

4th October, 1939

RATIONING OF ELECTRICITY

IT IS AGREED THAT -

fuel rationing may be necessary during war time;

fuel rationing should apply equally to coal, gas and electricity;

fuel rationing should not apply to the smallest consumers, to whom it would mean undue hardship;

BUT

it is known by the Electricity Supply Industry that THE PURPOSES OF FUEL RATIONING ARE NOT SECURED BY THE FUEL AND LIGHTING ORDER, 1939, for the following reasons:-

1. IT REACTS AGAINST THE NATIONAL INTEREST -

by encouraging in the minds of 20 million people (gas and electricity consumers) a spirit of unnecessary irritation and discontent;

by encouraging the burning of raw coal in preference to the use of electricity for cooking, thereby wasting high quality fuel; increasing traffic on railways and roads, and increasing the use of labour, petrol and horses in the distribution of coal to domestic premises instead of encouraging the burning in Power Stations of low quality coal which would be of little use for other purposes;

by incurring an excessive additional expense in its administration;

by requiring an administrative staff of some thousands of men and women, who would thereby be immobilized from more important service;

by impairing the efficiency of fuel rationing through the appointment of Local Fuel Overseers who, having an inadequate understanding of the Coal, Gas and Electricity Industries, would have constantly to make decisions requiring intimate detailed knowledge.

2. IT REACTS AGAINST THE PUBLIC(CONSUMERS') INTEREST -

by imposing hardship on those consumers who, in their previous year's consumption, were economical in their use of gas and electricity, while at the same time allowing an ample ration to those who in previous years have been prodigal and extravagant;

by requiring a large proportion of consumers inescapably to pay a higher average price;

by threatening to cut off supply to consumers, who, through inadvertence have exceeded their ration;

by imposing on consumers the necessity to read their own meters as a safeguard against over-consumption; few consumers have the necessary experience to read meters;

by increasing the consumers feeling of uncertainty and annoyance.

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3. IT DISCRIMINATES AGAINST ELECTRICITY CONSUMERS -

by adopting a false ratio between units of electricity and therms of gas;

by assuming that consumers should use coal or gas for cooking;

by refusing a ration of electricity for cooking to small consumers who have coal or gas ranges, however old-fashioned and inefficient these may be;

by basing the ration of gas and electricity on the previous year's consumption, in spite of the more rapid development of electricity than that of gas for domestic purposes;

by exempting gas prepayment consumers from rationing, thereby exempting 75% of all gas consumers, while on the other hand, exempting only 25% of electricity consumers by reason of prepayment meters;

by allowing a minimum of only 200 units of electricity against 100 therms of gas, instead of allowing 2,000 units - a figure based on the gas industry's own estimate of equality.

4. IT REACTS AGAINST ELECTRICITY SUPPLY UNDERTAKINGS -

by causing excessive additional clerical work which involves disorganization and confusion;

by crippling development even beyond the restrictions imposed by war conditions;

by providing consumers with an incentive to transfer from the Two-part Tariff to the Flat Rate, thereby involving work and expense in providing separate meters and separate wiring systems;

by causing consumers to return electric cookers and other apparatus on hire or hire-purchase, due to the difficulty of small consumers obtaining a reasonable ration. This will cause heavy financial losses to undertakings already saddled with rising costs and reduced revenues;

by reacting against the electricity undertakings' good relations with their consumers.

5. IT WAS DRAFTED WITHOUT ADEQUATE PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FROM THE ELECTRICITY SUPPLY INDUSTRY -

by relying almost entirely on the advice of the Electricity Commissioners who as a judicial body are insufficiently acquainted with practical matters of electricity supply;

by inadequate representation of Electricity Supply Undertakings.

Already, before the rationing scheme came into force, there was a drastic reduction in the use of electricity due to -

cessation of street lighting, shop window lighting, neon and other advertising signs;

reduction of load in theatres and cinemas;

evacuation of consumers from highly electrified districts to rural areas where the degree of electrification is considerably less;

voluntary economy by consumers in the National interest.

In two London Companies, reductions of total electricity output are reported, of 48% and 34% respectively.

The full operation of the Fuel and Lighting Order to electricity consumers cannot save more than about one million tons of coal in a full year above that saved by voluntary means. This represents less than two days' normal output of the coal mining industry. This saving is not worth the price which consumers, electricity undertakings and the National interest must incur by the Fuel and Lighting Order, 1939.

There is no wish on the part of the Electricity Supply Authorities to avoid a rationing scheme, but it is contended that it would be in the interests of all concerned to postpone the commencement of electricity rationing until 1st January, 1940, and in the meantime to cancel and re-write the Fuel and Lighting Order, 1939, in order to fulfil the functions for which it was originally intended.