

NUTRITION

# Skeleton at the Feast

**A "thanksgiving" day dinner in Austria, Poland, or Germany, might be a bowl of potato soup. It might include a few leaves of cabbage.**

**By SIR JOHN BOYD ORR**  
Director-General, FAO of the U.N.

*Told in an exclusive Science Service interview*

➤ THE generous people of America will be mindful of the needs of others when they come to their traditional turkey dinner on Thanksgiving Day. They will return hearty thanks for the fruits of the earth with which they have been so bountifully blessed, that they may share with those who are in want.

Never before in modern times has there been more desperate want in the world. In other lands, in Europe and Asia and in parts of Latin America and the Near East, few people will have turkey this year, or any festive equivalent of the Thanksgiving fowl of the United States.

Even in countries like England, where a poor man can still get a full meal, there will be no feast, for the best dinner possible for him is seldom anything but drab. If his diet does maintain health, it still lacks variety to support his spirits.

Millions of others must count themselves fortunate to have even enough to stave off starvation. Many will not be able to do even that.

## South of the Border

In some of the countries of the Western Hemisphere, in Mexico and Guatemala for example, many people might have festive turkey on their tables, though of course they do not celebrate Thanksgiving Day, a national holiday of the United States of America. But the turkey has been a favorite festive fowl in Central and South America for many centuries. And though living standards in some countries of this region have never been high, shortages this year are not so great as elsewhere in the world.

The turkey went to the Middle East to get its western name. There it is highly favored for a feast; but few will be able to afford this food in the Middle East this year. While supplies of food are not as scarce in that region as in

many others, inflation ranging from 200% to 1,000% above prewar years makes it very difficult for the majority of the people to secure even the necessities of life.

Farther to the East, in India, more than half the people are rice eaters. A feast would be boiled rice, mixed with vegetables and some meat cooked with spices. In better times a poor man might afford such a feast, together with some sweets, once or twice a year. But rice production is only 92% of the prewar level and the population has increased by many millions. Plain rice, and too little to go around, will be the season's fare of the overwhelming majority of the rice eaters of India.

## India's Wheat Crop

In other parts of India the people are wheat eaters. The partial failure of the wheat crop and the abandonment of fields of wheat at the harvest season in the Punjab during the period of civil strife last summer will aggravate hunger among the population there and elsewhere in India.

As in India, the people of China are divided among rice eaters and wheat eaters. China is short of food and a serious famine occurred there last year. In the South of China there are shortages of fertilizers, seeds, and farm animals. Many people are too weak from under-nutrition to work. In the North of China the wheat crop this year was cut 60% by the spring drought. All over China communications have been disrupted by years of war and civil unrest. There will be scarcely any feasts among the masses of people of China this year.

As serious a food crisis exists in some countries of Europe as in Asia. Last year in nine European countries, representing one-half of the population of the continent, less than 2200 calories daily per person were available. Nutrition experts have defined as "emergency subsistence" a national average supply level of 2200 calories. This is the minimum needed to prevent serious under-nutrition leading to disease and the

danger of civil unrest.

A low average in a country means semi-starvation for some groups and adverse effect on health generally. The prolonged food crisis in both Europe and Asia has retarded the growth of young people, lowered body weights, and increased the death rate, especially among children. It has impaired the capacity for work and increased the incidence of tuberculosis and deficiency diseases. In some regions of Europe tuberculosis has reached the epidemic stage.

## Food Rationing in Austria

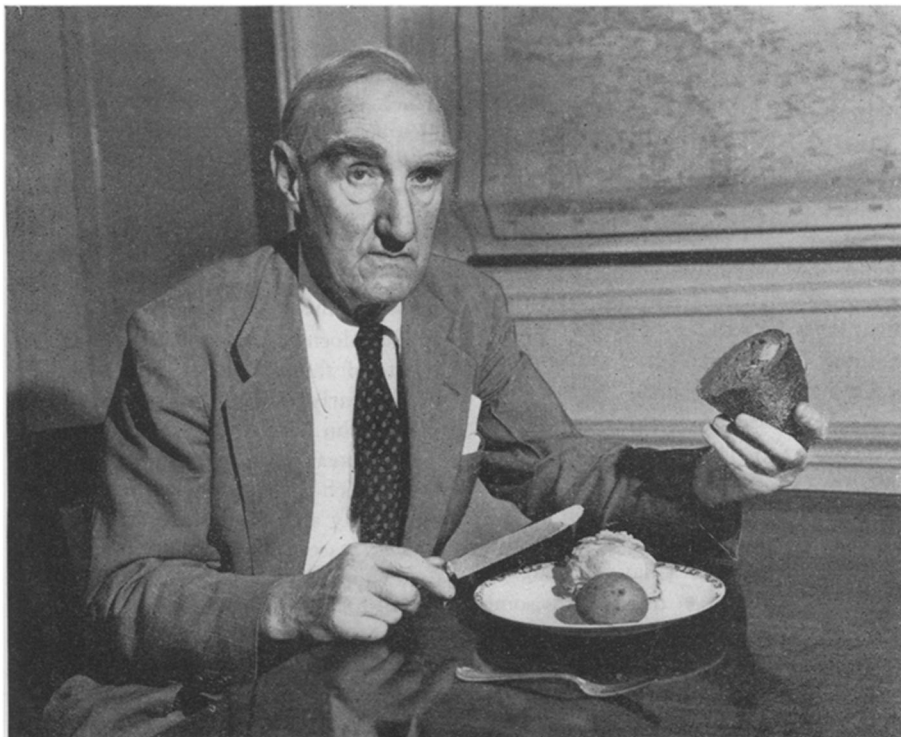
The modest goal of the government of Austria last summer was to have stocks of food at least four weeks ahead. Then the government could plan for good distribution to settle unrest among the people. The people realized that they could not have any more food than the ration stipulated. They only wanted to be sure that this meager ration would be honored. Normal consumption was 1550 calories, of which 1,000 came from bread. Beans and sauerkraut sometimes had to be put on the ration for babies because there was nothing else to give.

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An FAO nutritionist wrote of con-



**FOR AMERICAN THANKSGIVING—Mindful of the misery abroad, we have much to be grateful for when we sit down to our traditional turkey dinner on Thanksgiving Day.**



**EUROPE'S MEAGER FARE**—Sir John Boyd Orr is shown eating bread with a little margarine, some cabbage and potato, illustrating the desperate want that will stalk millions abroad while we feast.

ditions she observed in Italy last summer. The government calculated that the food supply in the country would provide a daily allowance of 2,076 calories per person daily. Since the partial failure of the European harvest last summer, the estimate must now be revised downward. The tuberculosis rate in Italy has risen to almost double the 1940 rate and is of the most serious concern to the government.

#### What Italians Are Eating

An Italian's ordinary dinner is spaghetti with sauce. His daily allowance of fats and oils is less than a tablespoon, and of sugar one teaspoon. He will have vegetables and fruit in season and a tiny piece of cheese when it is available. Such would be a "thanksgiving" dinner in Italy.

In Scotland, my native land, one may have a shilling's (20 cents') worth of meat a week. A family of three could manage a two-pound roast for Sunday dinner by doing without meat the rest of the week. Food rationing in the United Kingdom is austere but it is democratic. Food supplies are distributed fairly among all the people. Supplies of food available in the United Kingdom in 1946-47 were sufficient to main-

tain an average calorie level of 2,880 per person daily. The average level in the United States was 3,392.

But comparisons of numbers of calories available to people tell only part of the story of the difference between the diet in America and in the deficit countries. Suppose, instead, we compare available supplies of meat and poultry, eggs and milk.

In the United States, supplies available for consumption in 1946-47 were sufficient to provide each member of the population with two average-sized servings of meat and poultry, one egg and three glasses of milk daily.

#### Amount For Consumption

This quantity of meat and poultry was the amount available for two days' ration in France, four in Britain, 6½ in Italy, and 14 in Poland and Austria. In Poland and Austria three glasses of milk had to last four days and available supplies of eggs were only sufficient to provide one per person every fortnight. This quantity of milk and the egg would have been the average supply available for the ration of these products for six days in Italy and three days in France. The United Kingdom was able to supply an egg to each person every

other day and three glasses of milk for 1 1/3 days.

Cereals constituted 52% of the average European diet in 1946-47, and as much as 62% in countries where the calorie supply was low. In the United States cereals formed only 25% of the diet. Some of the people in a few of the countries of Europe have had practically no animal food since the war.

Owing to partial failure in the 1947 harvest the people in the deficit areas of Europe this year face the threat of even lower rations than any time since the war. Nor will the food shortage end in 1948. It will continue for many years. But it can be overcome, provided the nations will act together on a unified plan. The solutions are to be found in more production and more equitable distribution of food, together with a general improvement in the economic life of the people of the whole world.

Then and only then may a Thanksgiving Day for the world be proclaimed.

*Science News Letter, November 22, 1947*

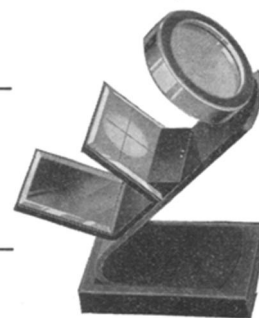
Milk is desirable for elderly persons to help prevent bone breakage.

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