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**TITLE: Everybody's Business: Film,
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War**

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Abstract:

One month after the outbreak of the Second World War, the 'Dig for Victory' campaign was introduced in Britain in an attempt to grow more food to feed a nation in conflict, at which time the government persuaded people on the Home Front to convert their gardens into allotments in order to cultivate vegetables. Correspondingly, strategies were also created to encourage farmers to transform their land as part of the war effort. The campaign for the production of food not only concerned the need to educate in order to provide for the country, but also provided an impetus for community and patriotism. Outlining the need for home grown products and productive cultivation of the landscape, Dig for Victory in World War Two was a scheme that was professional from the outset involving the screening of numerous newsreels and documentaries in its implementation. That this plan was mobilised at such short notice owes a debt to the First World War, a period which witnessed the birth of film as official propaganda. However, the main disparity between the two film campaigns lies in their strategies for dealing with the populace. The Second World War was deemed 'the People's War', using the working class as central protagonists with the aim of disregarding class difference. Alternatively, WW1 deployed upper and middle class characters in fiction films in order to educate. These practices were put into operation despite the fact that the cinema audience during this period was predominantly comprised of those fighting starvation, and indeed those actually 'digging for victory'. This article analyses the strategies inaugurated in the cinematic food campaign in World War One in both newsreels and fiction film, and traces a trajectory to the Dig for Victory campaign in World War Two.

Key Words: Food, Dig for Victory, Film, Propaganda, First World War, Second World War

Everybody's Business: Film, Food and Victory in the First World War

One month after the outbreak of the Second World War, the 'Dig for Victory' campaign was introduced in Britain in an attempt to grow more food to feed a nation in conflict, leading the government to persuade people on the Home Front to convert their gardens into allotments in order to cultivate vegetables. Correspondingly, strategies were also created to encourage farmers to transform their land as part of the war effort. The campaign for the production of food not only concerned the need to educate in order to provide for the country, but also provided an impetus for community and patriotism. Outlining the need for home grown products and productive cultivation of the landscape, 'Dig for Victory' in World War Two was a scheme that was professional from the outset involving the screening of numerous newsreels and documentaries in its implementation.¹ That this plan was mobilised at such short notice owes a debt to the First World War, a period which witnessed the birth of film as official propaganda. However, the main disparity between the two film campaigns lies in their strategies for dealing with the populace. The Second World War was deemed 'the People's War',² using the working class as central protagonists with the aim of disregarding class difference. Alternatively, WW1 deployed upper and middle class characters in fiction films in order to educate. These practices were put into operation despite the fact that the cinema audience during this period was predominantly comprised of those fighting starvation, and indeed those actually 'digging for victory'. This article analyses the strategies inaugurated in the cinematic food campaign in World War One in both newsreels and fiction film, and traces a trajectory to the 'Dig for Victory' campaign in World War Two.³

To contextualise, Britain's food crisis did not commence in 1914 but began much earlier. With an increase in town dwelling and a move from an agrarian to an industrial society, the late Victorian period had already experienced an agricultural depression with a subsequent collapse in prices. Both Britain and Germany relied heavily on imports, a situation which had political and strategic ramifications, and staples such as sugar, grains (in particular wheat) and meat were essential for the survival of this growing urban nation.⁴ By 1914, the government realised the need to increase its own domestic supplies while simultaneously safeguarding imports from naval attack. At the outbreak of war, Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, established a Cabinet Committee on Food Supplies with the aim of protecting the national food store in addition to supplying the nation with provisions at minimal cost. However, whereas domestic food production, including harvest yields, was high at the outset and increased dramatically up to 1916, by 1917 this was in decline, potato crops were poor and animal husbandry was threatened by labour shortages.⁵

Forming a coalition government in May 1915 (led by David Lloyd George from 1916), Asquith created the County War Agricultural Committees, whose members consisted of wealthy county landowners, farmers and agriculturalists, all of whom were responsible for national food production from 1917 until the end of the war. This had political ramifications and, as Van Emden and Humphries suggest, because of this,

many believed there was a middle-class bias on the food control committees set up by the government to oversee food distribution. They were dominated by traders, businessmen and the local great and good, but the co-operative shops and factories

that provided for the needs of most working-class families were barely represented ... There were constant allegations of discrimination with “one law for the rich, another for the poor”.⁶

By 1917, with an increase in German U-boat attacks on Allied Merchant ships, starvation had become a serious threat to Britain, and the main victims were the poorer members of society.⁷ A Consumer Council was established to express customer concerns and, in particular, those of the ‘organized working class’,⁸ and, from this point on, wartime food policy developed through increased regulation of agriculture. Eventually these policies were considered too liberal, and a heightened operation developed under the new Department of Information, urging for ‘a more vigorous and strident propaganda aimed at the masses and, when necessary, outright fabrication’.⁹ With controls on retailing, pricing and the distribution of food supplies, it was recognised that bread constituted a staple of working class diets.¹⁰ Indeed, in a Food (War) Committee report of 1917, concern was expressed over reprisals as a result of malnourishment,¹¹ suggesting that,

If the consumption of bread is rationed, there therefore quickly arises a popular complaint that the staple food most nearly approaching bread in nutritive value, viz meat, is relatively too dear to be resorted to by the working classes in substitution, so that a restriction of bread alone is in effect a favouring of the more well-to-do classes ... If a full normal supply of bread can be maintained the difficulties of the poorest class of consumers would appear to be capable of being substantially mitigated by measures less open to objection than general rationing. The situation would, for example, be much improved for this class if the children under five

years of age, who are largely dependent on milk, can have a greater assurance of supplies.¹²

The emphasis lay in preventing national discontent from the poorer echelons of society. Indeed, a series of strikes and unrest had occurred from 1917 'resulting in the loss of 5.5 million working days'.¹³ Similarly, widespread food riots reached a peak in the same year with grocers, shopkeepers, bakers and butchers targeted.¹⁴ This growing unrest and radicalism had to be handled carefully and the Ministry of Food recognised the need for staples to satisfy the fundamentals of a working class diet. Meat was clearly not an alternative to bread due to cost, and the necessity of importing fruit, either canned or fresh, had to be sustained. It therefore became government concern to focus on specific products to display a sense of even-handedness. As one Memorandum on the restriction of imports proposed: 'canned fruits, the imports of which, owing to the fact that they constitute a popular article of consumption with the poorer classes, should, in our opinion, in no case be reduced by more than 50 per cent. [sic] of the 1916 imports'.¹⁵ A further Interdepartmental report on Restrictions of Imports of February 1917 reinforced the requirement to import fruit at all costs:

Imported fruit is of course available at the season when there is no home-grown fruit, and large quantities, especially of bananas and oranges, are consumed by the working classes. Onions are, however, largely used for seasoning, and at a time when variety of diet will necessarily be restricted, their total exclusion might entail real hardship on the people, especially the poorer classes.¹⁶

Initially, use was made of various media in an attempt to encourage voluntary rationing including posters, newspapers, pamphlets, novels and postcards and, from 1916 onwards, the cinema¹⁷ became an important propagandist tool. Up to the period of the First World War, film had enjoyed a similar reputation to that of a music hall attraction, and had appropriated its working class audience,¹⁸ therefore providing an ideal venue to propagate such doctrine. Food films formed part of this more extensive operation and the move towards wartime film propaganda in general was pioneered by Charles Masterman, the first director of the Secret War Propaganda Bureau, which was the only agency to operate during WW1. Established in 1914, its remit was to gain the support of neutral countries against Germany and, by late 1915, combat films such as *Britain Prepared* (Gaumont 1915) appeared in cinemas in neutral countries across the world.¹⁹ In 1916 the War Office Cinematograph Committee was established, chaired by Lord Beaverbrook, Britain's first Minister of Information, and this organisation cooperated with the Department of Information's cinema division, resulting in a number of regular bi-weekly newsreel films shown in cinemas. With national food shortages becoming an issue, and with growing political and social unrest from the working class, campaigns began which 'switched the emphasis from elite, indirect propaganda to direct mass propaganda ... they directly targeted public opinion itself'.²⁰

Initially, the newsreel was very much in the hands of the British newsreel company, Topical Budget, relaunched in May 1917 as The War Office Topical Budget, although French companies such as Gaumont and Pathé also created short specially produced documentaries. A series of weekly newspaper-type shorts lasting between two and ten minutes long, known as 'tag' films, were screened between feature

length films in the cinema. As Rachel Low points out, they were seen by about ten million people and were ‘intended for home audiences and described as “a short film, taking about two minutes to show, and embodying, usually in story form, some useful moral such as “Save Coal” or “Buy War Loan.” ’²¹

The Ministry of Information set up its own studios using professional filmmakers and the short propaganda films included, amongst others, campaigns to aid female recruitment to the Women’s Land Army (WLA), as well as to encourage food economy. Albeit many of the films made insignificant or discreet mention of food, their messages were aligned with military activity. For example, in *Invasion is Still Possible* (1917), a War Office Topical Budget film, links are created with London’s defences. The film opens to reveal the Director of Food, Sir Arthur Yapp, seated at his desk donning the badge of the League to Save Food. Seen in close-up, the badge displays the words ‘Food Economy’ and ‘National. This image is followed by various shots of prisoners of war and other aspects of warfare thus creating a link between victory and sustenance in a straightforward and resolute mode.

A later newsreel, *Our Daily Bread*, links nutrition with the importance of keeping ships at sea. Avner Offer notes that British imports were open to attack because goods were shipped from all over the world with little kept in storage.²² *Our Daily Bread* (Engholm 1918) extols the virtues of the War Work Volunteers and their work in the shipbuilding yards. Incorporating material from military newsreels to emphasise the importance of imported food, *Our Daily Bread* displays images of grain ships offloading their cargo, and trawler fleets bringing in their catch. Further imagery covers ‘Ships that Guard the Foodships’ showing the launch of torpedoes before the final inter title encourages the audience to join War Work Volunteers.

Again, this film is largely observational, and the message simply reiterates the importance of retaining the importation of grain. As noted, the fact that bread was a staple of many of the working classes was significant, and any shortage was perceived as a threat to government security. Offer explains the nutritional value of bread, which contains enough vitamins and trace elements to support life and health with minor additions, more or less indefinitely and if the misery of the working classes 'was prolonged, or if resolve and loyalty weakened, they might force governments to make a compromise peace before the danger period was over. Poverty had become a key issue of strategy and of national survival'.²³ The title of the film associates a line from a daily devotional prayer with endurance and victory, and the importance of grain as 'the staff of life' cannot be underestimated.

Short films were not the only medium used to disseminate information. Apart from posters encouraging women to join the WLA, those promoting food economy tended to remind the public that saving food would not only prevent hunger but also help win the war. Slogans such as 'The Kitchen is the Key to Victory: Eat Less Bread' and 'Don't Waste Bread: Save Two Slices Every Day and Defeat the U Boat' were emblazoned over images of patriotic middle class women in the kitchen despite the fact that bread was a staple for the working classes, and food shortages were felt more by this sector of society than any other.²⁴

With military recruitment from rural areas resulting in the depletion of agricultural labour, particularly the trained its work force, from May 1915, the War Office forbade the further enlistment of skilled farm workers whose presence on the land was required as a leading force for new recruits. Moreover, the replacement of the

less experienced farm workers necessitated enlistment from other sources of labour such as women, school children (during their school holidays), and prisoners of war (this situation was partly remedied by temporarily reducing the school leaving age permitting children to abandon full time education between the ages of eleven and fourteen to work on the land).²⁵ Recruitment appeals to encourage women to engage in animal husbandry and farm work were set up by women's War Agricultural Committees, a drive which the Women's Branch of the Board of Agriculture coordinated from the beginning of 1917. The Board wanted to attract middle class women into farm labour, but more in terms of an educative capacity rather than to work the land. As Simmonds notes, '[t]he objective was to exhort middle-class women into working to preserve the national food supply and instil a change of attitude towards women's agricultural workers in sceptical farmers',²⁶ and as one government report stated, 'six staff instructors have been trained in London in the methods of preserving fruit and vegetables. They will act as teachers to classes of persons selected to serve as travelling instructors'.²⁷

Indeed, the middle class saw themselves as patriots and initially two thousand women were trained. Their activities were documented in a series of instructive films,²⁸ the content of which was noted in a report by the Food Production Department in February 1918, which made mention of a film 'produced by Gaumont Company on methods of food production, including bottling, drying and making bread with potato flour'.²⁹ However, recruitment was limited and, in 1917, the Board was reorganised to form the WLA.³⁰ Subsequently, a number of newsreels were produced to encourage conscription by representing women both as independent figures, and also enjoying the land. *Women Land Workers Recruiting Rally* (British

Pathé undated) displays women driving tractors, an activity hitherto unheard of, and *Women's Land Army* (British Pathé undated) reveals female camaraderie as the women happily stack hay and repair thatching together. Correspondingly, *Women Land Workers* (British Pathé undated) depicts them dressed in dungarees smiling, while they hoe crops in the fields and chat amicably amongst themselves. Scenes such as these demonstrate the benefits of joining up, an inviting prospect after either domestic service or a solitary existence with husbands and boyfriends in absentia. Additionally, inviting shots of the landscape romanticise and disguise the arduous work, visually providing spiritual respite for the spectator from the realities of conflict.

By 1918, the need for self sufficiency became more intense as the fear of food shortages increased and, as Offer suggests, 'a hungry work-force ... would not allow a war to continue'.³¹ This concern about food security was related to the push to farm animals more productively, and on a home grown basis. As noted in the WLA shorts, a preponderance of the films connected female farm labour to pleasure and suggested that it was a caring and rewarding occupation. In reality, city girls unfamiliar with rural ways perceived animal husbandry as alien and hard work, and agricultural labour in general was considered unappealing by many women because they could earn better pay in the munitions factories (employment which was also more sociable and less physically gruelling). The deficit of farm labour was a serious issue and, consequently, the period not only saw the emergence of a campaign to recruit Land Army girls, but also women living in rural areas were conscripted; indeed, it was the duty of the Women's War Agricultural Committees to register

countrywomen, particularly those who had undergone training schemes in milking and light farm work, and place them in suitable posts with local farmers.³²

A number of the films made to encourage rural aid mobilised an idealistic visual perception through rustic imagery of contented women in perpetual high spirits. In *Hogs for Food* (British Pathé undated) for example, two smiling women, wearing uniform, thus demonstrating their participation in the military campaign, face the camera. Framed in medium shot they feed pigs and hold small piglets in their arms suggesting that this is not only lighter work than might be anticipated, but also an arena where the nurturing of young animals is required. In a similar vein, *Womens' War Workers Piggery* (British Pathé undated) features a group of happy, smiling women feeding pigs, and *Farm Story – Milking Goat* (British Pathé undated) romanticises the countryside while demonstrating the pleasures of working in the landscape. *Farm Story* opens with a shot of sunlit rolling fields, as a woman leads a small herd of goats towards the camera. She is later seen milking the animal, and this time the action takes place with an idyllic orchard as a backdrop where children play, insinuating that freedom is in the hands of the workers on the Home Front. Nevertheless, despite the appeal of such picturesque imagery, the number of women in the Land Army amounted to only 16,000 by the end of the war, and many land workers were not WLA girls, but countrywomen and wives of farm labourers organised through the Women's Section of the Food Production Department's Labour Division.³³

If war work in the fields was an important part of the campaign, then allotments were considered vital to the bid for victory. Their numbers expanded during this

period from 570,000 in 1914 to over 1.4 million by 1918, and articles appeared in newspapers appealing to the populace to augment their food supplies by digging up waste ground and lawns; the *Aberdeen Evening Express* advised in an article entitled ‘Digging for Victory’, that it is ‘The Last Chance to redeem Past Omissions’,³⁴ and compared soil and climate as more favourable in Britain than that of Germany and ‘superior to Denmark’.

A number of short films demonstrate this element of the war effort. The thirty-second film, *Children Grow Vegetables* (British Pathé undated) opens with images of children, weeding and watering the formal vegetable plots and tending plants. Significantly, as the camera sweeps around, a Union Jack appears flying full mast in the background, a symbol signifying the patriotic devotion required for the war effort. Similarly, *Fighting U Boats in a London Back Garden* (Ministry of Information 1918) appealed directly to its working class audience by praising the efforts of the everyday civilian. The film shows an elderly woman and her granddaughter working together, as the title suggests, in their London back garden. Surrounded by a brick wall, the garden belongs to a small terraced property, and this, along with the elderly woman’s costume implies a working class household with a very productive garden. The woman is bent double in the small plot, the area abundant with vegetables as the inter titles congratulate her on her achievements, proudly informing the viewer that she has grown them herself. Situated centre frame, the woman hoes the ground and the spectator is informed that ‘This small garden provides a daily supply of vegetables for a family of five’, albeit there is no indication of the constituent members of her family, and the inference here is that, in the absence of the male members who presumably are away serving at the front,

even the elderly working classes must participate. The woman is aligned with combat, the film suggesting that 'Grannie' is 'A Private in the Civilian Army', and she smiles at the camera holding a bowl of vegetables, before the spectator is provided insight to her thoughts: the statement, 'This is why the U-boats don't worry ME' indicates that the British fighting spirit is present in all despite a real risk of attack. The film is complimentary towards this industrious woman who manages to sustain her family, and is also timely amidst the growing fear of working class dissent. Furthermore, because of the afore-mentioned visual strategies, the (working class) spectator is made complicit with the old woman's victorious attitude, and the garden appears plentiful and abundant in reward.

If the above mentioned factual films targeted the working classes using their status as focus, then it is surprising and unexpected that fiction films of the period used the middle classes as central protagonists given that the cinema audience was predominantly working class. By late 1917, the benefit of a filmic story with emotional interest³⁵ was observed, and the National War Aims Committee, launched in August 1917, formulated a policy prioritising narrative fiction films which it believed held greater appeal than the newsreel. Furthermore, few people enjoyed seeing their own humble existence on screen and rather than focusing on realism, they preferred to identify with an enhanced and more affluent lifestyle. As Low argues,

The idea that the public would get most satisfaction from stories about people like themselves had been behind many a film of lower class life before the war ... But recent practice was for the producer to let his audience identify themselves with

superior people, rather than to reverse the procedure and identify his characters with the audience.³⁶

The appeal of fiction cinema coincided with the growing gravity of the food situation and an awareness that not all members of society were participating in the food campaign. One report from the Ministry of Labour for November 1917 commented on the escalating dissatisfaction noting that it was

[exacerbated] by the food shortage. The other and possibly the more serious problem is the attempt which is being made with some success to accentuate the existing class feeling by wide advertisement of the facility with which the rich obtain luxuries, the cost of which precludes the working class from their enjoyment.’³⁷

The masses were undernourished and the vocabulary used here highlights fear of political dissent which the government perceived might lead to enforced surrender in the war. Alan Simmonds makes comment on this, highlighting a notorious newspaper article which caused a furore at the time:

Food shortages also magnified Britain’s deep social inequalities. Rumours of the wealthy hoarding food provoked rowdy demonstrations in Yorkshire ... Some of London’s East End families survived on a diet of tea, bread, potatoes and cabbage leaves, as the *Daily Herald* revealed in November 1917 that diners at London’s Ritz Hotel were able to consume six-course dinners of fish and meat entrées,

smoked salmon, a choice of soups and desserts and limitless servings of cheese and cream.³⁸

The newspaper report was entitled 'How They Starve at the Ritz' and the exposure of such inequality and the anticipated reaction was a cause for concern. The government had anticipated this problem as early as January 1917 when a report from the Food Controller of Bread, Meat and Sugar stated that 'Rationing, if for no other reason is justifiable in order to prevent that section of the community with greedy instincts from using such influence as they can command to securing themselves an excessive supply for sugar, disregarding the deprivation it causes to others less fortunately circumstanced'.³⁹ Following a number of strikes over low wages and food shortage, a later report associated agitation with the knowledge that some of the upper echelons were enjoying privileges unattainable by the working classes. It quoted the *Daily Herald* article, ironically ending with the words

These notes will, we hope, put an end to the miserable suspicions entertained by the lower orders that the rich are better off than themselves in war-time. The war, we know, has levelled everyone ... The fallacy of the argument is obvious, but it is ill to argue with a hungry man, and there can be no question that the effect of such a description on those, who are finding it difficult to obtain even the most ordinary necessaries of life will be very powerful.⁴⁰

As noted above, in reality the ruling classes appeared to be making little effort towards rationing; regularly dining out they seemed able to obtain food in abundance, yet films such as *Everybody's Business* (Hepworth 1917)⁴¹ suggest that

the middle classes are not wasteful, and that all levels of society are obligated to be accountable; in other words, self regulation is ‘everybody’s business’. *Everybody’s Business* is a thirty minute film focusing on an upper middle class family which employs domestic staff who are severely in need of guidance over food wastage.⁴² The family in the film is aptly named Briton, and the spectator is introduced to the characters at the outset, and informed that it is Mr Briton’s (Norman McKinnell) birthday. He and his wife (Kate Rorke) are seated in a drawing room, their affluence evident from their costume and the lavish furnishings which adorn the interior. An edit and inter title introduces Mabel Briton (Renee Kelly), their daughter, who, the spectator is informed, contributes to the war effort as an Inspector of Female Labour in a munitions factory. The Briton’s son, Tom (Gerald Du Maurier), is returning home on leave along with Mabel’s sweetheart, Jack Goudron (Matheson Lang).

On learning this news, Mrs Briton leaves the room to advise her cook and house maid of their guests’ impending arrival and the camera cuts to a shot of the kitchen. Here, in contrast to the industrious Britons, the staff are represented as lazy and ignorant: the domestic, a young girl in cloth cap, is seated indolently on the edge of the table, a broom held casually in her hand, gazing at a photograph of the cook’s (Gwynne Herbert) son in uniform. Her figure expression suggests tardiness, and both women quickly and guiltily rise as they hear Mrs Briton approach. She discusses the menu with cook whose refusal to accept advice signifies that she is misguided and uninformed. ‘Is that sufficient for an occasion like this?’, she asks, indicating her lack of comprehension of the food shortages. Mrs Briton is more responsible and her response places emphasis on the requirement to conserve food at this time: ‘Yes, that will be all right for a war-time menu!’ she retorts. At this

juncture, a gardener appears through a rear door and places a basket of produce on the table. He has harvested seed potatoes,⁴³ and Mrs Briton rebukes both him and the cook for this indiscretion. Mrs Briton then inspects the compost bin and, on discovering discarded potato peelings and bread, scolds cook for her profligacy. However, Hepworth does not consign ignorance merely to the staff; Mr Briton is initially unhappy with the limited choice of menu for the celebration dinner, and he pompously reminds his wife of their class status: ‘That’s not meant for people like us!’ he states and instructs a now self-righteous and smug cook to create a ‘proper’ dinner. This sequence not only demonstrates an awareness of middle class frivolity, but also targets the spectator who is made complicit in the notion that not all seemed prepared to serve the nation.

Later, when the boys arrive home, they describe stories of the battle on land and at sea, and Mabel informs the party about her work in the munitions factory. Here, the contemporary middle class youth, along with Mrs Briton, appear responsible and actively supportive of the fight. Mrs Briton’s frugality eventually overrides her subordinate, ignorant and slovenly domestic staff as well as her husband, who remains stubborn and inflexible until he realises his folly. Official newsreel footage is intercut with Lloyd George appealing to the people for food economy,⁴⁴ whereby actual images of crowd gatherings demonstrate that the populace become willing listeners; indeed they conform to government requests to ration their food; they eat two slices of bread per day and sign up for voluntary rationing.⁴⁵ In sum, the ruling classes are largely sensible and industrious and even Mr Briton eventually sees the folly of his ways. However, it takes greater persuasion to coerce the working classes into being less wasteful; ultimately, the unspoken message is that the gentry must

lead the way in the crusade to save food and, as Cate Haste suggests, '[f]requently, the dramatizations were intended to show how moral censure would fall on people who failed to do their duty'.⁴⁶ A more fatalistic approach is taken with cook whose son will surely die if she continues with her improvidence. In 1917 the Minister of Food noted, 'the importance of making all classes of the community realise the urgent necessity of avoiding waste of food in every form',⁴⁷ and to a working class audience the dilatory behaviour and lack of compliance by the domestic staff and gardener would not pass unnoticed. However, the implied ignorance of Mr Briton suggests an acknowledgement that all classes must avoid food wastage and moral censure falls on both him and the domestics.

That this film might operate as propaganda aimed at the working class seems surprising given its focus and treatment of the domestic staff. However, Hepworth permits the spectator identification with the characters in the film through his use of close-ups and choice of actors. Gwynne Herbert, who played the cook, was well known and had appeared regularly in films, and Gerald Du Maurier and Matheson Lang were stage celebrities, further mobilising a sense of intimacy with the characters. While these weren't stars in the Hollywood sense of the word, established film players were big earners and a similar pattern to America was developing in Britain.⁴⁸

A government report written just after the release of the film recorded its popularity and deemed it successful in educating the general public. While noting that the consumption of bread and flour was steadily decreasing as a result of the Food Economy Campaign, it added that 'the film, "Everybody's Business" produced in

the interests of the Food Economy Campaign was shown last week in 80 cinemas and is now touring the provinces where, judging by reports in the press, it is creating very considerable interest'.⁴⁹ Additionally, the *Burnley News*, anticipating compulsory rationing, noted the film's emphasis on parity and its promise of a peace outcome:

After the film had been shown, the mayor said there was to be an organisation set up that would take into account the requirements of every family, and see that everybody received an equal share. It was quite possible that in the near future that people would be rationed. He hoped that their love of country and the film that they had just seen would impress upon them all the vital necessity of economy. If they all economised to the fullest extent when a lasting peace arrived they would know that they had helped to hasten the happy day somewhat.⁵⁰

In the main, with minor exception, the domestic staff in *Everybody's Business* are the improvident, an attitude which contrasts with the spendthrift rising middle classes in the comedy, *The Economists* (1917). A fictional propagandist work, *The Economists* demonstrates the importance of buying National War Bonds to aid the war effort rather than try to grow one's own food. It also reveals how lessons might be learnt from the folly of the rising middle classes – a concept that might appeal to those struggling against shortages and hunger. Two buffoonish characters, Mr Woodgate (Lennox Paul) and Mr Sparwell (Lauri de Frece) are short of money and complain about the price of food, specifically rabbits and fish. Deciding to take up poaching, the two go out to buy a shotgun and a fishing rod – all activities

represented in comic mode as the inept Mr Woodgate, while purchasing a gun, aims at the vendor who drops quickly behind the counter to avoid being shot, and Mr Sparwell who practises catching balls in the fishing net, breaks the glass on a show case in the process. In the meantime, their wives are more resourceful; mocked by their husbands they repair their own clothes and make undergarments to save on expenditure. The men take to the woods where Mr Woodgate inadvertently shoots a vagrant and Mr Sparwell throws the man's billycan into the river. Each misdemeanour costs them money and when they return home they calculate their losses and realise their stupidity. They are now poorer people because of their illegal endeavours, and on the basis of this they resolve to buy National War Bonds instead. Despite the blundering antics of the men, and as with Mrs Briton, Mrs Woodgate and Mrs Sparwell demonstrate patriotism and aid the cause implying that the middle classes, in particular women, are at the vanguard of change. The war exposed class inequalities and the nuances of *The Economist* would not be lost on its audience. Furthermore, comedy had proven a popular genre by this date, particularly slapstick, and the idiotic behaviour of the two men suitably provided entertainment. That the spectator is implicated in the questionable activities of the rising classes might be perceived as a calculating gesture; while these characters have misjudged, they have also learned their lesson and are educable. Furthermore, it was highly unlikely that the middle classes would have the need to poach, so the narrative can only be directed at those who, through privation, might be tempted.

In a similar vein, a later film by Hepworth entitled *A New Version* (1918 – also known as *Come into the Garden Maud*) represents the middle classes as ignorant, uninformed but later enlightened. Maud (Alma Taylor), the central character, is

perturbed and dismayed that her husband (Henry Edwards) has converted their garden into an allotment. This campaign witnessed the cultivation of public parks, common ground, playing fields and flower beds, all to be replaced by vegetable plots. Initially adopting the strategy that all classes should embark on this process, the campaign was really an exposé of the practices of the middle and upper classes (those fortunate enough to have lawns) for their selfishness and greed. As one article in the *Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle* advises: ‘Mobilise the lawns’ – If you have a lawn you can help along the food supply [raise] tame rabbits for table very economically ... It is unpatriotic to allow even a square foot of grass to be idle when it can be working against Hun ... Such war work contributes towards victory for the Allies’.⁵¹

The film’s main character, Maud, is shown from the outset as a finely dressed woman, situated in her well furnished drawing room watching from the window while her husband digs the lawn to plant potatoes. To her overt criticism of his activities he replies ‘Shouldn’t we be a bit ashamed of our lawn, dear, if we knew that people were starving for want of the food we might have grown?’. Subsequently, an edit reveals a vision of their imagination; a working class mother is seated on her doorstep with a crying baby resting on her lap. The woman’s eyes are closed in desperation and next to her stands a barefoot, distressed child in rags. Maud is sympathetic and guilt-ridden and therefore soon convinced of her husband’s wisdom; the film thereafter shows her helping him plant vegetables and feeding livestock before reclining exhausted but seemingly satisfied in the hay. *A New Version* demonstrates that the upper echelons can guide and aid those at the lower end of the social spectrum through their own sacrifice, though the film ends with the

slightly barbed but conciliatory words: ‘And the moral is that one is happier doing useful work than loafing around in drawing rooms.’ The likelihood of the working classes possessing lawns was remote, particularly those in the city, yet the film makes complicit and appeases the spectator and promotes the idea that the middle classes are making sacrifices.

Nonetheless, and comparable to an analysis of *Everybody’s Business*, it is difficult to understand how a working class audience would be mollified by Maud’s behaviour. However, Alma Taylor and Henry Edwards were leading lights in the film industry, and both are shown as caring and therefore contributing to the war effort. Furthermore, they offer the spectator an aspirational lifestyle away from poverty through their fine clothes and interiors.

In sum, food campaign films seem divided into two camps: the straightforward tag documentary aimed at the working class to show ways in which they could contribute to food production and help win the war: secondly, through fiction films which offered drama, romance, stars, an insight into middle and upper class lifestyles and comedy, while still conveying a propagandist message.

Immediately after the war, and unlike other comparable nations, the government disbanded the propagandist agencies as part of a general post-war movement towards disarmament.⁵² Interwar governments in Britain did, nevertheless, continue to use film as publicity for electioneering and as an instrument for the projection of nationalism, firstly under the auspices of the Empire Marketing Board, and secondly the General Post Office.⁵³ The propagandist impact of these films created enough

influence for the early implementation of cinema as a campaigning tool in WW2 and, by the outbreak of war, the importance of film as a propaganda tool had been realised. A Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in 1939 assessed the British Council's achievements since its inception in 1934 and, in terms of its film output it was acknowledged that this was

the least organised and least developed form of our propaganda, though it is clearly one of the most important. ... It is doubtful, however, whether film propaganda can be dealt with satisfactorily without a national organisation for the purpose, an organisation with the standing and authority to impress itself upon the film industry as a whole.⁵⁴

The Ministry of Food was established in 1939 and information was circulated through leaflets, booklets, posters, women's magazines, short food newflashes in cinemas and most importantly, the radio – all aimed at equality by depicting and addressing every rank of society. Posters tended to be simplistic and designed by a disparate group of painters and illustrators and targeted the ordinary person. One such artist, Abram Games, became the official War Office poster designer and 'believed that his time spent among ordinary soldiers made him better able to produce posters that spoke directly to them',⁵⁵ including the 'Grow Your Own Food' version. In terms of radio, the main promoter of the campaign was Cecil Henry Middleton. He had a homely demeanour and an informal and amiable tone making him 'the perfect character to guide the new army of domestic vegetable growers and allotment holders'.⁵⁶ Indeed, Middleton complemented the tenor of the WW2 cinematic campaign as able 'to address himself to the lowest common denominator

of horticultural intelligence without the faintest hint of superiority or condescension'.⁵⁷

However, it was the cinema that provided a captive audience and, learning from the lessons of the government-sponsored films of the First World War, filmmakers now understood the benefits of concealing their provenance; many fiction films promoted the war effort indirectly and conducted its campaign with the People's War in mind. As Reeves points out, the ideology was 'on the celebration (of people's achievements), rather than exhortation (to achieve more)'.⁵⁸ Unlike WW1, it was considered that the working classes were responsive and as Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska argues, working class housewives were 'more receptive to the government's appeal and publicity than are women of other classes. But some of the economies that have been suggested are regarded as "piffling" by working class women, on whom such forms of thrift have long been imposed by necessity'.⁵⁹

This notion of group achievement rather than class leadership is exemplified in a 1942 government film entitled *Dig for Victory*. Released by the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Agriculture in combination, the film deploys a commentary by Roy Hay who explains that it is up to all to act. From a Dig for Victory foot and spade logo, the camera cuts to an image of a number of allotments reiterating the advice of WW1. Slowly panning around from left to right, the camera documents a broad spectrum of society employed in growing vegetables: off-duty firemen, women during their factory lunch breaks and even 'children growing food as part of their school routine nowadays for they know that food is just as important a weapon of war as guns' the narrator suggests.⁶⁰ Such a combination of images and

narration succeeds in mobilising the patriotic belief that all genders, ages and sectors of society join together to form ‘a great new army’ to grow ‘good food’ – in other words, working together despite class differences.⁶¹

This concept is a feature also present in the Ministry of Information film, *The Harvest Shall Come* (Anderson 1942). Sponsored by Imperial Chemicals, the focus is on the proletariat framed by the story of a young farm labourer named Tom Grimwood (John Slater) rather than centring on the middle classes. Tom, as the narrator informs, is representative of ‘the 700,000 farm workers whom we as a nation have for too long neglected and forgotten’. The film commences with Tom at thirteen years old in the year 1900 and, rather than demeaning him as a man of low intelligence as with the gardener in *Everybody’s Business*, the narrative celebrates his skills and training. At the age of twenty-one his next employer pays him a well deserved (the narrator informs) full wage along with bestowing upon him a tied cottage. Throughout the film none of the class distinctions evident in the First World War films emerge. Instead, the adult Tom is represented as a country gentleman, dressed in smart clothing and treated with respect with the aptitude to succeed. Later, two well dressed women knock on his cottage door to ask directions and one whispers indiscreetly ‘Do you think we ought to give him anything?’. ‘Oh yes’, replies the other, ‘he is only a farm labourer’, thus attempting to humble him. Yet, that the story is told with Tom as the central protagonist and subsequently follows his life suggests a critique of class structure during wartime, and the voice-over narrator criticises the women accordingly. They are the ones represented as ignorant and in need of education not Tom, we are informed. The film then transfers back in time to Tom’s First World War work on the farm during the food shortages.

Later, when attempts are made to conscript Tom, his employer informs him that he is too valuable as a skilled worker and therefore is exempt, and furthermore he gives him a pay rise. *The Harvest Shall Come* continues to document the life of the farm worker, and the narrator constantly praises him. Towards the end he is filmed from a low angle, loading hay onto a cart, thus ennobling him for his part in the war effort. The film closes as Mrs Grimwood (Eileen Beldon) asks to listen to the radio while Tom dons his Home Guard uniform, and the broadcaster informs us of past misdemeanours regarding the commoner: 'Never again must we neglect our land and the men and women who live by it'. Tom, in his uniform with rifle at his side, represents dignity and self sacrifice and the film focuses on the requirement of a labour force on the land rather than necessarily the food it produces. Gone are the feckless working class representations of the First World War as seen in *Everybody's Business*, and the worth of the lower echelons is now applauded.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to examine more examples in detail, and the above two instances illustrate the changes in attitude that occurred in the food campaign films since the First World War. In sum, WW1 saw the inception of a film crusade to save food and practise thrift while avoiding insurrection; factual films tended to feature the working classes in a candid manner, and were a direct address to the populace. However, films with a narrative using known personalities were more popular and therefore considered more persuasive. They operated through various means to both appease yet appeal to a working class audience by presenting the middle classes as leading the way yet vulnerable and capable of error. By WW2, and with films such as *The Harvest Shall Come*, the protagonists are the manual

labourers because, as Calder argues, the Second World War was, from the outset, the people's war where class was deemed unimportant, and all must work together to Dig for Victory.

¹ See Richard Farmer, *The Food Companions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

² See Angus Calder, *The People's War* (St Albans, Granada Publishing, 1971).

³ Other significant Home Front campaigns aimed at British civilians during the war focused on recruitment. In the government sponsored film *Mrs John Bull Prepared* (1918) the central character Mr Smith is a prosperous businessman who refuses to let his son volunteer and his two daughters participate in war work. Unlike the campaign for the production of food however, this crusade was aimed largely at the upper and middle classes, as the working class were required for industry. Over half of the men who reported for service were comprised of commercial, clerical and professional occupations and posters such as *Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?* (1915) and *Go! It's your duty lad!* (1915) used emotional blackmail to urge men to enlist with the British Army. See Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008), 244.

⁴ Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989).

⁵ Further emphasis was placed on agricultural food production. See Alan G. V. Simmonds, *Britain and World War One* (London, New York, Routledge, 2012), 209.

⁶ Richard Van Emden and Steve Humphries, *All Quiet on the Home Front* (London, Headline, 2003), 215-216.

⁷ See Van Emden and Humphries.

⁸ Simmonds, 205.

⁹ George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002), 119.

¹⁰ Food War Committee March 16 1917, p.1 CAB/27/7, NA.

¹¹ The period 1916 witnessed a large number of national strikes – see Gregory, 202-11.

¹² Food (War) Committee report of March 16 1917, np CAB/24/7, NA.

¹³ Simmonds, 88.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 166.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 129.

¹⁶ Interdepartmental report on Restrictions of Imports of February 1917 to the Right Honourable Earl Curzon of Kedleston, February 1917, 16, CAB 24/3, NA.

¹⁷ Women's weekly magazines such as *Woman's World* and *Mother and Home* focused on ideas for economy during wartime. The magazines included recipes and tips. Robb, 61-62.

¹⁸ Reeves, 1993.

¹⁹ August 1916 saw the screening of *The Battle of the Somme* (British Topical 1916) which raised approximately £30,000 for military charities. For further reading see Cate Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, (London, Allen Lane, 1977), 45.

²⁰ Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 7.

²¹ Rachel Low, *The History of the British Film 1914-1918* (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1973), 37.

²² Offer, 356.

²³ Offer, 222.

²⁴ A similar poster image of mother and child around a table with a loaf of bread superimposed onto imagery of a naval battle with the words 'Don't Waste Bread! Save Two Slices Every Day and Defeat the 'U' Boat' was produced simultaneously. IWM PST 133354.

Further ways in which food rationing was implemented through the medium of film was in the National Kitchens' Scheme set up by the government to encourage people to save coal by not cooking at home. See *Opening Of New National Kitchen By Mrs Lloyd* and *National Kitchen - Stoke Newington* (1918).

²⁵ The shortage of farm labour was remedied in part by prisoners of war. See *German Prisoners of War: camp in England for non-commissioned officers and men* (1917).

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- ²⁶ Simmonds, 211.
- ²⁷ Report of the Food Production Department for the Week ending 29th May 1917, War Cabinet. CAB/24/14, National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey (NA).
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Food Production Department: Report on the work of the Food Production Department for the week ending 19 February 1918, p. 2, CAB/24/42, NA.
- ³⁰ A government report notes that although by early 1918 there was an increase in recruits, albeit the demand from farmers had not been met.
- ³¹ Offer, 307.
- ³² As a result of village women's enterprise the Women's Institute was founded in 1915, its main concern the preservation of food.
- ³³ Other Pathé films include WW1 – *Women Flour Workers* (1919), *Bacon for Breakfast—feeding the soldiers in France* (1916), *Land Army Girls in Midlands Carrying on with Autumn Work*, *Land Girls in Orchard*, *Women Agricultural Plough Girls* (1917), *Ploughing Up the Parks* (1918), *The Women Farmers of Britain* (1918).
- ³⁴ Anon, *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 26 February 1918, 3.
- ³⁵ Nicholas Reeves, *The Power of Film Propaganda – Myth or Reality?*, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 13, Issue 2, (1993), 181-201.
- ³⁶ Low, 195.
- ³⁷ Government Report: The Labour Situation: Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week ending the 28th November 1917, p. 20, CAB/24/33, NA.
- ³⁸ Simmonds, 203.
- ³⁹ Report by the Food Controller on Bread, Meat and Sugar, 11 January 1917, 2. CAB/24/3, NA, 4.
- ⁴⁰ Report from the Ministry of Labour for the Week ending the 28th November 1917 p. 18, CAB/24/33, NA.
- ⁴¹ This was a propaganda film issued for the Ministry of Food but privately financed
- ⁴² By 1917 the number of women in service remained at 1.25 million. Large quantities of food were often required to feed these households, and the employer was directed to take the lead in instruction on waste avoidance and the most effective and economical way of cooking. This is exemplified in the *Win the War* cookery book which informs the lady of the house: 'the struggle is not only on land and sea; it is in *your* larder, *your* kitchen, and *your* dining room. Every meal *you* serve is now literally a battle [*italics original emphasis*]'. Reeves, 1999, 216.
- ⁴³ Seed potatoes were highlighted as extremely important produce as part of the wartime food campaign. See War Cabinet Report, President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries week ending 22 May 1917, which informs that 'A cargo of 150 tons of Irish potatoes has been shipped at the instance of this Department for distribution to Kentish farmers who have grubbed their hops as the result of the recent order', CAB/24/14, NA 437. *How to Save time with Your Potatoes* (MOI) and *The Secret* (MOI) both deal with the use of potatoes as part of a daily diet; whereas the former is instructive, the latter is fictional.
- ⁴⁴ A secret report from Lord Devonport, the food controller of bread, meat and sugar, to the Right Hon. D. Lloyd George, states that he has consulted the War Food committee of the Royal Society 'as to what quantity per day or per week of bread, and of other foods with which I am dealing is necessary for the maintenance of efficiency in different classes of the community,' Report by the Food Controller on Bread, Meat and Sugar, 11 January 1917, 2. CAB/24/3, NA.
- ⁴⁵ People signed Food Economy Pledge Cards. A Report for Week ending May 30, 1917 suggests that Empire Day (May 12th) was observed as Food Economy Day and the King's proclamation was publicly read where Food Economy Pledge cards were signed. 'Two cinema films illustrating the necessity for food economy are being released for exhibition all over the country within the next two or three days', Minister of Food Report for Week ending Wednesday, May 30, 1917, CAB/24/15, NA.
- ⁴⁶ Cate Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning* (London, Allen Lane, 1977), 46.
- ⁴⁷ See <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1917/mar/19/food-economy-campaign> Commons Sitting 19 March 1917, Accessed 6/12/2013.
- ⁴⁸ Low, 57.
- ⁴⁹ Report for Week ending Wednesday, June 20, 1917, CAB/24/17, 168, NA.
- ⁵⁰ Anon., *The Burnley News* August 18, 1917, 9.
- ⁵¹ Anon., *Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle* 5 April 1918, 2.
- ⁵² Other less liberal states such as Germany, Italy and Russia all expanded their campaigns. See Gary Messinger, *An Inheritance Worth Remembering: The British Approach to official propaganda During*

the First World War, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, June 1993, Vol. 13, Issue 2, (1993), 117-127.

⁵³ See James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda 1939-45* (London, New York, I B Tauris, 2008), 2.

⁵⁴ Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs: Foreign Publicity, July, 1939, 29, CAB/24/288, NA.

⁵⁵ Daniel Smith, *The Spade as Mighty as the Sword: The Story of the Dig for Victory Campaign*, (London: Aurum Press, 2013), 136. Radio was an important medium of war available to the majority of the population, and programmes also offered advice for wartime recipes clearly directed at the everyday listener.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 45.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 47- 48.

⁵⁸ Reeves, 1999, 181.

⁵⁹ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption 1939-1955* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), 111-2.

⁶⁰ See <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/theartofwar/films/dig_victory.htm> Accessed 13 May 2013.

⁶¹ For an extensive list of Food Flash films see Farmer, 230-236.