the fuss over ration cards and food shortages, health statistics prove that most Germans are getting fat this winter. There's a reason. A diet that has been unbalanced by starch.

"Soldiers and children eat best," the Germans say. If you have children under six, here is what each one is allotted per month. German dry measure is on the metric scale: figure one American pound for each 453 grams.

Butter	450 grams
Cheese	250 grams
Bread	4,400 grams
Child foodstuffs (oats, etc.)	500 grams
Meat and sausage	1,000 grams
Marmalade	400 grams
Ersatz honey	125 grams
Sugar	1,000 grams
Miscellaneous: (rice, noodles, etc.)	500 grams
Ersatz coffee	400 grams
Sago, corn, flour, etc.	100 grams

In addition, each child is entitled to $\frac{3}{4}$ liter, which is slightly less than a quart, of Grade-A milk per day, but is not supposed to eat margarine, oil, bacon or lard. If your little ones are over six, but less than fourteen, they get only $\frac{1}{4}$ liter of milk a day. Otherwise, they fare like their younger brothers and sisters; better in some things—such as bread, of which they get almost half a pound

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a day, and as much meat as adults, or a pound a week.

No One is Starving Yet

Over fourteen, you're a grownup: and then—unless you're an expectant mother, in which case you can have a pint of Grade A—you get only skimmed milk, what the Germans call "*blau milch*," as much as the milkman feels he can spare. If he is your pal, you might get a half pint. All foods are not rationed; only those that contain oil or are chiefly obtained from abroad, such as wheat and coffee. Potatoes, apples, grapes and pears are plentiful, and can be had without cards; so can vegetables in season. You can walk into any store that has these things, and buy freely. Most shops have a good supply of canned goods, too; but these can't be sold until their fresh prototypes are all gone. Moreover, they must be opened in the store, when sold; to prevent hoarding.

Fish and fowl, although not on cards, can only be purchased in the store where you are registered and given a number, which comes up in order. Fowl are not plentiful, and your friends will joke with you about this: "I am Number 14506 for a goose at Herr Breitenstein's shop, come and help me eat it—in 1946!"

There is joking about bread also. Nobody understands why it was rationed, if there's so much of it. Germany's annual consumption of wheat and rye totals seven million tons. She has stored nearly nine million in reserve; and claims that, with normal harvests, she can add nearly a million tons a year to this backlog. Your waiter, if you dine out, nine times in ten won't ask for your bread card: he even has a pocketful for emergencies. But he certainly makes you lay your butter coupon on the table before you get your "wafer." The daily allotment of butter is 10 grams. That is about half as thick as one of the pats you get in restaurants at home. Of bread, however, you and your wife can get more than 38 pounds a month between you; more, of course, if there are others in your family.

You can get only one egg a week, even if they are available. City people grumble suspiciously that country people, who are also on ration cards, really fare better because they "hold out" on what they send to market. It is a fact that the government wisely considers sectional food habits: for instance, Bavarians, notably hearty eaters, get bigger ration card allowances all around.

It's the same old game of wits always played when a government imposes sumptuary legislation. Remember the fun we had during prohibition? Germany has daily contact with all her immediate neighbors except France—in particular, with the rich dairy countries of Sweden, Denmark, Holland and Switzerland. There is some bootlegging and some hoarding. Butter or soap will do more for casual romance than a bankroll. The habit of national disci-

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pline is strong, however; the patriotism is genuine; and there are heavy penalties to keep weak brethren in line.

Patients in hospitals get 2½ pounds of meat a week, instead of the well person's one pound. The hospitals had a rush of well-to-do boarders, until doctors, with the eye of the government on them, began looking closer. Foremost hotels are skillful in wrangling supplies for "*markenfrei*" dishes: such as chicken and fish, which are difficult for lay folks to obtain. So Germans who can afford it stay frequently in hotels. They take "*markenfrei*" dishes—and send out their meat cards to buy sausages; or save up for meat blowouts in fashionable restaurants. There was an unprecedented run on cough drops. All your German friends were hastening into drugstores, hacking pitifully. The government caught on and the coughing stopped. The cough drops contained more sugar than the allowance!

Scissors are used oftener than knives and forks in restaurants. Funny papers have many cartoons of modern young German heroes of love—the man who gives all his meat cards to his girl friend when he takes her out.

Your hausfrau's share in the game is to plan variations for home meals, and get away from the starchy food which fills your bellies but not your muscles. She bumps into the hardest part of all; shopping. Perhaps she has five to buy for: self, husband and three children. That will be better than three pounds of meat each week. She can reduce the interminable waiting in line at the meat shop if she buys the whole three pounds at once. Yet, thoughtful of her flock, she fears that by so doing she may overlook the chance to gain variety if she waits in line every other day—and buys quarter- or half-pound packets.

Do Your Own Shopping

There is no delivery any more, even from the best shops. Even if she is able to afford a maid, the dutiful hausfrau goes to market personally. First, to see that her ration cards are not oversnipped and that she is not cheated. Second, personal contact with your tradesmen is more important now than ever; they can be nice in so many little ways. For all that you've heard about "*gleichschaltung*"—the well-known regimentation that has been going on in Germany under the party—there is still class distinction. And shopkeepers can spot one who is accustomed to being well-served and will not quibble about prices.

Two meatless days a week here recall for Americans the meatless, heatless and sugarless days we had in 1918. Yet without cards, and without an uncontrollable appetite for meat, butter and sugar, you can in all truth walk into any restaurant in Germany today and get a wholesome, adequate meal. Shortages often are only apparent, due to bookkeeping or to militarily clogged transport lines.

The government tells you that table discipline will be good for your waist-

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German doctor argued: "We have never been diet faddists in the way you have—vitamin conscious. The staples of our common people's eating habits have always been meat, bread, kraut, beer and potatoes. There hasn't been the slightest cutting down of four of those items. The per capita German consumption used to be 3 pounds of meat a week. Now it can be only one. That won't hurt the average German. The real deprivation, from the standpoint of health and comfort, to German workers is butter. You need fats in this miserable, depressing Baltic climate, to build inner heat and energy, and resistance against colds. But I think it would take a very long war—ten years at least—before there would be a noticeable decline in national health."

"Look at the British"

Food rationing here is not merely a product of war—it is the outgrowth of totalitarian economy and preparedness. Goebbels reminds people of the last war, in which there were two years of prosperity, a third of want and a last of desperate hunger. He says: "This time, neither feast nor famine, but just enough, spread out for as long as is necessary."

Moreover, he constantly reassures Germans that "they (the enemy) haven't got anything you haven't got!" Capital is made of the fact that France has three meatless days a week, and that England, too, is on ration cards, and of a comparison between British and German rations. Sugar and bacon allowances, for example, are but fractionally higher in England, while butter allowance is practically the same in each country—four ounces a week. Also, you are reminded, the German system is more elastic: it gives preferences to people, which the English doesn't, according to occupation. A "*schwerarbeiter*," or hard-working man—say, truck driver or day laborer—gets double the normal allotment of meat and fats. A "*schwerstarbeiter*," or hardest hard-working man—coal miner, or munitions worker—gets double, plus two thirds.

Foreign correspondents are considered "*schwerarbeiter*."

Germany is gloomy. Human enlightenment, despite skeptics, has made too much progress for any civilized peoples to throw hats in air and dance in streets for joy because war has come. But everyone is spending because everyone is working, and—the Germans say—"no one in Europe knows what's coming next, so we may as well enjoy what we've got now!" Despite government preaching there is apparently no attempt to save.

I think the real horror of Europe today is that millions have abandoned faith in the future. Consequently, when you see good spirits you remain unconvinced.

Restaurants, even fashionable ones, amusement parks, sports grounds and proletarian beer and festhalls are crowded. Movies cost from four marks

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for the best seats in the finest theaters to eighty pfennigs in the neighborhood houses, and they are jammed, with American films the most popular and Clark Gable the favorite. Germans don't go much for female stars. Germany is a nation of music lovers and operas, and concert halls are especially prosperous this winter, not only because the government encourages these affairs as "antiblack-out depression" tonics but because the people demand it. There are inexpensive "People's Theaters" throughout Germany; and whereas in France and England art museums are closed, their treasures buried away in vaults for protection against air raids, German museums are undisturbed and special exhibitions are being held in Vienna, Dresden, Leipzig, Berlin and elsewhere.

"The greatest hardship of this war," foreigners in Germany tell one another, "is to see a whole nation of female legs in cotton or shoddy!"

For clothing is on cards, and rationed even more severely than food. Wool and silk are the meats and fats of wearables. There's no such thing as a gift of silk hose to friend wife to get you out of the doghouse. One pair of stockings every two months is the most that any *fräulein*, rich or poor, loved or unloved, can hope for; "runs" are service chevrons.

It is simply impossible to dash into a shop and buy clothing. It isn't a matter of money alone. There has been no rise in prices, no profiteering. The government has attended to that. The important thing is to have a "*bezugschein*," or permit. You can get that if you have a real need—and plenty of time.

Ersatz fabrics are beginning to appear: paper, glass, pulp-fiber. Design is affected; to conserve materials tailors are making suits with fewer buttons, and only one pocket in the trousers and none in coats.

Even to buy mending thread or darning cotton you must be registered in a certain shop and buy only there. Shoes—and shoe mending—require special permits. You must go to the bureau designated for your neighborhood, file an application, and prove your need. If you are suspected of fibbing, the police may visit your home and tally your wardrobe. At the bureau, you may find a hundred people ahead of you and you may have to wait as much as six hours.

I know one lad who got a job with an orchestra. He applied for a shoes permit. Authority looked at his feet and said: "Why, you've got a pair of shoes, and they seem good!" He said, "Yes, but these are brown and for my new job I need a pair of black!" He was thrown out, with the admonition that the artistic ensemble of an orchestra was of little concern to the Reich at war.

There is some bootlegging in clothes. A business traveler might come back from Sweden wearing four sets of underwear and two suits. Both clothing and food are received legitimately, too, of course, through cabled help from relatives or friends abroad—especially from

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America through agencies in neighbor countries. And meanwhile, there are little tricks.

The government has some. It tells you that much wear and tear on clothes is caused by bad table manners. If you don't get soup and cabbage stains on your ties, or coats, you won't have to clean them so often—and thus wear them out. One third of all laundering, it explains, could be avoided if you take care not to get dirty. A careful, neat, and tidy nation will be one result of the war. War economy is doubly served here; soap, a fat product, is scarcer than income-tax rebates in the United States.

The people have "ways," too. A girl boasted to me how she got extra stockings and said this was not an uncommon stratagem. She went into the shop where she always bought stockings and picked out two pairs. "*Bezugschein, bitte!*" said the clerk. "Oh, but look here!" said my friend, "these are imperfect!" The clerk gulped—and got the point. Stockings with imperfections are free—and the little lady's fingernails had been busy.

If a girl wants to get a whole outfit in a hurry—two pairs of stockings, a dress, and all the trimmings—she can do it by marrying a soldier!

Perhaps you can best complete your picture of how people live in Germany now by looking at the budget of my young friend, Herr Peter Schufer.

Peter is in his early thirties, married and has a good job with a bank. Neither he nor Irma worries about things, for nearly every phase of their life is organized. No matter what happens—short of revolution and chaos—the government, like the Lord, will provide.

Herr Schufer, Doing All Right

Under the law, he cannot be fired without six months' notice, so long as he is honest and diligent. If he is mobilized, the government will pay their rent, and his firm will pay 85 per cent of his salary, while the government will make up the rest.

Like half a million of Berlin's more than four million population, he commutes. A thirty-minute ride each way daily on the excellent *Stadtbahn* costs him, for a monthly ticket, about \$6.30. For a small fee, he belongs to a building organization, which cuts his monthly rent one fifth. Week ends they sail on a near-by lake in their own small boat, or bicycle in the woods. Irma does her own housework, but twice a month a cleaning woman comes in. She gets fifty pfennigs an hour plus carfare and lunch.

Peter and Irma do not belong to the party, although neither is against the Nazis. They think Hitler has done a good job in clearing slums, reducing unemployment and safeguarding the rights of workers. Peter explains that the one thing about the Nazis most resented by middle-class people is the interference with the normal home life of the children. Parents feel that six days a week is enough to give their children to the Reich; Sundays ought to be spent at

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home. But Sunday is collection day—not only money for charity but for metal, clothing, scraps—the hundred and one things “saved” in the national economy. Children do most of this collecting.

Peter and Irma have a radio, of course. They listen to news broadcasts, and to important speeches, but not to all the propaganda. They occasionally risk tuning in foreign stations. Irma says that her favorite is the “Soldiers’ Request Program.” This is a daily feature. Music and other numbers requested by men in the Westwall are put on. In this program are also announced the names of men at the front who have become fathers since they joined up. Twins or triplets bring resounding cheers. Peter and Irma send mail to relatives in the army postage free. The government, through radio and other means, does everything to make the war homey.

They’d Rather Have Peace

Peter’s salary is 369 Reichsmarks per month. Out of this he must pay in taxes:

1. Income tax	25.50
2. Head tax	3.50
3. Army tax	12.70
4. War tax ($\frac{1}{2}$ income tax)	12.75
5. Unemployment insurance	10.00
6. Old age insurance	8.00
(his firm pays another 8)	
7. Sick insurance	31.78
	<hr/>
	104.23

The total he pays in taxes, therefore, does not reach one third of his income. The government likes to point out that he pays less than we do in the United States, less than people in England and many other countries do. There are no hidden taxes and no sales taxes, except for a small one lately on beer.

The sick insurance is really something. All German workers are insured. If Peter hadn’t joined a private company, his employer would have put him in the general municipal sick insurance. This insurance enables Peter and Irma to have every kind of medical and dental attention.

Peter and Irma are reasonably contented with their lot, but they hope the war ends soon. In common with ninety per cent of their fellow Germans, they hate the war; they are depressed by the black-outs, weary of the red tape of rationing, afraid the outcome might take away from them what they now have.

Irma is young and, physically at least, she does not mind the waiting in line, for this and for that, as much as her friend, old Frau Mehring, whom we met in a meat shop the day I went there with Irma to see how things worked.

We were early, but so was everyone else, because that’s how you get choice things. It was a large store; even so, many had to wait outside on the blustery sidewalk. Few of the hausfrauen had gloves: the hands that held shawls tightly around their heads were blue and

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swollen. They stood in the sharp morning with complete docility, talking little, and neither pushing nor grumbling. I asked Frau Mehring if she did not mind. She smiled. "I've got five boys in the army. Just think of that. As many sons as you have fingers on the hand. No, I do not mind waiting here like this, every day. Because my sons tell me in their letters that they have never eaten better. Don't you think any German mother should be happy to know that?"

I could not tell whether it was the cold wind that made her eyes run.

Collier's

April 13, 1940