Are Bread Lines Just Around the Corner?

By H. V. Thornton

What Will the returning soldier demand when an armistice calls a halt to hostilities? Even if the heaviest fighting and the greatest sacrifices do lie ahead, the question is entitled to serious consideration. Along some timid or excitable sectors of the civilian front, he has already assumed the proportions of a bogeyman, who will return to even scarcer and rebuild America. Actually, reliable reports indicate that he has thought little if at all about such matters. He is largely preoccupied under conditions which offer slight encouragement to the man who would ponder the problems of postwar economics.

Future events may persuade the service-man that America must be remade after some new and strange pattern; but this outcome may depend upon our ability to make his return to civilian life reasonably convenient and purposeful. Probably his chief concern, as he looks forward to the peace, is a job. As a rock-bottom minimum, he wants the right to work, to raise a family, and if the mood strikes him to cuss the magistrates of the land with customary American impunity. He could not, with dignity becoming a good fighting man, ask less of his country.

It should not be forgotten that the American soldier is a civilian, who in this instance, reached maturity in the hard years of America's worst depression. He remembers, vaguely perhaps, the "Hoovervilles," eviction of veterans from Washington, apple selling along Main Street and Broadway, the whole tragic anticlimax to the lush prosperity of another postwar period. So far as his experience is concerned, promising, purposeful jobs were hard to find until WAR suddenly placed a premium on manpower. The irony of this fact is too much for a well-balanced sense of humor; too tragic to justify the hope that the serviceman, along with the masses of people, will be very tolerant toward ideological convictions, partisan prejudice, or vested interests which stand in the way of full peacetime employment. He knows, despite a gigantic public debt and the waste of a long costly war, that America has sufficient resources—land, mineral, factories, and leadership—to reabsorb in useful employment not only the serviceman, but the millions of workers now occupied in war industries.

Nevertheless the task of restoring him to a peacetime role may be greater than he suspects, as a matter of fact, far more difficult than many leading civilians are disposed to admit. Among the latter the opinion commonly prevails that we will glide painlessly out of our wartime economy into an unprecedented boom. And to support their optimism, they point convincingly to the great and growing volume of deferred buying, and thirty or more billions of pent-up purchasing power.

The basis of this hope, however, is shaken when fundamental differences between the coming postwar era and the early 1920's is borne in mind. Our economy in 1917-1918 was characterized more by a change of pace than by a change of major purpose. Our primary contributions in World War I were manpower and food. We fought mainly with arms and munitions processed in the war factories of France and England. In this war we have become, to no small degree, "the arsenal of democracy," the provider of some twenty or twenty-four million of the other United Nations.

The remarkable conversion of our factories for wartime production will always stand as one of the great achievements of the war effort. We could not have survived without it; but the very extent and completeness of the conversion constitutes a rough measure of the problems which must be faced when demobilization day comes. These problems cannot be considered solely in terms of the rehabilitation of ten or twelve millions of soldiers, a task of no small proportion when we bear in mind the rather bad job we did twenty-five years ago with an armed force scarcely a third this size. The restoration of some twenty or twenty-four millions of war plant workers to peacetime pursuit adds immeasurably to the task, not only because they are more numerous than servicemen but because the number of their dependents is larger.

If due allowance is made for the greater size of our postwar armies, for those workers who will not be displaced because of the armistice, and for the fact that at this time we are considerably overemployed, it is not unreasonable to expect as a minimum temporary unemployment for from ten to fourteen million workers. In any event the number will be so great that the problems of postwar readjustment cannot be left to chance solutions.

Back of the hope that economic relations will automatically adjust themselves lies the assumption that once the fighting is finished people will rush to the markets for every form of durable goods. Of course this would happen if the goods were available. But they won't be available until plants now engaged in the production of war goods are converted back to the production of peacetime goods; and complete conversion will take time.

Not only will reconversion take time, but relatively little labor is needed in the process. For example, eighteen months were required to retool the Ford factory when the famous model T was replaced by the model A. In the meantime thousands of Ford workers were out of constructive employment. Hope prevails that we can do a better, swifter job of retooling our plants after this war, a hope which may have some foundation. But the record made in fitting our factories for the production of the materials of war is too impressive to be accepted as a measure of the time required for refitting our factories for peacetime production. True, we shall be faced with an emergency of very serious nature, but it will not be conspicuous or dramatic, nor will the guarantees of fat war contracts have much to do with the latter effort. Furthermore, in spite of the initiative and adventure which has always characterized American industry, some manufacturers may be in no great hurry to reconvert until they are sure of the direction in which economic winds will blow.

In the meantime, the savings of the soldier, worker, farmer, and small business and professional people may be dissi-
terms now available. You'd Help
of this bank and discuss the favorable
or other adequate security, see an officer
WERE
227 W. Main
National War Fund
Hal Muldrow, Jr.
2417 Commerce St.
Long-Bell Lumber Co.
Norman, Oklahoma
FIRST NATIONAL BANK
National Disinfectant
"Everything Cleaning"
Phil C.
BUILDING MATERIALS
Of All Kinds
Company
for
Norman '28
Dallas
Phone 51
Norman

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states cannot make war, as political jurisdic-
tions they cannot participate in the
conduct of war; but no constitutional
limitation forbids state measures which may
make war's aftermath less painful. A
courageous approach to the varied prob-
lems of reconstruction, among other
things, will restore the dignity and integ-
ity of state and local governments. But
aside from such matters, there is sound
justification for extensive expenditure of
public funds for the repair and extension of
the plants and structures of almost every
political jurisdiction in the state.
Either because of necessity or design, or
both, they will be neglected during the
war emergency.
The municipalities of this state alone are
spending $10,000,000 less annually on cap-
ital structures and their repair that would
have been expended under normal con-
ditions. Such interests cannot be neglected
indefinitely. There never will be a more
propitious time for launching public works
programs than with the armistice.
But they ought to be sound programs,
based upon thoughtful planning.
A great deal of furor has been raised by
the suggestion that private business and
government act in close and understanding
partnership for the purpose of solving the
problems of postwar reconstruction. As a
matter of fact, such partnership has always
existed. After all, commerce and trade
are based upon a scheme of law and order.
Many of our greatest problems, involving
the economic well-being of the whole na-
tion, cannot or will not be solved by pri-
ivate business. Among these are soil con-
servation, public health, highways and
some aspects of transportation. Our sys-
tem of private enterprise, accepted in its
best and fullest sense, cannot survive un-
less leaders are willing to join with their
government for the purpose of establish-
ing positive measures which will assure
work immediately following the armistice
and continually thereafter.

WAVES
Ensign Dessie Abbott, '42m.ed, Oklahoma City,
was assigned to duty at the Naval Air Station,
Jacksonville, Florida.
Ensign Helen Marie Jennings, '37ba, former
Oklahoma City school teacher, was assigned to
duty in New Orleans.
Virginia Watkins, '39he, Byng, Oklahoma, was
on duty as a specialist second class at the Naval
Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas.
Marilyn Lloyd Lovell, '42ba, San Antonio, Tex-
as, was on duty at the Naval Air Training Center
at Kingsville, Texas, as an aviation mechanic's
mate third class.
Velma Easton, '40-'41, Shreveport, Louisiana,
was an apprentice seaman in training at the Naval
Reserve Midshipmen's School, Northampton, Mas-
sachusetts.

Coast Guard
Caleb F. Carpenter, '37-'41, Oklahoma City,
electrician's mate second class, was assigned to
duty at Virginia Beach, Virginia.

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