Economica, New Series, Vol. 31, No. 122, May 1964

The Bread Crisis in Britain, 1795-96[1]

By WALTER M. STERN

The outline of this story is well known. During the wars with France high prices and a bread shortage occurred in 1795–96. The questions which this paper discusses are whether the shortage assumed crisis proportions, how it was caused and what action was initiated, particularly by public authorities, to alleviate it.

I

Does the shortage of bread in 1795–96 deserve to be described as a crisis? The average price of the quartern loaf stood at 1*s.* 0¼*d.* in 1795, but it had reached 1*s.* 6*d.* in 1776 and was to amount to 1*s.* 1*d.* in 1799, 1*s.* 2¾*d.* in 1801 and 1*s.* 5*d.* in 1812.[2] The highest price fixed in 1795 by the assize authority of the metropolis was 1*s.* 1½*d.*, in 1796 1*s.* 2*d.* This was exceeded in 1799 when 1*s.* 3¼*d.* had to be paid.[3] However, bread prices were controlled over a large part, but not the whole, of the country by a system which produced local differences without controlling the quality of the priced commodity. To the substantial section of the community which baked at home, what mattered was the price of wheat or flour, not that of bread. In ten war years (1800, 1801, 1805, 1806, 1808–13) wheat prices reached levels higher than in 1795–96.[4] However, inflation had supervened; prices only fractionally higher did not represent a greater real cost.

Nevertheless, the price development of 1795–96 exhibited crisis symptoms. Normal wheat prices followed an annual pattern, rising up to the harvest in August and September, falling when the new crop entered the market. Table 1 shows average wheat prices for England and Wales[5] month by month in five successive years; 1793 and 1797 do duty as normal patterns to compare with the disturbed years from 1794 to

[1] This paper has benefited from criticism in Dr. A. H. John's Seminar at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, in October 1963.

[2] C. J. Drummond and A. Wilbraham, *The Englishman's Food*, rev. ed., 1957, pp. 172, 181.

[3] J. Marshall, *Mortality of the Metropolis*, 1832, pp. 62–3.

[4] British Parliamentary Papers (hereinafter B.P.P.), *Accounts and Papers* (hereinafter *Acc.*), 1898, XXXIV, pp. 255, 257. Tooke and Newmarch, *A History of Prices*, 1928, vol. II, p. 387.

[5] Source: *Annual Register*, app. 1793, p. 240; 1794, p. 130; 1795, p. 133; 1796, p. 104; 1797, p. 155. The *Annual Register* describes these as prices in England and Wales, but they are likely to have been the prices to millers and dealers buying in the London corn market. London acted not only as a national clearing house, but as a last resort for buyers unable to cover their requirements in local markets (B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, B.o.T. mtg. 1). Arthur Young, writing in 1791 (*Tours in England and Wales*, selected from *Annals of Agriculture*, L.S.E. Reprint No. 14, 1932, p. 258) thought it " remarkable that the level of price at present is very general, except the division of the east and west of the kingdom for corn ".

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1796. The abnormality of these three years shows up better in the diagram (Fig. 1), but more marked than the lack of periodicity which begins late in 1794 is the high level of prices prevailing from April 1795 to September 1796. Prices apart, sheer physical availability must be taken into account. In 1800, 1801, 1805, 1807, 1809 and 1813 the British harvest was supplemented by more plentiful net wheat imports than in 1795;[1] more wheat was in fact to be had, albeit at higher prices.

TABLE 1

AVERAGE PRICE OF WHEAT PER WINCHESTER BUSHEL IN ENGLAND AND WALES

	1793	1794	1795	1796	1797
	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.
January	5 10	6 0	7 0	11 6	6 10
February	5 9	6 3	7 3	11 8¼	6 6
March	6 1	6 4	7 5	12 6¼	6 2
April	6 3	6 3	7 9	10 5¾	6 2
May	6 7	6 4	8 1	9 5¾	6 2
June	6 5	6 5	8 9	10 0¾	6 3
July	6 4	6 5	10 6	10 1	6 3
August	6 4	6 6	13 6	9 5½	6 7
September	6 0	6 4	9 10	8 0	7 4
October	5 7	6 4	9 6	7 7	7 7
November	5 10	6 8	10 5	7 5	6 10
December	6 0	6 9	10 10	7 4	6 7

Is there a danger of overestimating in these statistics the influence of London? The capital drew on a wide area for its supplies—contemporary sources[2] listed wheat coming from West Kent, the ports of Boston and Gainsborough in Lincolnshire and of Yarmouth, Lynn, Wells and Blakeney in Norfolk—and could therefore have caused a scarcity among consumers who normally derived wheat from these districts. The evidence does not bear this out. Owing to government management of the reserve of imported wheat,[3] appeals for emergency supplies converged upon the Privy Council. Neither their form nor their contents were standardized, suggesting that they were not routine operations of local authorities with nothing to lose and everything to gain from petitioning government. Table 2 shows places making such appeals month by month; the order is that in which the Privy Council listed them.[4] It appears that the whole country was affected, the west more than the east, especially in the early stages, Scotland least of all. Nothing indicates that the shortage was worse in London or the areas supplying it than elsewhere.

[1] B.P.P. *Acc.* 1898, XXXIV, pp. 255, 257.

[2] William Marshall, *The Rural Economy of the Southern Counties*, 1798, vol. I, pp. 122–3; William Marshall, *Review of the Reports to the Board of Agriculture from the Eastern Department of England*, 1811, pp. 27, 311, 362, 379.

[3] Cf. p. 178 below.

[4] B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, P.C. mtgs. 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 20, 22. P.R.O., P.C.4 (Privy Council Minutes), No. 6, Nov. 14, 1795; P.C.2 (Privy Council Acts), No. 144, fo. 575; No. 145, fo. 21.

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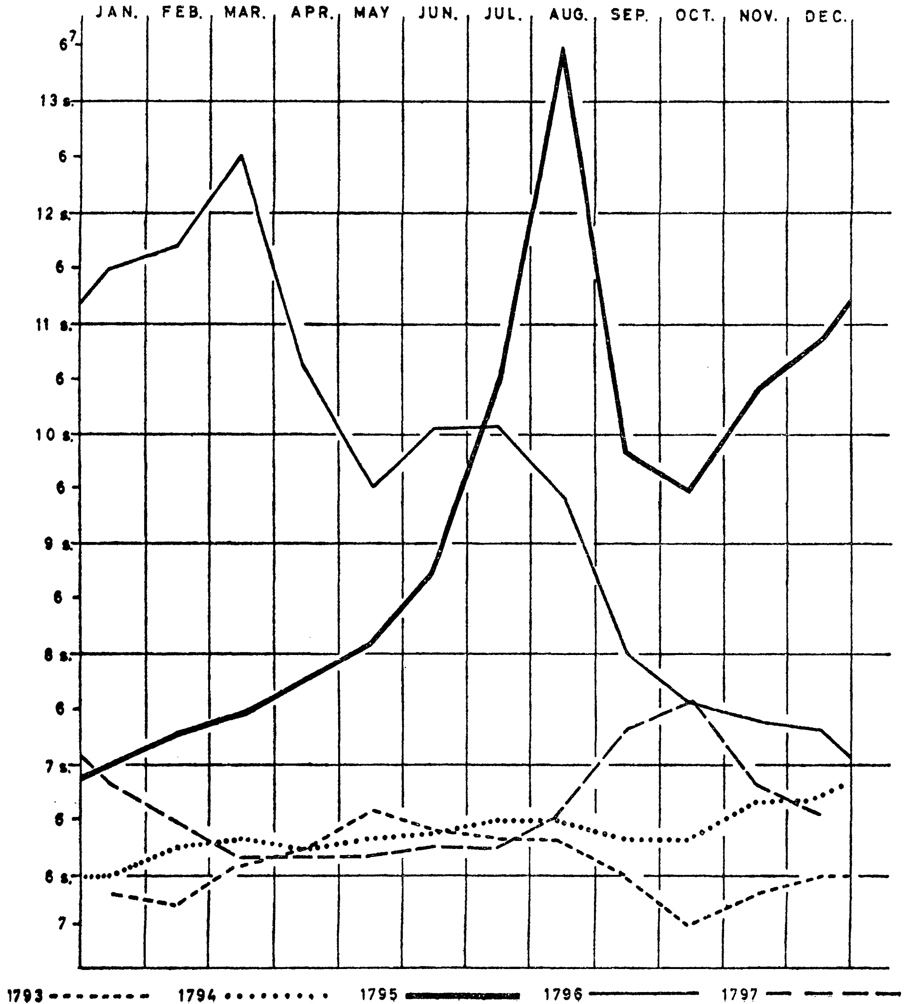

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TABLE 2

APPEALS FOR WHEAT SUPPLIES TO THE PRIVY COUNCIL

1795			
June	Pembrokeshire	Sussex—2	
	Stourbridge (Worcs.)—2	Birmingham	
	Lewes (Sussex)	Herefordshire	
		Oxfordshire	
July	Bristol	Essex	Newcastle, Sunderland,
	Forest of Dean—2	Nottingham	Stockton and Shields
	Weymouth	Leith	Usk
	West Cornwall	Bury St. Edmunds	Swansea
	Lynn	Nottinghamshire	Newport (Mon.)
	Milford Haven	Cheshire	Woodbridge (Suff.)
	Winchester	Cornwall	Norwich
	Sheffield	Peterborough and	Ipswich
	Scarborough	Leicestershire	Dorset
	Poole	Richmond (Yorks.)	Manchester
	Barnstaple	Yarmouth—2	Kettering and Rowell
	Monmouthshire—2	Hull	(Northants.)
	Glamorgan	Leicester	Wiltshire
	Cardiff—2	Stamford	Hampshire
	Herefordshire	Wells (Norfolk)	Romsey
	Pembrokeshire	Dover	Portsmouth
	Exeter	Durham	Eastern New Forest
	New Forest		Rochester
Aug.	Worcestershire	Whitby—2	Milton (Kent)
	towns	Royal Artillery con-	Northamptonshire
	Carlisle, Penrith	tractor, Woolwich	Workington (Cumb.)
	and Whitehaven	Peterborough	Wells (Norfolk)
	Derbyshire	Troops at Guernsey	Swansea
	Herefordshire	Birmingham	Orpington
	Gloucester	Rochester	Sandwich
	Southampton	Army contractors for	Chatham
	Forest of Dean	Essex and Suffolk	Boston (Lincs.)
	Monmouthshire	Troops in Southamp-	Commissioners victualling
	Cardiff	ton district	the Navy—2
	Maidstone—2		Glasgow
	Ipswich		Yarmouth
Nov.	Falmouth	Whitby	
Dec.		Merthyr Tydfil	
1796			
Jan.		Perth	

Some districts did not stop short at appealing for help, but detained by force wheat or flour in transit to other areas; above all was this true where country districts saw purchases made by large towns pass from their grasp. Table 3 lists the complaints reaching the Privy Council, chiefly from Bristol and Birmingham, of inability to obtain delivery of wheat and flour purchased.[1] After ineffectual attempts to stop the practice, a new law at the end of 1795 prohibited obstruction to the free passage of grain within the kingdom. Beyond outlawing what was anyhow illegal conduct, it awarded damages against the hundred in which the offence had occurred.[2]

[1] B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, P.C. mtgs. 12, 14, 19.
[2] *Ibid.*, P.C. mtgs. 13, 32. *Cobbett's Parliamentary History* (hereinafter *CPH*), vol. XXXII, col. 235–42 (Pitt's speech). 36 Geo. III, cap. 9, especially sect. 3–5.

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TABLE 3

FORCIBLE DETENTION OF WHEAT OR FLOUR SUPPLIES IN TRANSIT

1795	*District where detained*		*Destination*
July	Burford	Norfolk	?
	Cambridge	Northamptonshire	
	Bristol	Parts of Gloucestershire	
	Oxford	Huntingdon	
Aug.	Guernsey		Jersey
Oct.	Monmouthshire	Herefordshire	Bristol

Attempts to prevent the transit of grain constituted only one type of more general bread riots. Information on these, derived from *The Times* and government sources, is shown in Table 4.[1] The concentration on London and its catchment area for wheat supplies is slightly greater in this list; moreover, the worst riot took place near London when in April 1795 militia men quartered in Sussex entered Seaford and Newhaven fully armed and violently seized all flour and provisions they could find, in spite of their officers' efforts to restrain them. Such rank insurrection in addition to the bad example set to the population led to the execution of two of the principal culprits. But neither the intensity nor the geographical distribution of riots would justify the conclusion that this was a mere London shortage.

TABLE 4

BREAD RIOTS

Date	*Locality*	
1795		
March		North Wales
April	Seaford and Newhaven (Sussex)	
July	Tewkesbury (Glos.)	Norwich
	Wilton, near Ross (Forest of Dean): colliers	Yarmouth
		Cambridge
	Mitcheldean (Glos.)	Berwick-on-Tweed: women and colliers
	Blakeney (Norfolk)	Croydon
Aug.	Bath	Bishops Stortford (subsequently denied)
	Ketley and Coalbrookdale (Salop)	Halstead (Essex)
	Liverpool	Caernarvon (denied in *The Times*)
Sept.	Sudbury (Suff.)	
	Wildburton, Haddenham, Sutton, Ely (Isle of Ely)	
Oct.	Holywell, near Chester	
Nov.	Ludlow (Salop): Cleehill colliers	
1796		
March	Clewer, near Windsor	St. Davids (Pembs.)
	Potters Bar (Herts.)	
April	Truro (Cornwall)	

Mortality figures constitute another test. If large numbers of people were deprived of sufficient food, we would expect annual deaths to be in excess of the average for the period. Burials for England and Wales

[1] *The Times,* March 3, Apr. 21, May 30, June 16, July 2, 22, 23, 29, Aug. 4, 8, 11, 14, 20, Sept. 16, 26, Oct. 20, Nov. 10, 1795; March 8, 10, April 11, 1796. B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, P.C. mtg. 11. P.R.O., P.C.2, No. 145, fo. 333.

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in the years 1793 to 1798 are shown in Table 5. Burials in 1796 were fewer than in the three preceding years and no more than in the two following. The figure for 1795 on the other hand is 6 per cent. above that for the previous, and 10 per cent. above that for the two following,

TABLE 5

BURIALS IN ENGLAND AND WALES (000)

Year	Burials	Year	Burials	Year	Burials
1793	204	1795	210	1797	191
1794	198	1796	191	1798	188

years; moreover, in spite of increasing population, it was not exceeded until 1818. It indicates a distinct peak in the death rate which owes nothing to direct military action; those killed in battle were not buried in England and Wales. This strengthens the impression of a real crisis.

If London conditions had overshadowed the remainder of the country, the excess of burials in 1795 should be reflected more than proportionately in London figures. Table 6 gives details. These show

TABLE 6

BURIALS IN DIVISIONS OF THE METROPOLIS

	City of London		Out Parishes		City and Liberty of Westminster	Total
	within the walls	without the walls	within the bills of mortality	without the bills of mortality		
1793	1568	4571	11,286	2901	5728	26,054
1794	1244	4022	9,885	2598	5186	23,135
1795	1507	4537	10,964	3044	5696	25,748
1796	1229	4049	10,467	2866	4916	23,527
1797	1167	3424	9,049	2575	4418	20,633
1798	1321	4092	10,515	2828	4827	23,583

that the thesis cannot be maintained. Though burials in London in 1795 exceeded those for most years of that decade, they fell below the figure for 1793, a year in which there had been no famine. Nor was this true only for London, but for every division within the metropolis except out-parishes not within the bills of mortality. Contrasted with burial figures for the whole country, this suggests that London was less affected by the scarcity of bread than other areas. The only statistical evidence against this conclusion relates to the higher age groups, if we calculate differential mortality according to ages for the metropolis (Table 7).[1] But it would require medical expertise to explain why the year 1795 took heavier toll of the higher age groups in London than 1793, while being more lenient to the population as a whole.

[1] Burials in England and Wales, based on parish register abstracts of census returns, from B. R. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstracts of British Historical Statistics*, Cambridge, 1963, p. 28. Corresponding London figures calculated from J. Marshall, *op. cit.* pp. 62–3, 71. None of these statistics claims accuracy, but there is no reason to suspect greater inaccuracy in any one year than in another.

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TABLE 7
MORTALITY IN THE CITY OF LONDON AND 50 OUT-PARISHES OF THE METROPOLIS WITHIN THE BILLS OF MORTALITY BY SELECTED AGE GROUPS

	Under Ten	Over Ten	Under Fifty	Over Fifty
1793	10,456	11,293	16,691	5,058
1795	9,216	11,963	15,477	5,702

II

Could a bread shortage as severe as this have been due to natural causes? The 1794 wheat yield had been one-fifth below the ten-year average; the 1795 crop was worse, owing to frost and floods throughout the sowing season. It amounted to 15 bushels to the acre at a time when 24 was considered average.[1] Harvest conditions alone would account satisfactorily for the bread shortage. But many contemporaries were convinced that high bread prices resulted from human wickedness. From the growing of grain to the consumption of bread the product passed through several stages, involving farmers, corn dealers of various kinds, millers, mealmen and bakers. Bakers apart, suspicion of monopoly and manipulated price rises attached to every link in this chain.

William Malcolm, who reported to the Board of Agriculture on Surrey and Buckinghamshire, believed that opulent farmers controlled markets by fixing prices and dictating terms to their smaller colleagues. Ten trade witnesses, all millers or corn factors, in reply to questions by the Privy Council declared such concerted action impossible, though suspecting prosperous and perspicacious individuals of holding wheat against an expected further price rise, as well as of retaining more seed corn than usual at a time when investment in wheat looked profitable; this could raise the proportion of seed corn, normally one-tenth, to one-seventh. A popular explanation focused on the amalgamation of small holdings in fewer hands: larger farmers not only had greater resources, but might not reside on their holdings; work in their absence would be neglected, threshing performed unthriftily and incompletely. From Arundel and the Isle of Wight came reports of buyers refusing to take the farmers' grain at more than a price agreed among themselves, but this furnishes evidence of the strength of the corn traders' monopsony rather than the farmers' monopoly.[2]

[1] Twenty-four is a contemporary figure based on widely diverging estimates. W. Marshall gives it for West Kent in *The Rural Economy* . . . vol. I, pp. 121–2, and for Essex in *Review of the Reports* . . . , p. 485, quoting Nathaniel Kent as giving it for Norfolk (p. 349), for which the author considers 20 nearer the mark. His other estimates range from 40–56 bushels for the Sussex coast (*The Rural Economy* . . . vol. II, pp. 234, 238–9) to 12–28 bushels for Suffolk, with a general average of 22, while Arthur Young speaks of the finest soils there yielding 32–40 (*Review of the Reports* . . ., p. 437). M. K. Bennett, " British Wheat Yields per Acre for Seven Centuries ", *Economic History*, vol. III (1935), p. 27, gives 19 bushels per acre as the average for the period.

[2] B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, P.C. mtgs. 30, 32–5. *The Times*, Jan. 3, March 19, April 23, 25, May 16, June 22, July 3, Oct. 7, 16, 1795; March 2, 5, 12, April 19, 21, 23, 1796. *CPH*, XXXII, col. 235–42 (Lechmere's speech).

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Corn traders were the group most frequently suspected of combination to raise or maintain grain prices. Theoretically, this suspicion could least appropriately be fastened on corn jobbers who rode from market to market in order to buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest. *The Times* printed an anonymous letter blaming them for high corn prices on the day on which it reported a 33 per cent. difference in the price of wheat between Wiltshire and Caernarvonshire; there is no suggestion that jobbers' activities ironed out such differences.

Jobbers were, however, vulnerable in one respect. The variety of standards for measuring corn bewildered contemporaries. Quarters and bushels were in most general use; even then the Winchester bushel had to be distinguished from the Imperial bushel. In markets as widely apart as Arundel, the Isle of Wight, Reading, the "eastern district", the Midlands and Yorkshire, corn sold by the load, at Ipswich and in Norfolk by the coomb, at Newcastle by the boll. Nor was this all. The load of corn amounted to 40 bushels (Winchester or Imperial?) in the eastern district, to 20 in the Midlands and to 3 in Yorkshire. Corn jobbers alone knew the measures used in different markets: this knowledge could be profitable. The public demanded the abolition of sale by measure in favour of sale by weight. A bill embodying reform drew open opposition from corn dealers at Cambridge; there may well have been weightier adversaries behind the scenes, for it was put off for three months in May 1796 and not resuscitated.

Most corn dealers dominated single markets rather than spanned several. From the Middle Ages to 1710, all corn for sale had had to be brought to public markets; only there could farmers sell and dealers buy. This was no longer practicable: corn grew at a distance from markets and might be consumed at an even greater distance. In such conditions, sale in markets involved double transport costs. Nor did supply and demand always adequately balance in a single market. Boroughs vigorously petitioned Parliament against corn sales by sample, arguing that it deprived ordinary consumers of the opportunity of buying small quantities of corn for grinding in their own hand mills. Dealers retorted that the poor never bought corn in the market: those working in agriculture purchased it from their employers; urban labourers bought bread at bakers. Boroughs may well have hoped to boost their market revenues by compelling all grain to come to market; this would have left buyers free to buy or not to buy, while depriving sellers of similar freedom either by law or by transport costs; whatever threatened to remain unsold at the close of market would have to go at any price it would fetch. When the shortage reached its peak in August 1795, corn dealers took to purchasing standing crops at a price, not per bushel, but per acre. This, however, was treated as forestalling and considered an offence at common law.[1]

[1] *The Times*, April 23, July 31, Aug. 17–20, 27, 30, Sept. 8–10, 23, Oct. 1, 19, 24, 1795; March 2, April 21, 1796. W. Marshall, *Review of the Reports . . .*, pp. 308–9, 381–2, 417, 436, 438; *The Rural Economy . . .* vol. I, pp. 122–3. S. and B. Webb,

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Millers were regarded with deep suspicion by everybody in the community, especially by the irate bakers. Where he ground his customers' wheat, the miller's reward took the form of a toll, a deduction from the grain processed. Tolls were customary in old, arbitrary in new mills; in either case only the miller knew the rate. He could levy it in produce or its cash equivalent; he took grain when prices rose and insisted on money payment when they fell. A number of remedies were canvassed; millers' tolls to be proportionate to the quantity, but unrelated to the value, of grain ground; or to be fixed by magistrates; public granaries, with mills attached, should be—and in some places were—erected to supply the poor with corn or flour at reasonable rates. A law (36 Geo. III, cap. 85) compelled millers to display a table of tolls at the mill, to levy them in the form of cash only and to submit their weights to public control. But such legislation did not go to the heart of the matter, because most millers did not grind on commission, but themselves acted as principals, buying grain and selling flour.[1]

Knowing the scarcity of food on the other side of the Channel, many British people suspected wheat of finding its way there through illicit trading with the enemy. Clandestine export by merchants residing in French Channel ports could have contributed to the shortage; every shipment of corn sent coastwise or to the Channel Islands rekindled this suspicion, and no amount of official denials stilled it. Twice the government asked the commissioners of customs to investigate specific allegations of smuggling activities, once from Hampshire ports, especially Southampton, on the other occasion singling out Ipswich and Yarmouth. In neither instance was any illicit export discovered.[2]

Not the outward, but the inward movement of grain affected total supplies. For 30 years Britain had been on balance an importer of wheat, though on a small scale. Customs duties kept out foreign corn in years of adequate home supplies, but could be suspended when imports were needed. By the beginning of 1795 the Port of London stood open to receive wheat and flour imports. War rendered them more difficult, except from one source: corn cargoes intercepted in enemy or neutral vessels bound for enemy ports were naturally diverted to Britain.

The 1794 crop was plentiful in Poland and Southern Prussia, Europe's chief corn chamber, and Britain treated for wheat purchases while a hard winter kept the Baltic frozen longer than usual and delayed shipments. A Prussian embargo on corn exports raised apprehensions, but

" The Assize of Bread ", *Economic Journal*, vol. XIV (1904), p. 199. House of Commons Journals (hereinafter HCJ), LI, pp. 89, 132–3, 204–13, 251–2, 527–8, 677, 696. *CPH*, XXXII, col. 235–42 (Lechmere's speech). B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, P.C. mtg. 21.

[1] *The Times*, July/Oct. *passim*, esp. July 2, Sept. 9, Oct. 7, 1795; March 2, 1796. HCJ, LI, pp. 206–13 (letter from Sir Francis Bassett), 493–4.

[2] *The Times*, Jan. 3, May 24, 1795; March 2, 1796. P.R.O., P.C.2, No. 145, fo. 1–2; P.C.4, No. 6, Nov. 21, 1795. B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, P.C. mtgs. 33, 37.

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licences were granted and the embargo subsequently lifted. The 1795 crop turned out as poor in Northern Europe as in Britain, but large quantities of 1794 wheat were already afloat and arrived at home ports all through the winter of 1795–96. Prices meanwhile rose in Northern Europe; what further wheat became available was snapped up by the Dutch before the King of Prussia renewed the embargo in Spring 1796.[1]

In normal years British millers disdained Canadian wheat. However, the Canadian crop of 1794 was not only abundant, but of unusually high quality, nor was 1795 a normal year. Hopes ran high of Canadian wheat arriving in June 1795, to relieve the shortage, though few ships were available on the spot; moreover, purchasers for Spanish and Portuguese markets had been quicker off the mark. Britain met these difficulties by dispatching 56 ships to Canada and purchasing at second hand wheat earmarked for Spain or Portugal. Though the wheat started arriving in August, much of the manœuvre miscarried. Only half the ships sent to Quebec returned with cargoes; the grain had been loaded in hot weather and was in poor condition. To secure for delivery in Britain during 1795 any part of the new Canadian crop, quick action was needed to purchase, load and ship before the St. Lawrence River navigation shut down for the winter. But the 1795 harvest in Canada turned out poor, and in September the Governor issued a general embargo.

In the United States a deficient crop in 1794 commanded even higher prices than usual, owing to French purchases. Frost stopped navigation in New York and Baltimore early in 1795. The 1795 crop showed much the same characteristics as in Britain: it looked good on the ground, but proved light on harvesting and in the Southern States suffered from the weevil. In the circumstances Britain purchased hardly any United States wheat, though confiscation of neutral cargoes yielded some supplies from that quarter.[2]

For no obvious reason Ireland proved a broken reed for wheat supplies. The harvest was plentiful and the embargo on corn exports exempted Great Britain, but ships could not leave before February 1796, thus arriving too late to relieve the shortage. Nor was the situation promising on the European coast of the Mediterranean. Harvests in Spain and Portugal had been so poor that these countries bought Canadian wheat. Only Sicily looked more hopeful, at least after the 1795 harvest, and its King authorised exports to Britain, though not until early 1796. From the Levant the Governor of the Turkey Company wrote that war risks would make freight costs exorbitant for British,

[1] House of Lords Journals (hereinafter HLJ), XL, pp. 276, 294, 297, 311, 528. *The Times*, Dec. 25, 1794; April 17, 20, Aug. 12, Sept. 11, Nov. 4, 1795; Jan. 1, March 29, April 2, 1796. B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, B.o.T. mtgs. 1, 9, 12; P.C. mtgs. 3–5, 7, 27, 28, 32. P.R.O., P.C. 2, No. 145, fo. 61–2, 125–6; P.C.4, No. 6, Nov. 14, 1795.

[2] B.P.P. *Acc.*1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, B.o.T. mtgs. 1, 3, 5; P.C. mtgs. 3, 5, 25, 30, 34, 36. *The Times*, July 18, Aug. 12, Nov. 5, 1795. P.R.O., P.C.4, No. 6, Nov. 9, 1795; No. 7, Feb. 27, April 27, 1796.

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but not for neutral, ships. The Middle East looked to Egypt where both the 1793 and 1794 wheat crops had been excellent, but the customary political intrigues rendered it doubtful whether contracts would be honoured. Britain, however, could not afford scruples: not only were orders placed, but even extended in response to some gentle blackmail that only large quantities would command a moderate price. To obtain physical possession was not the only difficulty. Sicilian and Egyptian wheat being much harder than the British variety, special millstones had to be bought from Portugal to grind this unfamiliar material. Though some reached Britain early in 1796, it is doubtful how much it contributed in these circumstances to the relief of the bread shortage.[1]

All wheat imported up to the end of 1795 was purchased on government account and carried in ships either belonging or chartered to the government. This may well be the first example of state trading in essential supplies during war time. Collective bulk purchase in modern war aims at avoiding competitive bidding by a multitude of private buyers and at a fair rationing out of available supplies. The policy of the 1795 government owed nothing to the first and little to the second motive; it imported wheat because otherwise there might have been no wheat imports at all. Wheat surpluses existed overseas, but those in Northern Europe were subject to embargo, while Canadian wheat did not usually find buyers in Britain; neither area had enough shipping available to lift the supplies. Ships, therefore, had to be chartered and sent in ballast, on the off chance of Prussian and Austrian embargoes being lifted and Canadian wheat proving saleable—risks which private merchants could not be expected to incur. Government wheat transactions were less unusual in authoritarian countries: Sicily offered wheat to the British government, but not necessarily to private buyers; the French government from 1793 to 1795 imported wheat on its own account, not however to the exclusion of, but in addition to, private importers, and incurred heavy losses in the process.

When did the British government embark on the policy of accumulating an emergency reserve of wheat ? No clear answer emerges from the sources. *The Times* absurdly suggested in March 1795 that ministers had taken every possible precaution for months, even for years ! Claude Scott, the factor who bought in the Baltic on government behalf, hinted in January 1795 that considerable purchases had already been made.

Was government trading really necessary ? While the government was in the market, no merchant imported on private account. Several claimed that, had the government stayed out of the market and encouraged private importers by generous bounties, not only would the country have obtained wheat, but more of it than under government trading. The consequences of events which did not happen are

[1] B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, B.o.T. mtgs. 1, 11; P.C. mtgs. 16, 19, 22, 26–8, 34. P.R.O., P.C.2, No. 144, fo. 549–50; No. 145, fo. 128, 191, 227–8, 231, 576; P.C.4, No. 7, June 8, 1796. *The Times*, March 29, April 14, 1796.

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not amenable to historical proof. Claude Scott was convinced that British merchants would have purchased wheat abroad, but not equally certain where they would have sold it. Even discounting persistent rumours of trading with the enemy, there was more than a hint that, as long as Spain and Portugal offered higher prices, Canadian wheat in private British hands would continue to flow there; it could be diverted to Britain—at a price ! As a London corn factor put it: government imports to secure supplies; merchants import to make profit.[1]

Though necessary, a policy of government purchase was not cheap, if sellers knew the identity and motives of the buyer. Lower prices might have been secured, had the government spread its orders among a number of small merchants instead of placing them through a single factor well-known as its agent. But the House of Commons Committee on the High Price of Corn went much further in its very first report in roundly stating that "it was expedient for the Executive Government to desist from making any further Purchases of Corn; and that a Bounty should be granted upon the Importation of certain Sorts of Grain into this Country, for the Encouragement of private Speculation". No chapter and verse was given for this piece of parliamentary wisdom; did it seem self-evident to committee members who were corn traders ? A bill to implement the decision had its first reading three days after the delivery of the report and became law a month later as 36 Geo. III, cap. 21.

As soon as the Select Committee had been set up, the government suspended wheat purchases. It promptly accepted the Committee's recommendation and instructed its agents to place no further orders. The British Minister in Berlin, involved in negotiations, was brusquely reminded that the British government could not now buy any grain, whatever Lord Elgin might have arranged to do. Not that the government could wash its hands of the wheat situation even in 1796. Though concluding no new contracts, it remained responsible for what it had bought and for how and what it sold; not until May 1796 did it lose command of the market owing to the abundance of privately owned wheat. Information still reached government, both through official channels and dealers, about grain available abroad. British consuls and naval commanders had to be instructed to assist British merchants buying corn, to promote and convoy wheat transports. When cargo space became a problem, especially from the Mediterranean, the government put vacant room in ships returning home under charter to itself at the disposal of either the victuallers to the armed forces or the merchants importing grain and expedited delivery by the grant of a special allowance to the crews. Such cargo space had to be allocated *pro rata* among applicants, owing to the great demand. On one occasion

[1] B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, B.o.T. mtgs. 1, 8; P.C. mtgs. 5, 27, 33, 34. *The Times*, March 4, 21, April 25, June 13, July 11, 1795. P.R.O., P.C.2, No. 144, fo. 571–2; P.C.4, No. 7, Feb. 9, 15, 1796.

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the government even advanced funds to an importer in financial difficulties.[1]

Total wheat imports in 1795 fell below 300,000 imperial quarters, less than in any subsequent famine year before 1806. Three times as much wheat was imported in 1796 as in 1795. Does this confirm the conclusion that government purchase worked badly? Large quantities of the 1796 total represented fulfilment of government orders of the previous year. Events did not bear out the extreme view taken by Arthur Young that imports could have only a psychological effect, being too small to lower the home price of wheat. British millers preferred British wheat, but even the poorest foreign wheat found eager buyers at times of shortage and in February and March 1796 kept prices from soaring quite out of range. This gave the government an opportunity of disposing of what in normal times were unsaleable stocks, while continuing to hold the balance between expected arrivals, wheat in store at home and market offerings, so as to make its reserve last. It sought to achieve maximum impact by spreading some imports to small ports all round the coast after local publicity which often caused farmers to dishoard their own supplies in anticipation of a price fall. Ships could be ordered to specific ports; the government had no means of directing its wheat to inland districts, but could only arrange for sales in public markets where inland areas bought. In the London corn market which served as a barometer to the whole country, Claude Scott did not sell by public auction, as this was not the custom there and would have increased apprehension of scarcity and competition among buyers. Instead he sold by sample, rationing purchasers if necessary and enabling buyers to choose the quality most appropriate to their needs. The market received prior advice that government wheat would be sold, but not how much. By selling at or just below market price, he sought to keep that price steady or lower it a little without causing a landslide. When the price had reached the desired level, the government withdrew from the market.

While imported wheat came from a single supplier, this policy worked well. After November 1795 the government could not know either the time or the volume of private imports reaching the country. This affected the management of its reserve. Between December 21, 1795, and early March 1796 the government offered in the market only Canadian low-quality wheat, unsaleable at normal times; prices rose to starvation level. The government might have persisted in this policy, had not the Lord Mayor of London made urgent representations. Thereupon government reserve sales recommenced at the beginning of March, just when the first private imports reached the country. Under the joint impact of these supplies the market broke abruptly.

[1] B.P.P. 1795–96, XVI, No. 123; XIX, No. 135. HCJ, LI, pp. 7, 10, 19, 21, 35, 85–6, 91–2, 197–8, 271. P.R.O., P.C.2, No. 144, fo. 450–2b, 549–50, 557, 571–4; No. 145, fo. 68–9, 123–5, 129, 228–30, 312–3, 453–4; P.C.4, No. 6, Nov. 9, 14, 1795; No. 7, Feb. 9, 15, 16, 18, May 19, 1796.

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The Times represented consumers' reaction by a jubilant poem, but the merchants who had been so anxious to assume responsibility for the country's wheat imports burnt their fingers to the tune of £200,000.[1]

III

As imports did little to relieve the shortage until April 1796, extraordinary measures had to be taken at home. Between January 31 and August 6, 1795, the Board of Trade devoted 13 meetings to the shortage of wheat, repeatedly joined by the President of the Royal Society (Sir Joseph Banks) and the Lord Mayor of London. The Privy Council dealt with the shortage of wheat at 43 meetings between April 27 and November 25; it sat *inter alia* on October 17, 20, 21, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, November 2, 3, 4 and 5, that is on all days but Sundays during the latter period. The frequency of meetings made heavy calls on the politicians most concerned. Out of the 13 Board of Trade meetings, Lord Hawkesbury, its President, attended 12 (on four occasions he in fact *was* the meeting); in his capacity as a member of the Privy Council, he was also present at 40 meetings of that body. The Home Secretary, the Duke of Portland, recorded his attendance at four Board of Trade and 39 of the Privy Council meetings. Another example of assiduity came from the London corn factor Claude Scott, who acted as the government's chief agent for Baltic grain; though not a member of either body, he waited upon both at most meetings.[2]

Alternative uses of wheat had to be sacrificed. Distillers employed some wheat when it was cheap; though its price by early 1795 anyhow ruled it out, legislation consolidated the prohibition. Wheat was also used for the manufacture of starch; as in distillery, inferior wheat only served this purpose and had priced itself out of this market by the beginning of 1795. However, to stop loopholes, an Act prevented starch makers from employing wheat. What was true of starch applied equally to hair powder, but while starch had industrial uses, hair powder was an upper-class luxury. Its sacrifice on the altar of national food supplies provided a popular rallying cry. April saw an excise placed on hair powder, but savings came mainly through voluntary abstention, the royal household giving a lead which prominent citizens were content to follow. So far as the battle of food could be won on the hair powder front, the war was going well.[3]

[1] B.P.P. 1795–96, XIX, No. 135; *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, B.o.T. mtgs. 1, 2; P.C. mtgs. 3–5, 22, 27, 28; 1898, XXXIV, pp. 255, 257. P.R.O., P.C.4, No. 7, Feb. 8, 16, 27 (no minutes are extant for March), 1796. *The Times*, March 3, 8, Apr. 5, June 1, 1796.

[2] *The Times*, Oct. 29, 1795. B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b.

[3] *The Times*, Dec. 24, 1794; Jan. 7, Feb. 11, June 20, July 30, Aug. 28, Sept. 25, 1795. B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, B.o.T. mtgs. 4, 13; P.C. mtgs. 8, 10. 35 Geo. III, cap. 11, sect. 7; 35 Geo. III, cap. 49, especially sect. 3; 35 Geo. III, cap. 119; 36 Geo. III, cap. 6. *CPH*, XXXII, col. 235–42 (Pitt's and Fox's speeches). City of London Guildhall Library Record Office (hereinafter G.L.R.O.). Repertories of the Court of Aldermen (hereinafter Reps.), CIC, fo. 372; Journals of the Court of Common Council (hereinafter Co. Co. Jls.), LXXV, fo. 240–240b.

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The poor could not be left to bear unaided the brunt of this scarcity. Relief measures were taken everywhere to subsidize their bread purchases; here again the King set an example which was widely imitated. All these devices shared a common characteristic: in reducing the price of bread to the poor, they encouraged its consumption. At a time of shortage this was bad policy. It appeared far more expedient to find substitutes. Workhouses, hospitals and public charities were asked to rely on potatoes, rice, garden vegetables or meat. Only sailors in normal times ate ships' biscuits, made of the residue of grain after the extraction of the fine flour; in commending them to general consumption, the Court of Aldermen may have borne in mind that the Lord Mayor was their largest producer in the London area. The Naval Victualling Office experimented with baking them of potato flour. *The Times* in July and August, 1795 could be mistaken for a forerunner of *Mrs. Beeton,* regaling readers with a profusion of unusual recipes. Every food fad in the country commended his particular *nostrum* in the guise of a public benefactor.[1]

The purse of the poor rationed their bread consumption. No self-interest limited the rich: they did not regard bread as a luxury food, but ate it as they were inclined. To its appeal to opulent City companies to stop luxurious entertainments, *The Times* had a mixed response. Typical was the fate of a Common Council motion to stop for a year all public dinners by the Corporation of London and its committees; it met with prompt defeat, but on raising it again, its sponsors were offered the perpetual chairmanship and deputy chairmanship of the City Lands Committee, provided they dropped it. When they refused to budge, the motion passed, but with the time limit shortened from 12 to three months.

In spite of some lapses from grace, there was no lack of that public spirit which Britain has always displayed in emergencies. The rich generally accepted that, as they had alternative means of sustenance, it behoved them voluntarily to curtail their bread consumption. This inspired an undertaking by Privy Councillors to diminish as much as possible their own and their families' use of flour. A variety of prominent people followed suit; scarcely a " creditable and considerate " family in the metropolis, according to *The Times*, failed to reduce its bread consumption by one-fifth or even one quarter. Sacrificial ardour varied; one member of the government cut his servants' customary bread ration by half! When by December 1795 the shortfall of wheat had been estimated at one-third of usual consumption, a new spate of pledges, begun[2] by both Houses of Parliament, sought to achieve

[1] *The Times*, Dec. 19, 25, 1794; July 11, 15, 20, 27, 30, Aug. 7, 13, 27, Oct. 20. 1795; Jan. 18, 1796. G.L.R.O. Co. Co. Jls., LXXV, fo. 239b–40; Reps., CIC, fo. 363–6. B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, P.C. mtgs. 6–9, 14, 40. D.N.B, *sub* Curtis, Sir William.

[2] Webbs, *op. cit.* p. 208, report a resolution to that effect by the Woolwich vestry on Jan. 1, 1795. At that time the proportion proposed to be saved could have been only an inspired guess.

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savings of that proportion by voluntary restrictions on consumption; the Home Office circulated resolutions to that effect to all its correspondents throughout the country; they were duly read out to congregations in churches; the Court of Aldermen recorded its concurrence in the press and urged all its members to pledge themselves similarly, but when the Common Council proposed the same action, a four-to-three majority voted against it.[1]

Up to the eighteenth century most bread had consisted, and for another hundred years much of it continued to consist, of cereals other than wheat. While this applied chiefly to North Britain, the urban south had grown accustomed not only to wheaten bread, but bread made of the finest wheat, entailing a low extraction rate in milling. Consumers equating the fineness of bread with its whiteness tempted dishonest bakers to cheat them by an admixture of alum, a mineral with bleaching properties. When wheat became scarce, two types of economy measures were possible: bread could be "adulterated" by being wholly or partly made of other grains, and the extraction rate of flour could be increased. Those who baked bread for their own consumption pleased themselves. Bakers, however, encountered two obstacles: customers' tastes and the law.

London bread consumers were the most spoilt of all. Time and again the finer types of imported wheat had to be reserved for the London market, the coarser ones sold in the outports. Londoners resisted all attempts to introduce a lower grade of bread. The poorer the district, the finer the bread sold; the finest of all was baked in Petticoat Lane. While the rich might be persuaded to put up with coarser and darker bread, the poor could not. The facts were not in dispute, though the explanation varied. *The Times*, reflecting the middle-class view, considered the poor too dainty; Pitt lamented their prejudices in Parliament. Another member explained that buying inferior bread led to increased consumption and wastage due to its satisfying neither appetite nor taste; hence no money was saved. Piece workers in steady employment assured Arthur Young that only the finest bread gave them sustenance adequate to maintain their pace of work; as soon as they ate lower quality bread, performance suffered.[2]

In spite of many examples to the contrary, few bread reformers believed it practicable entirely to dispense with wheat. The general clamour was for bread only partly wheaten. Fox and Sheridan both argued in Parliament that admixture of other grains made bread less nutritious as well as less palatable—the latter probably the more important criterion. They did not draw any distinction between the sub-

[1] *The Times*, May 1, 11, June 24, July 10, 11, 15, 16, 18, 20, 23, 28, Aug. 14, Nov. 10, Dec. 22, 1795; Jan. 4, 11, Feb. 3, 1796. *CPH*, XXXII, col. 687–700 (Dundas's speech). B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, P.C. mtgs. 6, 26. G.L.R.O. Reps., CIC, fo. 369–71, 387–95; CC, fo. 65–9; Co. Co. Jls., LXXV, fo. 240, 241–2, 244–7; LXXVI, fo. 61–2b. HLJ, XL, pp. 562–3, 567–8. P.R.O., P.C. 2, No. 144, fo. 542–3.

[2] B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, B.o.T. mtg. 2. *The Times*, Dec. 15, 1795; Feb. 6, March 2, 1796. *CPH*, XXXII, col. 687–700 (Francis's speech).

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stances to be admixed. In spite of what people and even statutes said, neither beans nor rice would mix with wheat flour at all; maize did, but only at the price of turning bread a revolting yellow colour.[1] White peas could be added, but not in significant quantities. Barley was the grain most often and successfully mixed with wheat, usually in a 1 to 2 proportion; the royal household ate some barley bread of this composition. Others preferred oats. London merchants and traders at a crisis meeting tasted bread made of wheat, barley and oats; they guardedly commended it for a dire emergency, but not otherwise. Had the poor had plenty of coal, they might have substituted potatoes on a large scale, but fuel for roasting them was scarce and dear.[2] In the circumstances they tried to turn potatoes into bread, but even the sanguine *Times* had to admit that potato and wheat flour did not mix. That left rye, the grain chiefly used in conjunction with wheat for bread consumed by the royal household. It was described as neither engaging to the eye nor pleasing to the palate, though it could be made delicious to the taste by mixing wheat, rye and potato flour in equal proportions ![3]

For every person suggesting admixture, at least half a dozen advocated a higher extraction rate; many advised both. Even the Board of Trade experts could not agree whether a higher extraction rate increased merely the quantity of bread or the amount of nutrition provided. Flour was ordinarily ground into eight different grades, of which the three highest were known simply as firsts, seconds and thirds; firsts sold for bread in London, seconds for bread elsewhere; seconds and thirds as well as the next two lower grades, fine and coarse middlings, made seamen's biscuits. Qualities below this, fine and coarse pollard and finally bran, went to feed livestock, especially pigs and poultry. Voluntary resolutions by prominent people willing to eat brown bread abounded, but were mostly frustrated by the impossibility of obtaining it; only a consumers' strike threat could persuade bakers to provide the quality demanded. Bakers in their turn blamed millers for refusing to supply the appropriate flour. Ever since millers some time in the seventeenth century had turned mealmen, purchasing and dressing wheat on their own account, they had sold the different grades of flour for their different uses at a good profit; they could even adulterate first-class with lower grade (often imported) wheat and sell the flour at the price for prime quality. A higher extraction rate would have reduced their profits. Brown bread was therefore scarcely cheaper than white; the lower cost of the ingredients did not benefit consumers. In these conditions consumers' self-denying resolutions served no purpose; only statutory prohibition of bread above a certain fineness would help. To this length, however, Parliament was not prepared to

[1] Confirmed by experience after the second world war.
[2] I owe this point to Professor F. J. Fisher.
[3] B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, B.o.T. mtgs. 1, 2; P.C. mtg. 40. *The Times*, July 11, 13, 15, 22, 27, 30, Aug. 11, 14, 30, Dec. 14, 24, 29, 1795; Jan. 7, 21, 22, Feb. 24, 1796. *CPH*, XXXII, col. 235–42 (Pitt's and Fox's speeches), 687–700 (Sheridan's speech). HCJ, LI, pp. 206–13.

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go; it had already to contend with the venerable but dense and obscure jungle of laws proliferating round the assize of bread.[1]

To control the price of necessities in the consumers' interest had been considered an appropriate function of government since the Middle Ages. Adam Smith's contemporaries voiced doubts, but were not yet convinced that competition could be trusted in this rôle.[2] Through legislative attempts to stop up loopholes, especially in the quality of bread, to provide two or three grades of bread and to take account of the changes in the economic power of bakers and millers, the assize of bread had degenerated into a control of retail price based on the cost of raw material, but leaving free all intermediate stages in the chain of production.[3] This solved the problem at the bakers' expense; moreover, the allowance made to them under the assize was specific, not *ad valorem*, becoming more and more inadequate as prices increased. Bakers lost no opportunity of voicing their dissatisfaction, but as small craftsmen had no influence. The Worshipful Company of Bakers of London retained shreds of ancient greatness and in 1795 even obtained an interview with the Prime Minister, but its Master happened to be not a baker at all, but a prominent miller and mealman; his influence tipped the scale on the wrong side.[4]

This was the legislative straitjacket extant in 1795. However much disobeyed in practice, the law laid down in detail what grades of wheaten bread could be sold and how to price them, making allowance neither for the introduction of a higher extraction rate for flour nor for the fixing of a price adequate to remunerate bakers. They could not even be indemnified against disregarding assize prices, as half the penalty incurred went to the common informer. Bread could legally be made of rye, barley, oats, pease and beans as well as wheat, but not of any other grains; the assize however priced every kind as though it had been baked of wheat.

Parishes inundated the government with demands for a coarser grade of bread. Legal prohibitions were a minor hurdle; what one law forbade, another law could authorize. 36 Geo. III, cap. 22, passed late in 1795, permitted bakers to use every kind of grain, grain mixture and potatoes as well as wholemeal wheat flour. This gave free rein regarding quality, but what about price? The maintenance of the assize would have required an all-inclusive table setting prices for

[1] B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, B.o.T. mtgs. 1, 2; P.C. mtgs. 9, 37, 40. *The Times*, July 14, 15, Aug. 13, 1795; Jan. 1, 7, Feb. 6, 1796. *CPH*, XXXII, col. 687–700 (Francis's speech).

[2] A motion in the London Court of Aldermen to repeal all legislation relating to the assize of bread was lost on the Lord Mayor's casting vote in 1795: G.L.R.O. Reps., CIC, fo. 495–505.

[3] The steps in the degeneration of the assize of bread from the Middle Ages to the late eighteenth century are described in detail by S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.* pp. 196–218.

[4] *The Times*, Oct. 12, 17, Nov. 4, 1795; Jan. 6, 1796. Webbs, *op. cit.* p. 201. B.P.P. 1795–96, XVI, No. 125, especially app. H.; *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, B.o.T. mtg. 2. G.L.R.O. Reps., CIC, fo. 273–7.

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bread baked not only of every quality of wheat flour, but also of flour adulterated by varying proportions of other bread grains; imagination boggles at the task of providing not only for single-grain, but for combined admixtures and different qualities among the lesser grains. The challenge was flung to the London Court of Aldermen, the chief assize authority in the country: would it compile such a table? It firmly declined to grasp this nettle: in fixing the assize of bread, it assumed no responsibility for the justice of the price set, but proceeded purely in accordance with the tables annexed to the Acts; it did not claim competence to judge the principles which had guided their compilation.[1]

Some parishes devised plans for feeding the labouring poor without awaiting official sanction, none more systematic than St. James, Westminster. The energetic and resourceful clerk to the governors and directors of the poor experimented with four types of flour:

(1) Wholemeal wheat, rye and barley combined 3: 2: 1

(2) Wholemeal wheat and barley combined 2: 1

(3) Wholemeal wheat, rye, barley and maize combined 5: 3½: 2½: 1

(4) Wheat "thirds", rye and barley combined 3: 2: 1, 12 bushels being mixed with 2 cwt. potatoes.

Of these, No. 3 proved a complete failure, owing to the maize preventing the flour from rising. No. 2 succeeded best and enabled the parish to sell quartern loaves at 12½*d.* when the assize price was 15*d.* People bought this bread reluctantly, driven by poverty. It achieved a diminution of bread consumption: adults who normally ate two quartern loaves a week now contented themselves with 1½; children even reduced their intake from three to one. This made the experiment a major success, causing the Privy Council not only to question mayors and chief magistrates everywhere how far adultered bread had been brought into use, but to print and disseminate 500 copies of these experiments.[2]

IV

A number of further bread crises occurred in the course of wars with France, some worse than that of 1795–96.[3] The measures then adopted were brought into operation again on subsequent occasions: suppression of alternative uses of wheat and appeals to the patriotic spirit of the wealthier section of the community. Though the assize of bread was not abolished in London until 1822 (3 Geo. IV, cap. 106)

[1] B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, P.C. mtgs. 6, 10, 40. G.L.R.O. Reps., CIC, fo. 274–7, 363–6, 387–95, 495–505, 597, 615–8; CC, fo. 21, 23–5, 38–9; Court of Aldermen Papers, Oct. 1795, letter from Titus Woolhead to Town Clerk, Oct. 6.

[2] B.P.P. *Acc.* 1795–96, XLII, No. 839b, P.C. mtg. 9. G.L.R.O., P.A.R. Bk. 4, pp. 15–24. P.R.O., P.C.2, No. 145, fo. 292, 324.

[3] For subsequent crises, cf. W. F. Galpin, *The Grain Supply of England during the Napoleonic Period*, New York, 1925, especially pp. 10-13, and Webbs, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 211–14.

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—1836 (6 & 7 Will. IV, cap. 37) in the remainder of the country—it was never again allowed to hamper the feeding of the people at a time of wheat scarcity. No further experiments in government trading took place; bounties encouraged imports by private merchants, the government suspending the corn laws for the duration of the war. The real outcome of these crises was a general conviction that population was increasing too rapidly and pressing on food supplies —a thesis which found expression three years after the 1795–96 crisis in *The First Essay on Population.*

The London School of Economics.

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