

The Politics of Food in World War II: Great Britain's Grip on Canada's Pacific Fishery

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Article abstract

Maintaining and transporting food supplies during wartime are crucial activities. How to fulfill these obligations often is an important point in determining a government's wartime trade strategy. An example is the case of Great Britain during World War II. Britain attempted to control the cost and quality of its imported foodstuffs by influencing the production, supply and price within supplying countries. British food missions were established to negotiate the best-possible agreements and to protect Britain's long-term commercial interests. This self-interest can be seen in the food programme established by the British Ministry of Food and in the negotiations with British Columbia packers for canned salmon.

Britain needed this nutritious and practical foodstuff, but refused to enter into longterm contracts with Canadian suppliers. The British Columbia salmon was considered too expensive, and Britain wanted to return to the cheaper Japanese and Russian suppliers after the war. The ultimate result was that the BC salmon canning industry was seriously curtailed at war's end, and the very existence of the resource was threatened.

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DIANNE NEWELL

Résumé

Maintaining and transporting food supplies during wartime are crucial activities. How to fulfill these obligations often is an important point in determining a government's wartime trade strategy. An example is the case of Great Britain during World War II. Britain attempted to control the cost and quality of its imported foodstuffs by influencing the production, supply and price within supplying countries. British food missions were established to negotiate the best-possible agreements and to protect Britain's long-term commercial interests. This self-interest can be seen in the food programme established by the British Ministry of Food and in the negotiations with British Columbia packers for canned salmon.

Britain needed this nutritious and practical foodstuff, but refused to enter into long-term contracts with Canadian suppliers. The British Columbia salmon was considered too expensive, and Britain wanted to return to the cheaper Japanese and Russian suppliers after the war. The ultimate result was that the BC salmon canning industry was seriously curtailed at war's end, and the very existence of the resource was threatened.



La conservation et le transport des vivres en temps de guerre sont des activités capitales. C'est souvent à partir de telles préoccupations que se détermine la stratégie commerciale des gouvernements. La politique de la Grande-Bretagne pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale en est un exemple. La Grande-Bretagne a tenté de contrôler les prix et la qualité des aliments importés en influençant la production, l'approvisionnement et les prix dans les pays fournisseurs. Elle y établit des délégations, chargées de négocier les meilleures ententes possibles tout en protégeant ses intérêts commerciaux à long terme. C'est cette politique intéressée que l'on peut percevoir dans le programme établi par le British Ministry of Food et dans ses négociations avec les entreprises de mise en conserve du saumon de la Colombie britannique.

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THE POLITICS OF FOOD IN WORLD WAR II

La Grande-Bretagne avait besoin de ce produit nourrissant et commode, mais elle a refusé un contrat à long terme avec les fournisseurs canadiens. Considérant que le saumon de la Colombie britannique était trop cher, elle voulait revenir après la guerre au saumon du Japon et de la Russie. En conséquence, l'industrie de conservation du saumon en Colombie britannique fut sérieusement réduite à la fin de la guerre, et son existence menacée.

In war-time . . . [the price-profit-and-reward] method of organization is to an increasing extent superseded by others. More is done for love and less for money; more for patriotism and less for profit.¹

Geoffrey Mills and Hugh Rockoff have recently observed that economic historians have largely neglected wars, “regarding them as temporary aberrations in which the normal principles of economics no longer apply.”² Most histories of wartime economies, such as they are, were written during the war by insiders. Very little attention has been paid to the critical question of food in wartime, except for domestic food rationing programmes. To be sure, the ostensible objective of civilian food control programmes during World War II was to prevent profiteering, soaring inflation, food shortages, and social unrest at home. To do this, the state sought to eliminate the market forces of supply and demand which normally determined domestic selling prices. Yet, most scholars, even Mills and Rockoff, do not take into account the fact that the ability to procure foodstuffs varied tremendously from one country to another, and that members of the private food trades were usually involved in developing and carrying out food policies. The official food historian for Britain during World War II, Richard Hammond, intentionally ignored the work of British overseas food purchasing operations, believing that they did “not lend themselves to historical analysis or generalization.”³

For Britain, food procurement was a fundamental strategic consideration during World War II. Unlike the USA, Britain was a wholesale importer of food. To control the price, quantity, quality, and regularity of the supply — most of which had to be imported — at home, it had to influence the production, and monopolize the supply and price, of foodstuffs in the major food-producing countries abroad. Its import programmes therefore had important and far-reaching consequences for major food-exporting countries such as Canada. At the heart of Allied food control was the British

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1. A.W.F. Plumptre, “Organizing the Canadian Economy for War,” *Canadian War Economies*, ed. J.F. Parkinson (Toronto, 1941), 2.
 2. Geoffrey Mills and Hugh Rockoff, “Compliance with Price Controls in the United States and the United Kingdom During World War II,” *Journal of Economic History* 47:1 (March 1987): 197.
 3. Richard J. Hammond, *Food and Agriculture in Great Britain 1939–45: Aspects of Wartime Controls* (Palo Alto, 1954), ix. For a rare monograph on food supply in wartime (albeit an administrative history), see L. Margaret Barnett, *British Food Policy During the First World War* (London, 1985). When Barnett writes of “North America” she is referring to the USA.

Ministry of Food (MOF).⁴ The extent to which the MOF accomplished its goals and the degree to which economic self-interest was central in negotiations is revealed in the following example of one of the important food imports for Britain in the first half of the 20th century, Pacific canned salmon.

BACKGROUND

By 1900, the west coast of North America from the Columbia River to the Bering Sea was the world base for canned salmon. Although the highly coloured, richly flavoured sockeye or red salmon predominated, the four other cheaper species were commercially important by World War I. Because the salmon fishery of Alaska (where the US industry had become concentrated) was enormous, and because the American salmon fishery was relatively unregulated prior to the 1920s, the United States was the major world producer of canned salmon. It produced at a relatively low cost for its own domestic market and exported only its surpluses to Great Britain.

Although the British Columbia salmon fishery was considerably smaller than that of the United States, it traditionally ranked ahead of any other fishery in Canada. It was always highly regulated, dominated by salmon canning, and export-oriented, though stiff import duties denied British Columbia entry to the American market. In Japan and Siberia, salmon canning started up in a modest way during the Russo-Japanese war (1904–05). By the 1920s, the Japanese producers were becoming unbeatable competitors in the prime red salmon market, Great Britain. This was a particular hardship for British Columbia salmon fishermen and cannery owners who counted on British customers.

During the depression of the 1930s, government and industry in both British Columbia and Alaska, where the salmon fishery peaked by mid-decade, undertook strict measures to conserve and propagate the salmon resource.⁵ This reduced the total catch and, therefore, the size of the canned salmon pack. In Alaska, canning continued to dominate, but in Canada, where markets were not assured, packers had to diversify,

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4. Researchers have only recently had access to the records of the second MOF (established 8 September 1939). Canada generated only a tiny record on the British Columbia salmon canning industry during the war; without the large and comprehensive set of MOF records (located in Great Britain, Public Record Office [hereafter PRO], Ministry of Food [MOF]), this study, and others like it, would be impossible to conduct. The key record groups relied on here are as follows: MAF 75 (Supply Department), 83 (Secretariat and Overseas Purchases Board), 97 (British Food Mission), 104 (Food Mission in Ottawa), and 157 (Orders Committee).
 5. Richard A. Cooley, *Politics and Conservation: The Decline of the Alaska Salmon* (New York, 1963), 107–12. After four decades of talks, Canada finally negotiated a joint international salmon treaty in 1937. The best single source on the economics and marketing of Pacific canned salmon up until World War II is Homer Gregory and Kathleen Barnes, *North Pacific Fisheries, with Special Reference to Alaska Salmon*, Studies of the Pacific No. 3 (San Francisco, 1939). The authors were responding to the threat posed by the Japanese factoryship operations being conducted off the coast of Alaska in the 1930s.

processing fish other than salmon and using a variety of processing methods.⁶ The lucrative herring reduction industry emerged for the production of fish meal and oil. Canada also began to stimulate domestic demand for canned salmon, from virtually nothing in the 1920s to 35 per cent of the annual pack by the time war was declared. Britain continued to be one of the largest single outlets for exports of British Columbia canned salmon, taking an average of 25 per cent of the annual pack in the 1930s, but the province also exported its canned salmon and other ocean fish products to over forty different overseas markets.⁷

On the eve of World War II, Britain remained the largest importer in the world of canned salmon. Annually it brought in two to three million cases, each containing forty-eight pounds of salmon. About eleven hundred tons per week were consumed domestically and considerable amounts were reexported.⁸ Britain had, however, largely replaced Canada's canned salmon with the lower-priced product from Japan and Russia.⁹ All of this changed with the war.

THE BRITISH MINISTRY OF FOOD

Britain depended on foreign sources for nearly two-thirds of its domestic food consumption.¹⁰ Ensuring adequate and high-quality supplies was the responsibility of the Ministry of Food (MOF), which consisted of prominent members of all branches of the food trade. They headed its committees, commodity divisions, advisory boards, divisional offices, and food missions. This agency sprang into action as soon as war broke out in September of 1939.¹¹ The problems it faced were formidable. If the country continued such a large programme of food imports in wartime, both transportation and payment would soon pose difficulties. Neither the regular peacetime

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6. Further details are provided in Dianne Newell, "Dispersal and Concentration: The Slowly Changing Spatial Pattern of the British Columbia Salmon Canning Industry," *Journal of Historical Geography* (forthcoming, January 1988).
 7. Keith Ralston, "Patterns of Trade and Investment on the Pacific Coast, 1867-1892: The Case of the British Columbia Salmon Canning Industry," *B.C. Studies* 1 (Winter 1968-69): 17-45, explains the early development of the British market. See the records of the Empire Marketing Board (established in 1926 to promote the marketing of empire produce, at first in the United Kingdom and, after 1930, in other empire countries), in PRO, Records of the Colonial Office, CO 758 to 760; PRO, Records of the Board of Trade, BT 55 (especially files 47 and 48, Ottawa Economic Conference, 1931, interdepartmental preparatory committee, notes); PRO, Department of Overseas Trade (1918-46), BT 90; and Great Britain. Department of Overseas Trade, *Report on Economic Conditions in Canada* (annual, 1923 to 1939).
 8. PRO, MAF 86/2, 24 January 1940.
 9. Gregory and Barnes, *North Pacific Fisheries*, especially ch. 8, and "World Production of Pacific Canned Salmon, 1910-1938," in *Pacific Fisherman Yearbook* (1939), 87; see also PRO, BT 55/47, Doc. 11, 16 March 1931; Doc. 13, 30 March 1931; Doc. 20, 20 April 1931; and Doc. 22, 22 April 1931.
 10. See MOF, *Food Consumption Levels in the U.K.* (London, 1947).
 11. See Sir John Orr and D. Lubbock, *Feeding the People in Wartime* (London, 1940), and MOF, *How Britain was Fed in Wartime, Food Control 1939-1945* (London, 1946).

shipping capacity of twenty million tons, nor the foreign credits to purchase food imports would be available. Whatever the larger social considerations in favour of food control, businessmen would be unable to prevent alterations which could seriously affect normal trade conditions after the war without a comprehensive food control programme.¹²

During the experimental phase from 1939 to 1942, the MOF designed a domestic price control and distribution programme based on the prewar trade situation, but soon found it more difficult to control the necessary importing.¹³ Rationing required that the MOF stockpile huge food reserves; however, Britain was quickly cut off from most of its established sources of essential commodities and, more seriously, from trading with sterling currency countries. Even though the MOF's orders were deliberately low, the amount of foodstuffs imported from Canada in these first few years was enough to alarm Britain's Exchange Requirements Committee.¹⁴ Moreover, this growth occurred at a time when Britain also required increased imports of Canadian industrial goods. Canada was also holding currency imbalances in excess of two hundred million pounds sterling.¹⁵ After the fall of France in the summer of 1940, Britain became concerned about shipping for all commodities and therefore had to reduce imports to the bare essentials and restrict the number of sources of supply.¹⁶ Although the MOF had managed to resist relying on "dollar" countries to this point, it now had to turn to North America almost exclusively.

Britain planned to purchase most of its food from the United States, and to take from Canada only what it had to for political reasons, what it could get very cheaply, or what it could not get from the Americans. This policy was reinforced in the spring of 1941 when the United States introduced a massive aid programme, Lend-Lease, to help Britain and her allies to purchase food and other war supplies. In anticipation of Lend-Lease, the MOF had already set up a North American Food Mission in Washington. To prevent Great Britain and other trading partners from shifting all their orders to the Americans, Canada and the United States agreed to pool their resources for exporting war supplies.¹⁷ The Americans were willing to make a major commitment of ammunition and raw materials to Britain. The case was, however, different

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12. Sir William H. Beveridge, *British Food Control* (London, 1928), 337-38.
 13. For a comprehensive file of statutory rules and orders and statutory instruments pertaining to food, including canned meat, fish, and soup between 1939 and 1951, see PRO, MAF 75/9. Canned fish profit margins are discussed in PRO, MAF 154/150, 3 October 1941.
 14. It leapt from the 1938 level of £39,500,000 to £48,000,000 in 1939, with £56,000,000 projected for 1941; see PRO, MAF 83/113, "Notes on the Revised Canadian Import Programme," July 1940-June 1941; and MAF 83/178, 1 September 1940 (memo) and "Brief in Connection with a Visit of the Canadian Ministers, 3 October 1940." The size of Britain's orders for Canadian munitions and supplies in 1939 and 1940 disappointed Canadians; see J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945* (Toronto, 1975), 97-8.
 15. W.K. Hancock and M.M. Gowing, *British War Economy* (London, 1949), 375.
 16. Sir John Orr, *Nutrition in War* (London, 1940), 8.
 17. J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's War*, 135-47.

for food supplies. The Food Ministry could not bargain with the Canadians for huge, regulated flows of foodstuffs without altering the long-term trade position of either party. In the case of negotiating for Canadian canned salmon supplies, Britain attempted to maintain long-term control of its food imports at the expense of Canadian aspirations and resources.

PACIFIC CANNED SALMON AS A WAR SUPPLY

The MOF began to influence the international price and production of canned salmon through wholesale and retail price controls which it imposed within days of the beginning of the war.¹⁸ Large supplies of canned salmon were included in the MOF's civilian food programme every year of the war (see Table 1). The MOF limited its food imports to those items which fit stringent criteria, and canned foods were particularly well-adapted to its purposes. Canned foods were preserved almost indefinitely, could withstand rough handling, and did not require special conditions (such as refrigeration) for storage. They also made economical use of ocean-going shipping and required no further processing to be edible. Canned fish was a particularly important food ration because it was precooked and ready to eat from the tin. Furthermore, during the interwar years, fish became recognized for its superb nutritive value, especially "fat" fish such as salmon.¹⁹ These products were regarded universally as the main substitute for meat when supplies of meat, feed for livestock and poultry,²⁰ and other major sources of protein and oils became scarce.

All fish was nutritionally valuable and many varieties of canned fish were available but, according to the records of the MOF, Britain imported only a few basic varieties. These included salmon from the Pacific coast of the United States and Canada; sardines and pilchards from the Pacific coast of the United States, Spain, and Portugal; herrings from Pacific Canada; and crayfish from the west coast of the Union of South Africa. These varieties were imported consistently and in quantity during the war.²¹ Yet, Pacific canned salmon was always the mainstay; the others were essentially "fillers" to top up the annual quotas.

18. PRO, MAF 86/1, Canned Fish Supplies, Advisory Committee, *Minutes*, October 1939–March 1942. The meetings dealt mainly with the issue of canned salmon. See also MAF 86/2, "Minute Sheet of the Advisory Committee," 6 January 1940 (Outline of [proposed] Scheme of Control), and 24 January 1940 (note of a meeting on the purchase of canned fish by the MOF and on the general issue of its control).

19. John Burnett, *Plenty and Want: A Social History of Diet in England from 1815 to the Present Day* (Harmondsworth, 1968), 273 and 326; Charles Smith, *Britain's Food Supplies in Peace and War* (London, 1940), 1 and 129–54; Charles Smith, *Wise Eating in Wartime*, No. 4 (London, 1943), 8–9; and J.R. Marrack, *Food and Planning* (London, 1942).

20. This category of imports was prohibited from 1942 onwards; see MOF, *How Great Britain was Fed in Wartime*, 5.

21. Insignificant amounts of cod, haddock, and canned lobster were imported from time to time. See, for example, PRO, MAF 83/239, Provisional Order, Canned Fish Imports Programme for 1942, 14 January 1942.

Table 1
Imports of Canned Salmon Into the United Kingdom in World War II
(in thousands of long tons)

Source	1940	1941	1942	1943	1945
USA	23.0	10.4	20.4	24.8	20.9
Canada	13.0	17.4	31.0	27.5	29.8
Japan	11.6	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
USSR	4.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	52.0	27.9	51.4	52.3	50.7

NOTE

In long tons of 2,240 pounds. Much of the canned salmon imported each year was from the previous year's pack. Therefore, the annual import figures do not reflect the actual size of the pack in a given year. Taken on average, the imports from Canada over the period 1940-45 represent 73 per cent of the annual pack, and those from the United States 20 per cent.

Source: For 1940 to 1943, PRO, MAF 97/236; for 1945, PRO, MAF 97/237, 7 November 1945.

Regardless of the other reasons for featuring canned salmon on the food imports programme, preserving the market demand for this item was the first priority for the members of the British food trades. Britain did not want to depend on Canadian canned salmon during the war, partly because of the small supply. It also did not want to be obligated to high-cost Canadian producers after the war. Accordingly, the orders Britain placed for British Columbia canned salmon in 1939, 1940, and 1941 were low.²² As Table 1 clearly indicates, however, the options for the MOF quickly dwindled. By 1941, because of the high domestic demand which the industry fought to protect, the United States could spare very little.²³ Russia was no longer a supplier. The MOF had counted on Japanese suppliers during the first eighteen months of the war, but now

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22. PRO, MAF 83/113, "Notes on the Revised Canadian Import Programme," July 1940-June 1941; PRO, MAF 83/178, 1 September 1940 (memo), and "Brief in Connection with a Visit of the Canadian Ministers, 3 October 1940"; and W.K. Hancock and M.M. Gowing, *British War Economy*, 375.
23. The American food administrators informed the MOF that they would route small quantities of their canned salmon supply to Britain but would not formally grant Britain priority over its own citizens; PRO, MAF 97/710, "British Request for Canned Salmon," 29 July 1941. The United States government was the largest single customer for domestic Pacific canned fish that year, buying 1.5 million cases; *Pacific Fisherman Yearbook* (1942), 102.

trade with Japan was prohibited by agreement with the United States.²⁴ MOF officials contemplated stretching the diplomatic agreement with the Americans by having the Japanese salmon delivered secretly to some half-way neutral point, such as Lisbon,²⁵ but nothing seems to have come of this idea. The MOF therefore revised the import programme to include greater amounts from Canada. This was extremely welcome news for the export-minded British Columbia salmon industry.

THE BRITISH FOOD MISSION IN CANADA

With Canada becoming the main source of supply, MOF agents in Vancouver and the Canadian Department of Fisheries made bulk purchases from British Columbia packers. These were then distributed under a MOF label bearing only a numerical grade.²⁶ (With the war on, the Canned Fish Advisory Committee of the MOF, which represented all sections of the trade in Britain, brought about the banning of proprietary labels for canned salmon distributed in Britain.²⁷) As a controlled commodity, the cost was subsidized by the British Treasury and shipping space was guaranteed.

To strengthen its hand both at home and abroad in securing adequate amounts of important foodstuffs such as canned salmon, the MOF introduced its experimental new food distributional scheme, "points rationing," in December of 1941. This scheme was intended to make widely available processed foods which were popular but in short supply. Canned salmon, one of the first items to be points rationed, was the main prop of the entire scheme.²⁸ The mounting restrictions and controls in Canada and Britain caused MOF officials to gain control over the quantity of canned salmon available to

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24. The MOF negotiated for fifty-two thousand tons of Japanese canned salmon — only eleven thousand tons from Canada — for 1940–41. The total allotment of canned salmon authorized by the Great Britain Overseas Purchasing Board and the Exchange Requirements Committee for that period from all sources was seventy-four thousand tons. Only eleven thousand tons arrived from Japan. See PRO, MAF 83/116, 1 June 1940–30 June 1941 ("Draft Import Programme"), item #30, 1 June 1940, and 18 September and 18 October 1940; and MAF 83/113, 13 August 1940 (memo re: 2nd year of the war programme — Canada), "Revised Canadian Import Programme," July 1940–June 1941, and 22 August 1940 (Meeting of the Overseas Purchases Board).
 25. PRO, MAF 83/238, 20 June 1941 and MAF 83/239, 2 and 24 October 1941.
 26. PRO, MAF, 86/2, Minute Sheets, 2–24 April 1941, "Canned Fish (Control) Order." Appointed as liaison officers were John M. Hill of the Cooperative Wholesale Society (a major importer/wholesaler of canned fish) and a Mr. Cornish of Simpson, Roberts & Co. Ltd.; PRO, MAF 97/228, 15 July 1941; MAF 83/239 (1941). See Richard J. Hammond, *Food* (London, 1951–63), 1:196. The number grades designated the types of salmon, which varied in oil content and colour of flesh, not in quality.
 27. PRO, MAF 97/236, MOF (Imports Division) to BFM (Ottawa), "Canadian Canned Salmon Labels [history of the issue of]," 17 January 1944.
 28. Sir Thomas G. Jones, *The Unbroken Front. Ministry of Food, 1916–1944* (London, 1944), 98–102; MOF, *How Britain was Fed in Wartime*, 42 and Appendix D, 56–62; Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 237; Hammond, *Food*, 1:196ff, and PRO, MAF 83/116, various letters and memos. A one-pound tin of the top grade commanded almost the entire monthly points allotment for an individual consumer.

it but to lose control over the type and price. This, they argued, was inevitable: "It is a little difficult for the United Kingdom, a debtor country, ignorant to a large degree of Canadian political and economic conditions, with an unsatisfied demand for certain commodities, to lay down the line as to what constitutes a reasonable price [for food-stuffs]." ²⁹ Because of the rising price of canned salmon, the MOF was pressed many times to drop this item from the import programme. Periodic reviews each produced the same conclusion: canned salmon was a major cushion for meat, a popular main meal dish, and ideal in emergency conditions. ³⁰

Following the outbreak of war in the Pacific in December of 1941, the United States' own food requirements soared. The battle against the Japanese in the Aleutians caused the American Pacific fishery to fall into temporary disarray. Because Britain was already heavily indebted to Canada and a large trade and currency imbalance existed, early in 1942 Canada issued Britain both an interest-free loan and a "billion dollar gift" to be spent over the next year. ³¹ This prompted the MOF to set up a branch of the British Food Mission in Ottawa.

Because canned fish purchases would be large and complex to administer, the ministry's Vancouver office began to work directly for the Ottawa mission. It gathered intelligence on the entire North American Pacific fishery, the American centre of which was Seattle, and made local arrangements for labelling, assembling, temporary storing, checking, inspecting, and shipping the British Columbia canned salmon and herring pack. ³² The office also prepared all documentation and statements for the purchases. An association of canners, the British Columbia Salmon Cannery Operators' Committee, allocated contracts to its members on the basis of a percentage of their total sales for 1941. This meant, amongst other things, that no new firms could enter the canning business. Prior to shipping, inspectors with the Department of Fisheries confirmed the grade and quality of the pack.

The critical problem remained of how to control "outside" competition for canned fish and other scarce resources. With world food shortages becoming more severe, shipping less available, and the sources of supply more restricted, an Anglo-American Combined Food Board was formed that summer to insure all foodstuffs under the control of allies were used to "maximum efficiency." ³³ The London Food Council was charged with assessing the supply of and demand for food supplies throughout the empire

29. PRO, MAF 97/227, "UK Food Purchases in Canada. Report of a Visit to Ottawa [4-7 June 1941]."

30. PRO, MAF 83/238; MAF 97/250, 23 October 1941; and MAF 97/710, 29 July 1941.

31. W.K. Hancock and M.M. Gowing, *British War Economy* (London, 1949), 375. See also PRO, MAF 97/641, especially 12 February 1942, and MAF 97/642, 24 February 1942.

32. This required the services of a full-time staff comprising five people: two shippers, two stenographers, and an accountant. See PRO, MAF 104/121.

33. In order to eliminate competitive buying and widespread price inflation among allies and neutral countries, the United States and Britain formed a series of combined boards in 1942; see Eric Roll, *The Combined Food Board* (Palo Alto, 1956); Hammond, *Food*, 1: 238-40; and MOF, *The World Food Shortage* (London, 1946), 21-2.

and with recommending allocations accordingly. Canada was now a major source of foodstuffs but, for that very reason, was at first denied representation on both bodies.³⁴

The horizontal and vertical extension of controls in 1942 was important to Canadian officials, who could justify securing for Britain the supplies it needed at low, stable prices only if both the purchases and the export controls involved could be seen to be in the national interest. Food ministry officials noted that the Canadian government could adopt such policies for canned fish because of the "relatively small and localized voting power of the canning and fishing industry."³⁵ The Canadian government took all the necessary steps to insure maximum production and supply. They forced the packers to make available the quantity necessary to fill the MOF order each year, slackened the carefully developed fishery conservation regulations, deferred military service for many fishermen, placed an embargo on the export of fresh and frozen salmon to the high-priced American market, and restricted the salmon- and herring-salting and reduction industries.³⁶ In short, every herring and every salmon suitable for canning ended up in a can.

Not surprisingly, the Fisheries department secured virtually the entire 1942-43 pack for the MOF; no canned salmon reached the domestic market. Additionally it held the canners to 1941 prices plus demonstrable increases in costs. The cost increases were so substantial — as high as 35 per cent — that the local MOF agents in Vancouver suspected the provincial fishermen and packers of attempting to profit from the crisis.³⁷ They even privately accused the deputy minister of Fisheries of caring more about the industry than the MOF.³⁸ Indeed!

Of considerable embarrassment to the deputy minister of Fisheries (a man already burdened with the unfortunate name of D.B. Finn), there was no way of knowing whether or not the fishermen and canners were profiting from wartime sales. The department knew little about the cost of production in Pacific salmon canning. Neither Fisheries nor the Department of Trade and Commerce had reliable data, only "shrewd

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34. Canada had to create a new coordinating body of its own, the Foods Requirements Committee. See PRO, MAF 83/477, 22 October 1942 (under order-in-council of that date).
35. PRO, MAF 97/227, "U.K. Food Purchased in Canada. Report of a Visit to Ottawa [4-7 June, 1941]."
36. National Archives of Canada (hereafter NA), Records of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board, RG 64, vol. 535, 29 July 1941, by order in council No. 5631, 26 July 1941, under the War Measures Act; Canada, *Annual Report of the Department of Fisheries, for the year ending 31 March 1942* (Ottawa, 1942), 31-6; *ibid.* for 1942-43 (Ottawa, 1943), 9; British Columbia, *Annual Report of the Department of Fisheries, 1941* (Victoria, 1943), 17-18; and PRO, MAF 97/251, 1 September 1942.
37. PRO, MAF 97/233, 9 February 1943, BFM (Vancouver) to BFM (Ottawa). These included a 12.5 per cent increase in the cost of raw fish, 8.5 per cent in packing costs, and 13.5 per cent in overhead costs. A new factor was the cost to fishermen of the government-sponsored war risk insurance. The price increases differed by grade according to cyclical and regional variation in the availability of the raw fish.
38. PRO, MAF 97/233, 12 November and 3 December 1942.

guesses."³⁹ A quick economic survey of the industry indicated that costs varied considerably according to the species being processed, which changed from district to district and season to season. A further complication was that each company used a different accounting system. Also, a number of companies had incurred substantial costs as a result of expanding or equipping their plants to meet the wartime demand.

MOF officials felt the main problem was that Canadian officials had failed to fix the price all along the line, especially to control the price negotiated for raw fish and prevent industrial disputes in fishing.⁴⁰ During the summer of 1942, for example, salmon fishermen struck for a 50 per cent increase over 1941 prices for raw salmon. Also, the Canadian wage comptroller had permitted one cannery operator to increase female packers' wages by 43 per cent.⁴¹ In addition, there was talk that controls would come off the American prices for raw salmon and/or that the American cannery operators might cut back on canned salmon production.⁴² The effect of either change would be to raise canned salmon costs in the United States and Canada. Ministry officials were not anxious to pass on the price increases to British consumers, a move which, as one official confided to another, "would have a bad long term effect on the trade."⁴³

The MOF officials were not above interfering with Canadian policy to get what they wanted. On this occasion they convinced a reluctant Canadian Wartime Prices and Trade Board to establish maximum prices for raw salmon used for canning.⁴⁴ The board was reluctant to act only because the product was not sold on the domestic market and so did not come under its regulations. Without doubt, the interests of the West Coast packing companies were well represented on the board.⁴⁵ Its first chairman was H.R. MacMillan, president of B.C. Packers Co. Ltd. The Pacific region director of the Fish and Fish Products Division was J.S. Eckman, vice-president of the Canadian Fishing Co. Ltd. This maximum price order provided a serious blow to West Coast fishermen. They struggled to maintain a voice in the industry by pressing for the formation of a joint production board of fishermen and cannery operators,⁴⁶ but cannery

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39. NA, RG 64, vol. 535, "Preliminary Memo on Canned Salmon Prices, by Irene Spry, 11 October 1942."
 40. PRO, MAF 83/239, BFM (Ottawa) to MOF, 3 February 1942, and PRO, MAF 97/232, especially 28 August 1942 and file 251, 5 September 1942.
 41. PRO, MAF 97/228, 4 July 1942.
 42. Raw salmon came under full price controls in the United States (Emergency Price Control Act, 1942) after 6 November 1942. The maximum price was not to fall below the average price prevailing in 1941; PRO, MAF 97/233, 20 November 1943.
 43. PRO, MAF 97/233, 1942.
 44. Order A-723, to stabilize the price of canned salmon; see "Memo of Understanding," PRO, MAF 97/235, and MAF 97/251, 12 May 1943.
 45. NA, RG 64, vol. 49, "History of the Fish and Fish Products Division, Wartime Prices and Trade Board."
 46. PRO, MAF 97/250, 30 April and 27 May 1942; MAF 97/232, 25 August 1942; and MAF 97/235, June 1943.

operators and Fisheries officials blocked any such proposals. Thereafter the price for both raw and canned salmon was frozen at the 1942 rate, although the provision was made for increases to cover demonstrable and uncontrollable cost increases.

THE TURNING POINT, 1943

From this point on, the Canadians gained the upper hand in negotiations with the MOF. In January of 1943, Canada and the United States met over the issue of joint agricultural production and food supply. They agreed that Canada would henceforth supply most of the needs of Great Britain.⁴⁷ Shortly thereafter, the United States introduced its own major food control programme. In February, Canada renewed the billion dollar gift but under a Canadian mutual aid arrangement.⁴⁸ Under its terms, the MOF was supposed to take what Canada was prepared to offer and could no longer act as food supply agent for the other empire countries. Moreover, the Mutual Aid Board decided case by case how much of Britain's purchases in Canada would be paid for by Canada.

The MOF's food imports programme was by now well planned and very specific. Annual tonnages of canned fish had to be established and shipping space reserved almost a full year ahead of each packing season. Enormous amounts of short-term storage space in North America were needed so that imports could be phased evenly over a twelve-month period. A small portion of the annual order was to be shipped to the East Coast by rail and then by ocean transport; the rest was to be shipped by the more time-consuming, all-water route via the Panama Canal. Rationed food items had to have ready markets, so only first quality ("A" grade) canned salmon and the traditional imported variety (red salmon grades 1 and 2) were acceptable. Second quality and "tips and tails" were unacceptable. The salmon was to be packed in the smallest tins — quarter- and half-pound flats. British Columbia herring, considered a poor substitute for salmon and California pilchards, had to be packed in tomato sauce to be palatable and in oval tins to ship well. The salmon cans had to be labelled in Canada and boxed in strong wooden crates.

The pack that Canada could supply was roughly the opposite of what the MOF required. There were many practical difficulties. With the war on, there was little or no storage space at coastal shipping points, especially at the crowded cannery sites themselves. Labour shortages made it difficult to harvest and pack all the salmon available during the fishing season. All nonessential industries were affected by labour shortages but the numbers of sockeye salmon fishermen and cannery workers were acutely inadequate on the Pacific. Many of them were of Japanese nationality or origin and had been evacuated from the coast and interned in 1942 as a war measure. Many

47. NA, Records of the Department of External Affairs, RG 25, Food Requirements Committee, vol. 2497, "Canadian-United States Food Production Conference, Washington, D.C., 4-6 Jan. 1943." These were the Gardiner-Wickard talks.

48. "An Act for Granting to His Majesty Aid for the Purpose of Making Available Canadian War Supplies to the United Nations" — Canada, 7 Geo. VI c. 17 — also known as the War Appropriation (United Nations Mutual Aid) Act, 1943.

other fishermen and plantworkers joined the military or rushed into year-round work in the mercantile marine, tow-boat operations, coast freighting, shipyards, or munitions plants. Replacing the plantworkers in the major centres were raw recruits and crews of Indian women,⁴⁹ who performed their traditional roles as fish washers and can fillers; they also took over the mechanical and supervisory jobs. In the more marginal and remote fishing districts many plants closed for lack of labour. It was simply too difficult to find workers for such short periods. In addition, there were several major cannery fires each packing season, and these reduced the pack and the packing capacity at critical times.⁵⁰

As for the specific "mix" of the pack, provincial packers had little control over the quantity of each species and the size and styles of tins. The quadrennial sockeye runs peaked in 1941; the succeeding three years were low points in the cycle. By 1943, the catch was a full 25 per cent below that of the previous season and the lowest in over a decade. Only one-quarter of the catch was sockeye and the next most important species, coho. Tin can supplies — their quantity, quality, sizes, and styles — were strictly controlled in Canada and the United States.⁵¹ In the first few years of the war, a number of canneries in British Columbia installed automatic filling machines, but these were mainly for high-speed packing of the pound tall can, which the MOF ultimately did not want. Most British Columbia canneries lacked the machinery to pack the small sizes and odd shapes wanted by the MOF.⁵² As a special concession to requests from high-level officials in Great Britain, American and Canadian comptrollers authorized the release of half-pound and a few quarter-pound tins to British Columbia salmon packers in 1942.⁵³ The cannery operators agreed to pack that size for MOF even though it usually involved hand labour. That the British Columbia cannery operators complied with the MOF's demands is evident in Table 2. In every case a decrease occurred in the percentage of talls packed. The least change occurred in grade 3, the variety which the MOF did not want.

49. Alicja Muszynski, "The Organization of Women and Ethnic Minorities in a Resource Industry: A Case Study of the Unionization of Shoreworkers in the B.C. Fishing Industry, 1937-1982," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 19: 1 (1984): 89-107.

50. See University of British Columbia Library, Special Collections, ABC Packing Collection, various letters to head office from Inverness Cannery, October 1941. Cannery fires are documented in *Pacific Fisherman Yearbook*, 1940 to 1946.

51. See Charles Henry Hesson, "Competition in the Metal Food Container Industry 1916-1946," PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1948. PRO, MAF 97/234; MAF 83/239, 13 January 1942; MAF 97/230, 11, 16, and 28 March 1942; and MAF 97/250, 1 April 1942 (when the British Raw Materials Mission to the United States became involved) and 7 May 1942. The Americans prohibited the use of tinplate in the manufacture of containers for packing salmon in less than the eight-ounce size of container; PRO, MAF 97/228, 11 May 1942 and 97/250, 1 April and 9 May, 1942.

52. See Newell, "Dispersal and Concentration."

53. They did so on the excuse that some of the British Columbia plants lacked the equipment to pack one-pound tall tins. PRO, MAF 97/234, United States Department of Agriculture, Food Distribution Administration, Special Commodities Branch, to BFM (Washington), 30 March 1943.

Table 2
“A” Quality British Columbia Canned Salmon Shipped to Great Britain, 1941–42
and 1943 Packs Compared
Years

Sizes and Grades	1941–42 Pack	1943 Pack	Percentage Change
	Percentage Cases (48 lb.)	Percentage Cases (48 lb.)	
1 lb. Talls			
Grade I	43	17	–26
Grade II	81	17	–64
Grade III	72	58	–14
1/2 lb. Flats			
Grade I	53	69	+16
Grade II	18	74	+56
Grade III	27	41	+14
1/4 lb. Flats			
Grade I	4	30	+26
Grade II	1	9	+ 8
Grade III	1	1	nil

Source: PRO, MAF 97/235, “Statement of Canned Salmon . . . Showing all Sizes, Grades, and Quantity.”

Other essential equipment, raw materials, and supplies needed by the industry were in equally short supply, especially at coastal shipping points.⁵⁴ The Pacific fishing fleet, for example, was seriously reduced by military acquisitions and transfers to freighting. The Canadian government had to subsidize new boat construction and allow generous depreciation rates under various war tax schemes. Serious shortages also occurred in the supply of marine engines, gasoline, fish nets, paper and ink (for can labels), lacquer, packing wire, and softwood lumber (for manufacturing packing crates). Adequate supplies of these items, and of the ancillary materials and equipment needed to make them, increasingly required priority clearance from the appropriate comptrollers in Canada and, when foreign supplies were involved, those of foreign countries.

By 1943 Canada was no longer willing to give Britain what it wanted. What had seemed in the first few years to be a trade bonanza had become a trade burden. The annual per head consumption of canned fish in Canada in 1942 and 1943 had soared

54. PRO, MAF 97/227, 4 April 1942; MAF 97/233, especially 12 January 1942 (on salmon nets), 22 and 30 January 1942 (on wooden crates), and 30 November 1942 (on marine diesel engines); MAF 97/228, 17 June 1942 (on paper and ink for labels); MAF 97/250, 11 March and 22 June 1942 (on boats and tax incentives); and MAF 97/235, 12 and 22 June 1943 (on wire).

60 per cent over the period 1934–41.⁵⁵ Because of this growing internal market and higher domestic prices, British Columbia packers wanted to reserve a reasonable portion of the pack (and the top grades) to sell at home. They increasingly resented the fact that the East Coast packers were free to sell their products in Canada (and fresh and frozen fish in the United States) at high prices while they were locked into fixed, low-priced deals with the MOF.

The MOF tried appealing to the patriotic sentiments of Canadians, arguing that Canadians should simply give up eating canned salmon as a gesture to British civilians, who were desperate for food. They also argued that distribution of small sizes and choice grades could be administered more easily. They even attempted to prove that red salmon was more nutritious and therefore more “essential” to Britain’s food programme. The packers, however, made it clear to the MOF that, as there was no demonstrable difference in the quality or nutritional value of the various species of salmon, the MOF’s insistence on receiving only the top-of-the-line and small sizes was a business consideration which had nothing to do with food scarcities. The packers were supported in this charge by the deputy minister of Fisheries who, as a biochemist, was not easily fooled about salmon. The packers tried informally to circumvent the MOF and the Combined Food Board rulings by deliberately packing larger amounts of the sizes and styles of tins not wanted by the MOF.⁵⁶ This freed up more of the pack for sale on the domestic market.

Britain’s ability to monopolize the canned salmon pack was breaking down. Canada retained a third of the pack in 1943, though it gave up the prime grades. Fisheries officials hinted that they would press to retain even more of the next year’s pack (see Figure 1 for the changing pattern of production and distribution).⁵⁷ Just in case any hope existed of increased postwar trade with Britain, the British Columbia packers agreed to turn over the bulk of their 1944 pack, but they demanded the option of applying their company brands to the labels.⁵⁸ American canners joined in the campaign. The Canadians also pressed the deputy minister of Fisheries to arrange to have the word

55. NA, RG 25, vol. 2505, file 205, “Trends in Civilian Consumption in Canada, 1935–39 — 1943”; and NA, RG 64, vol. 1, “Rationing and Price Control in Britain.”

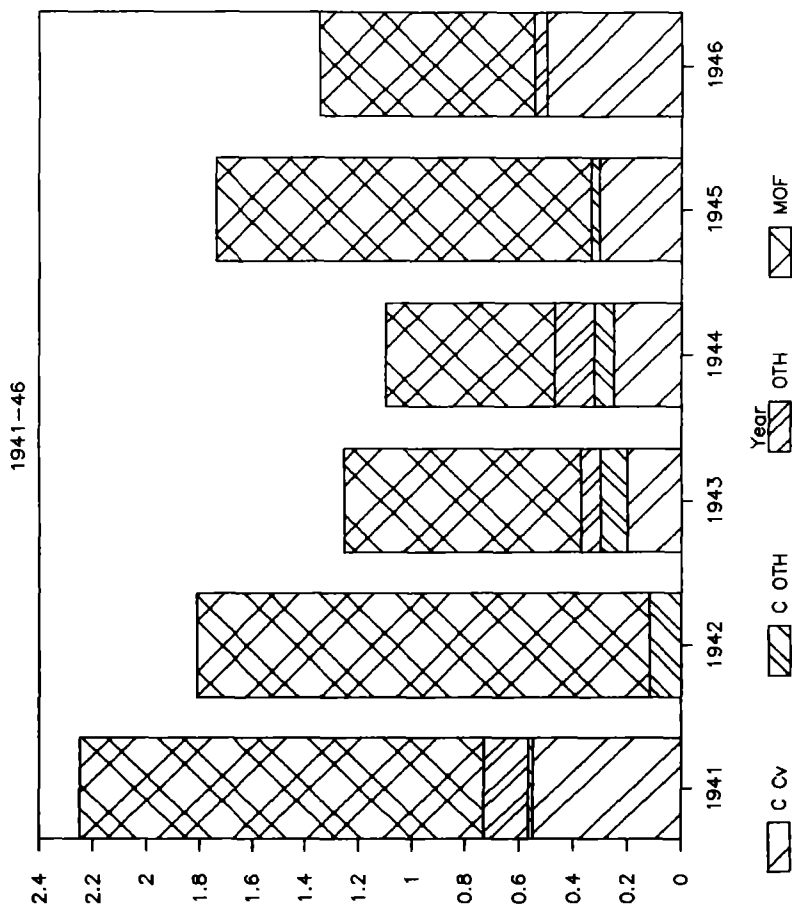
56. This was the case with canned herrings. MOF officials caught on to the game, however. They decided to release most of the one-pound tall cans to Canada for domestic consumption but concealed this decision from the salmon packers for fear it would lead to a large surplus of this particular item being packed at the expense of ovals; PRO, MAF 97/235, 17 November 1942.

57. PRO, MAF 83/239, 30 October 1942 and MAF 83/233, 16 December 1942; PRO, MAF 97/1639; Canada, *Department of Fisheries Annual Report, 1943–44* (Ottawa, 1945), 4 and 24; and British Columbia, *Fisheries Report, 1943* (Victoria, 1945), 11–2.

58. There was a Food Standards and Labelling Division of the MOF; see MOF, *The Advertising and Labelling and Composition of Food* (London, 1949). PRO, MAF 97/232, BFM liaison (Vancouver) to BFM (Ottawa), 31 October 1942 and MAF 97/230, 13 January 1942; MAF 83/239, BFM (Washington, DC) to MOF, 4 November 1942; MAF 97/233, MOF (internal memo), 23 January 1943; and MAF 97/236, BFM (Ottawa) to MOF, 10 December 1943.

Figure 1
Distribution of Canadian Salmon Pack, 1941-46

48 Pound Cases
 (Millions)



Note

Canadian Other ("C OTH") includes the Canadian Red Cross, the Department of Muniton and Supply, and Ships Stores.

Source: Canada, Department of Fisheries, *Annual Report of the Department of Fisheries for the year ending March 31, 1947* (Ottawa, 1947), 20.

“grade” on the labels changed to “group” so as not to imply any quality difference which might make it difficult to market the cheaper species in Britain after the war.

British Columbia packers were by now convinced that the MOF Canned Fish division officials, who were in the fish wholesaling and retailing business, were using the nonproprietary labels and three grades for Canadian and American salmon in order to keep the market open for the Japanese producers after the war. The packers even published an open letter to that effect in 1943.⁵⁹ MOF officials naturally denied the accusation but could not muster a strong argument for their actions. As stocks of the best quality and small sizes dwindled, the MOF decided to change “grade” to “group” for grades 1 and 2, and to encourage sales of grade 3 by giving it the name “National Household Salmon” for patriotic appeal.⁶⁰ Canada finally managed to get onto the Combined Food Board in the autumn of 1943 and proceeded to ration canned salmon domestically in December. Britain decided that the Canadian government could not afford to ignore the anti-Japanese sentiments of British Columbia packers with a general election on the horizon. With the affair becoming a heated political issue and with the end of the war in sight, ministry officials capitulated and authorized the use of proprietary labels on Canada’s 1944–45 pack.

MOBILIZING FOR THE POST-WAR TRADE

Canada renewed the Mutual Aid Fund in 1944 but, under internal pressure, reduced its value to \$800,000 and expected more of its other commitments to be purchased with it.⁶¹ Perhaps more importantly, Canada was making formal plans for its own economic reconstruction after the war. The members of the Canadian Economic Advisory Committee on Canada’s Food Position had recently concluded that it would be in the best long-term interests of Canadian food producers to “foster [only those] markets which have assured importance for two or three years after the . . . European war and a great potential importance thereafter.”⁶² Britain wished to purchase heavily as a hedge against the shortages bound to occur when the war ended in 1945 but the MOF stubbornly refused to enter into a long-term contract on Canadian canned salmon. This was because, as one Food Mission official confided to another, such a deal was bound to “keep the trade out of cheaper markets [in the post-war period].”⁶³ The “cheaper” markets for canned salmon had been Japan and Russia; who knew what the situation would be after the war?

59. PRO, MAF 97/234, 12 April 1943, and MAF 97/236, 25 January 1944.

60. The design for the new label was approved in January 1943; PRO, MAF 97/233, 23 January 1943. Oil, butter, and milk supplies in Britain also were distributed under a “National Household” label; Jones, *The Unbroken Front*, 82.

61. PRO, MAF 97/642, 15 May 1944.

62. NA, RG 25, vol. 2505, file 205, “Report [c. 1943],” and J.L. Granatstein, *Canada’s War*, 254–7. The Economic Advisory Committee comprised a group of senior public servants which formed a reconstruction planning body under the leadership of an influential economist, W.A. MacIntosh.

63. PRO, MAF 97/236, 14 August 1944.

The provincial salmon harvest was poor in 1944 for the third straight season. Despite this, the Canadians withheld 250,000 cases for its civilians, and almost an equal amount for the Red Cross, the armed services, and Australia and New Zealand, where they hoped to reestablish their lost export markets.⁶⁴ Only 60 per cent of the pack went to Britain. The Canadian cannery operators indicated they would press to hold back an all-time high of 300,000 cases from the 1945–46 pack. Meanwhile, with meat in short supply and with new demands for cheap, nutritious food from the international relief agency, fish was becoming more important than ever. The MOF was therefore forced to begin purchasing fresh, frozen, and canned fish fairly heavily from the East Coast packers and seriously to consider miscellaneous sea fish products which they had rejected out of hand before. A few years earlier, the head of the British Food Mission in Washington had written to his counterpart in Ottawa: “Will you please enlighten my profound ignorance. What, exactly, is Lobster Tomali [sic]?”⁶⁵ Whatever it was, it eventually found a place in Britain’s food imports programme.

The Food Mission did not wind up its business in Canada until 1953, when all food control in Britain finally ended. Markets for British Columbia canned herring were assured for a few years because of relief agency orders. The story was, however, different for canned salmon. In the postwar phase of decontrol, Britain stopped the purchase of supplies of “nonessential” foodstuffs, including canned salmon, from Canada. Britain, and eventually the other sterling countries, did this to curtail trade with hard currency countries and to encourage the regeneration of its domestic industries.⁶⁶ Britain could do so because MOF officials had successfully managed to resist pressure to engage in long-term contracts with foreign suppliers on commodities such as canned salmon.

Through the efforts of the various postwar committees and commissions established to moderate the social and economic dislocations bound to occur once the war ended, Canada raised the price ceilings for all raw and canned salmon sales in 1946 and authorized a price subsidy for selling on the domestic market.⁶⁷ Production levels were rising in the British Columbia salmon fishery because men and boats were available at the end of the war and both boats and gear were more efficient.⁶⁸ In order to compensate the salmon fishermen for the low wartime prices for raw salmon, the Canadian government granted them permission to sell their fall catch to packers in the United States, who paid high prices because of stock depletions there. By 1947, all government distribution controls on canned salmon through the Department of Fisheries ended, but there was little to celebrate.

64. PRO, MAF 97/237, 29 August and 4 December 1944.

65. PRO, MAF 97/223, BFM (Washington) to BFM (Ottawa), 17 July 1942.

66. PRO, MAF 83/2459/2580/2565/2627/2655; MAF 104/123, BFM (Ottawa) to BFM liaison (Vancouver), 25 August 1947 and 21 February 1948; and Canada, *Department of Fisheries Annual Report, 1948–49* (Ottawa, 1950), 7, 9–10, 19, and 27.

67. NA, RG 64, vol. 49, A2056 (15 August 1946), A2495 (12 December 1946).

68. This aspect is detailed in Newell, “Dispersal and Concentration.”

By 1947, the full repercussions of peace-time conditions were felt by the West Coast fishing industry. In that year, the export markets for canned salmon collapsed, and those for canned herring evaporated completely. The British Columbia canned herring industry had been a wartime creation. The salmon canners eventually negotiated with MOF officials for a portion of the 1949–50 pack, with declining amounts for the next four years and at prices below the world price.⁶⁹ When the Japanese salmon fishery recovered in the 1950s, Britain returned to the Japanese producers they had dealt with until the war. British Columbia fishermen and fish packers, as with most other Canadian food producers, became permanently dependent on North American markets.

In important respects, the war had been a temporary aberration in terms of the West Coast fishing industry. After the war the British Columbia fish packing industry became diversified once again. The trend toward geographical concentration in a few major centres, noticeable in the interwar years, was heightened. The most isolated and remote plants and canning districts eventually ceased operating and shut down on a permanent basis. There were, however, some changes, especially in the condition of the salmon resource. The runs of salmon became more erratic and occurred later in the season, while the quality of the flesh was poor, and the average size of the individual fish was much smaller. Due to stock depletions and environmental changes such as massive hydro-electric developments along the major spawning rivers, British Columbia's salmon fishery — indeed, the entire north Pacific salmon fishery — became more heavily regulated than ever, and the price of canned salmon soared.⁷⁰

CONCLUSION

As has been demonstrated in the case of Canadian canned salmon negotiations, state trading required an effort on the part of Britain and cooperation on the part of Canada, the United States, the other dominions, and the colonies that was out of proportion to the overall quantity and value of the supply. Underlying the bargaining strategies of Canada and Britain were the interests of businessmen. For Britain, no deals were to be struck with foreign suppliers of foodstuffs that might disadvantage the private trade at home after the war. Yet that was only one of Britain's strategies. David Meridith has shown how, in the case of cocoa production in West Africa during World War II, Britain used the wartime emergency to establish a series of monopolistic marketing boards which became permanent features of postwar economies.⁷¹

69. Canada, *Department of Fisheries Annual Report, 1948–49* (Ottawa, 1950), 7 and 15; and *ibid* for 1949–50 (Ottawa, 1950), 42–4.

70. This is discussed in Cooley, *Politics and Conservation*, and Newell, "Dispersal and Concentration."

71. David Meridith, "State Controlled Marketing and Economic 'Development': The Case of West African Produce during the Second World War," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 39: 1 (1986): 77–91.

THE POLITICS OF FOOD IN WORLD WAR II

When it came to Pacific canned salmon, Britain wanted the product in the long run, but not from such an expensive producer as British Columbia. For the provincial fishermen and packers, Britain's wartime orders amounted to a "windfall." With the support of Canadian government authorities, the salmon canners campaigned to gain some advantage in the British market after the war. Yet, despite their manoeuvrings and the occasional triumph, they failed; the controls had worked mainly in Britain's favour. This windfall was costly during the war because it shifted scarce resources, both human and material, from more obviously essential war services to the interests of businessmen. In the long run, the creation of "artificial" guaranteed markets and the lifting of restrictions on the exploitation of salmon to meet the MOF's orders during the war threatened the survival of this important Canadian resource.