

throughout the length and breadth of Central and Western Europe a general rise in food prices, but not nearly so great a rise as might have been anticipated. Nor does it seem probable that a further increase in prices, at least as measured in gold, will result during a second or even a third year of war. The governments both of belligerent and of neutral countries have taken measures to prevent speculation in food, and agriculture and commerce have adapted themselves automatically to the exigencies of the war. Germany and Austria are utilizing every vacant lot for intensive cultivation, and as wheat rises in price in England and France, a greater area is sown in Argentina and the Canadian northwest. If the Dardanelles are captured by the Allies, the vast reservoir of Russian grain will flow into Western Europe. Food, in all likelihood, will be no scarcer on the planet this year than last, or, if somewhat scarcer, will be more equally distributed and more economically consumed. None of the belligerent nations is likely to be starved into submission.

ANY privately supported social agency has for its function to experiment and demonstrate. It can never put successful experiments into practice on a large scale, and should not if it could. This is the function of a publicly supported institution, which can seldom experiment, and lacks freedom and flexibility in demonstration. The School Lunch Committee of the Home and School League of Philadelphia has recently gone out of existence with the transference of its work to the public school authorities of the city. It has experimented for several years and has demonstrated the fact that school lunches may be self-supporting. As a result of its work the city now largely adopts this urgent school reform. Here is an admirable example of the way in which the private social agency should direct its activity toward abolishing the reason for its own existence.

"FINDING herself at war with half the world, England had claimed the right to search neutral vessels on the high seas for goods belonging to her enemies and to confiscate them wherever found; had also claimed the right to seize vessels trading with such of her enemies' ports as she had declared blockaded, whether she had actually blockaded them or not. . . . The northern states of Europe, headed by Russia, drew together in a league of 'Armed Neutrality,' determined to assert in force the doctrine that 'free ships make free goods,' . . ." This account, written some years ago by Professor Woodrow Wilson, of Princeton University, refers to the year 1780, and now happens to appear in the course of the serial

republishing of "A History of the American People." The passage proves that if history is trying to repeat itself, it is far from letter-perfect. There is ground, however, for the belief that the present world-drama is merely a garbled version of an old morality in which one of the sinners, at least, bore the same name. Is Mr. Wilson plagiarizing from history, or is history plagiarizing from Mr. Wilson?

British Orders and American Protests

ENGLAND'S new note is admirable in temper, and is in one respect satisfactory in substance. It opens the way for a consideration after the war is over of the legal controversies between the two countries by an international tribunal. But it does not make the British contention any more acceptable to the American government and public opinion. Justification for the Order-in-Council and in general for the British maritime policy during the war is based chiefly upon two grounds. It is defended as the legitimate application of existing principles of international law to new conditions, and as a fair reprisal against an enemy which has ignored civilized methods of waging war.

The first of these defenses is not without force; but how can the British government reasonably expect the United States to acquiesce in the second? The claim that the American government should accept unprotestingly an unprecedented extension of the principle of the blockade and an unprecedented stretching of the definition of contraband because Germany behaved badly in Belgium, implies a revolutionary change in the attitude and responsibilities of neutrals toward belligerents. It implies that neutrals should pass judgment on the issues and controversies arising among belligerents and adapt its own commercial policy to the results of such a verdict. The NEW REPUBLIC trusts that in the future neutrals will have the courage to assume this very attitude and responsibility. But when such a responsibility is assumed it would scarcely be effective unless it were shared by an organized group of neutrals. If it were assumed now by our country, it could be construed by Germany as an unfriendly act. Great Britain, by excusing her own conduct as a measure of retaliation and by presumably expecting us to consent to it on that ground, is practically asking the United States to take sides against Germany. We are obliged to reject this English plea in order to have a valid defense against any German complaints. The American government has refused to admit in its

negotiations with Germany that the British Order-in-Council constitutes sufficient excuse for the German violation of the law of visit and search. It must refuse to admit in its negotiations with Great Britain that alleged German atrocities in Belgium constitute a sufficient excuse for an unprecedented extension of belligerent power over neutral commerce.

The policy of Great Britain makes the situation of the sympathizers with the Allies in the United States very difficult. The United States is a nation whose inhabitants are derived from many countries and races. It contains many millions of people of German blood. These people are naturally very desirous that the resources of their adopted country should not be used in a manner injurious to their blood relations in Germany. It so happens, however, that they can be used in a manner very harmful to Germany without any violation of technical neutrality. The Allies can draw military supplies from this country to an extent which during the coming year may count decisively in their favor. The Germans naturally object to the assistance which the Allies are obtaining from the United States, but they would not have been in a position to stir up an effective counter agitation as long as Great Britain was respectful of the restricted rights of trade which the pre-existing body of law permitted Germans and Americans to enjoy. Now, however, German-Americans are in a position to stir up an effective counter agitation. They can ask the good-natured American citizen of the Middle West whether he wishes to stand for an application of international law which enables the Allies to buy ammunition in the United States but prevents the Germans from obtaining food and clothing for women and children. They can urge upon the Southerner that the most effective way to obtain a sale for his cotton in Germany is to force Great Britain to modify her commercial policy by the threat of an embargo on military supplies. Such a threat would be resented in England, but by making it the United States would merely be itself following the example of reprisal which is so popular with Great Britain and Germany.

The other justification urged by the British government for the Order-in-Council has more force. The law of nations has always admitted the general right of a belligerent with control of the seas to suppress any commerce of military advantage to its enemy. The doctrine has been applied in the past, subject to definite restrictions. If a blockade were established, it was supposed to be effective, to be impartial and to have no more than a certain radius of action around specified ports. If a blockade were not established, only that part of a belligerent's trade destined to feed, equip or supply its armed

forces was subject to interference. Great Britain claims that these restrictions have ceased to hold, because a perfectly effective blockade can be established without enclosing specified ports, and because any commerce with a nation in arms is of military advantage to that nation. A blockade, in order to be legitimate, has only to be effective.

The technical answer is that the British blockade is not effective, because it does not attempt to stop German trade with Norway, Sweden, and Denmark in the Baltic, and consequently it is not impartial. As the *New York World* says, it is not so much a blockade of Germany as against the United States. But the real strength of the American case does not rest upon these technical rights. They are only the pretext. Such rights derive their importance not from their intrinsic value, but because they are the one means of bringing home to Great Britain some sense of international responsibility in the exercise of her sea power. The kind of power which Great Britain is claiming is of enormous reach and effect. It makes the British navy the veritable ruler of the seas, subject only to the restrictions which a well-disposed British government is willing to impose on its fleet commanders. Such being the British assumption of power, neutrals must cling to their prescriptive rights. If only the old limitations on the exercise of that power can be kept alive, nations which do not expect to control the seas will have a good legal excuse for insisting that Great Britain either share this great power with other nations, or exercise it in some constitutional way. That is the reason why the American government has protested and must continue to protest against the Order-in-Council.

The Freedom of the Seas

THE Government of the United States and the Imperial German Government . . . have long stood together in urging the very principles upon which the Government of the United States now so solemnly insists. They are contending for the freedom of the seas. The Government of the United States will continue to contend for that freedom, from whatever quarter violated without compromise and at any cost."

The foregoing passage from the last American note to Germany is strong and clear. The freedom of the seas is a brave phrase. If the American nation is going to "contend" for the good of any cause, it could not select a more fruitful one than the "freedom of the seas." The deliverance of mankind from all kinds of frustration and oppression will in part depend upon the conversion of the "freedom of the seas" from a sounding phrase into a sober and definite political achievement.