_____

_____

Austerity and sufficiency: the changing politics of sustainable consumption.

Emma Hinton and Michael Redclift

Department of Geography, King's College London

Introduction

In April 2009, in the face of the first economic downturn that the UK has experienced since the 1990s and the most serious economic recession since the 1930s, the British public was once again urged to embrace a 'wartime spirit' of voluntary thrift, sufficiency and austerity. The advocacy of sustainable consumption today is typified by the Energy Saving Trust (a Government-sponsored quango) and the Imperial War Museum's 'Wartime Spirit' campaign, which breathed new life into the call for sufficiency deployed by the Government during the Second World War, in a bid to persuade individuals to address the twin issues of the economic recession and climate change through their personal consumption practices. The campaign, based around a list of ten 'top tips' developed from the reissued 1943 pamphlet, 'How to Make Do and Mend' (Norman 2007), urged the British public to: 'make do and mend', 'walk short distances', 'save fuel for battle', 'save kitchen scraps to feed the pigs', 'don't waste water', 'waste paper is still vital', 'dig for victory', 'holiday at home', 'eat greens for health', and 'keep calm and carry on'. Apparently, this 'wartime spirit' approach had significant public support: sixty nine per cent of the 1,570 members of the public interviewed thought that communities should work together to share resources, and fifty nine per cent thought rationing or personal daily allowances were required in 2009 (EST 2009).

This twin focus on voluntary community action and a desire for Government interventions to improve equity in consumption echoes the imposed austerity associated with the Second World War. Yet despite this public support for enforced austerity, the EST favoured voluntary behaviour change in pursuit of the 'new frontier' of frugality. As Philip Sellwood, chief executive of the EST, stated:

> "We are certainly not advocating a return to rationing or indeed enforced personal daily allowances. However if we could adopt just a few of the practices used during the war, such as recycling bath water for watering plants, then it would go a long way towards saving energy and reducing our carbon footprint… We can now see an age of 'thrift being the new thrust' and 'frugality the new frontier'." (EST 2009)

This disjunction between a public desire for regulation in the form of rationing and the EST's view that voluntary behaviour change is all that is needed to bring about sustainability, address climate change and simultaneously improve individuals' experiences of the recession, was mirrored by the public protests held in London on the same day as the press release. At these G20 protests in April 2009, thousands of people - climate change

campaigners, economic activists and ordinary members of the public - took to the streets to protest at the unsustainability of the current economic system in the face of climate change, and to call for radical change.

The discussion of sustainable consumption is necessarily linked today with the banking crisis that has affected most financial institutions since September 2008, leading to an economic downturn and period of recession. The 'toxicity' of many financial institutions was triggered by excessive lending in a number of countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain and Ireland, especially on house purchases. This brought about a loss of confidence in the ability of the lending institutions to recoup their assets, and national governments acted to guarantee the private banking sector against a feared 'run on the banks'. These developments occurred within a context of relatively high personal (and institutional) indebtedness since the 1980s (Thompson 2007, Ferguson 2003).

At the same time another shift has been occurring in consumer policy, this time prompted by the much wider acknowledgement of global climate change, especially after the Stern Report was published in 2007(Stern 2007). The need to pursue 'low-carbon' solutions to economic growth rapidly altered the policy discourses surrounding consumption, and it has become an article of faith for public policy that economic growth is only tolerable if it does not exacerbate existing concentrations of carbon in the atmosphere. In 2008 the United Kingdom's Climate Change Bill was introduced, establishing a very ambitious target for carbon reductions of eighty per cent by 2050. This policy activity has been accompanied by sustained lobbying on the part of NGOs and others, including Rising Tide, the Campaign Against Climate Change, and the series of Climate Camps that have repeatedly mobilised the public in their thousands to call for urgent action on climate change and a new approach to economic organisation.

This perspective is seen clearly in the document which, more than any other, represents the high-water mark of free market environmentalism: the Stern Report. Stern wrote that:

'The transition to a low-carbon economy will bring challenges for competitiveness but also opportunities for growth... Reducing the expected adverse impacts of climate change is therefore both highly desirable and feasible.'
(Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change, UK 2007).

This quotation illustrates the way in which what had previously been viewed as a 'threat' could quickly become an 'opportunity', although the quotation fails to say for whom the opportunities exist. Unsurprisingly, the immediate responses to Stern (and the IPCC 4th Assessment of 2007) were effusive and optimistic in tone. One commentator on business and the environment wrote that:

'People would pay a little more for carbon-intensive goods, but our economies could continue to grow strongly… The shift to a low-carbon economy will also bring huge opportunities… Climate change is the greatest market failure the world has seen'.
(Welford 2006,)

The characterization of climate change as a 'market failure' immediately offered economists, businesses and Government a lifeline. Rather than necessitating expensive and comprehensive restructuring in systems of provision, or even reduced volumes of production and consumption, Stern's neoclassical view that sustainability could be delivered through *increased* consumption of particular kinds of products, simultaneously feeding the economy has come to typify the mainstream sustainable consumption discourse

These developments in the economy and in public policy raise some awkward questions for our understanding of sustainable consumption and the policy discourses which have characterised the field. In this paper we draw on the substantial literature that suggests there is still considerable confusion over the most effective way of achieving more sustainable consumption, and several of the assumptions about consumer behaviour – such as the role of an 'information deficit' about the environmental costs of products and services, and the targeting of personal responsibility for policy solutions as being sufficient to lead to voluntary behaviour change. Remarkably, these assumptions are largely untested and circumstantial. Whilst policymakers and pundits alike tend to measure progress towards sustainable consumption in terms of the numbers of purchases of particular 'green' or 'ethical' commodities, where success is framed in terms of market share, an alternative discourse suggests that sustainable consumption involves frugality, thrift and a kind of voluntary austerity. If this is indeed the case, then a focus on economic growth – low carbon or otherwise – may still be unsustainable. .

 The example of the EST's 'Wartime Spirit' advocacy campaign serves as a useful example of the link between some of the contemporary sustainable consumption discourses and the wartime propaganda of the mid twentieth century. In this paper we draw parallels between

the contemporary and wartime discourses of austerity and sufficiency, and their groundings in crises relating to the availability of financial and natural resources. We challenge simplistic portrayals of the successes of wartime sufficiency and governance, and the ability of such an approach to address the contemporary problems of climate change and the unstable economic system. We argue in this paper that this conflation of two very different periods of economic hardship disguises many of the differences between the two situations, provides mythical portrayals of 'Blitz spirit' (Calder 1969), and overlooks the fact that after the war, consumption and consumerism increased markedly - leading to the problems we confront today. The paper thus raises important questions for a comparative historical approach to sustainability and 'sufficiency' which contextualise current economic and environmental circumstances.

The context provided by wartime was ,of course, was very different from that of today, in that war provided an 'external enemy' that facilitated political and class alliances impossible in peacetime (Mackay 2002). However, the prevailing view that the wartime austerity economy called for, and benefitted from, hitherto unknown levels of 'participation', in which "the people surged forward to fight their own war... (contributing) the willing brains and hearts of the most vigorous elements in the community", (Calder 1969, 18) is open to question (Mackay 2002, Hylton 2001).

.

Macroeconomic policy and sustainable consumption today

The contrasts with public policy today demonstrate how sustainable consumption has developed as a policy discourse during the last two decades. General optimism about the economy in the United Kingdom during the last decade, and the escalation in property prices, had served to discourage saving (Bernthal, Crockett and Rose 2005, Braucher 2006) and increase consumption. At the same time the level of indebtedness had increased, even prior to the banking crisis of 2008/9. In a society in which increased equity in housing seemed assured, and borrowing was easy, individuals were prepared to buy property to rent and re-mortgage their homes with apparent alacrity (Tucker 1991). More disposable income meant enhanced personal consumption, rather than saving, and *sustainable* consumption represented

another consumer choice in a buoyant market. It was one way in which the citizen, passenger, or neighbour could be re-labelled as a 'customer', a discursive practice which had grown since the 1980s, and which drew attention to the ubiquity of market relations (Cross 1993, Cohen 2003). For Green and Left critics it also represented a further step towards the privatization of people's lives and aspirations and the disarticulation of community and solidarity bonds.

The interest in sustainable consumption was fuelled by the expansion of credit and market opportunities (Bernthal, Crockett and Rose 2005). It consisted largely of widening consumer choice, and making new or ethical products more available on the market, rather than in narrowing choice to fewer, more sustainable products and services. This kind of top-down 'choice editing' has recently been hailed as an important means of delivering sustainable consumption, and would move us away from a reliance on voluntary behaviour change towards greater product selection (Sustainable Consumption Roundtable 2006).

The rise in disposable income, for most consumers, was also driven by increasing female participation in the labour force, facilitating wider social participation for the majority (but not all) of the population (Goodman and Redclift 1991). This model of rising consumption had also been associated with longer working hours, as Richard Titmuss had argued earlier, to explain the apparent rise of the 'Affluent Society' in the late 1950s (Titmuss 1962) and captured more recently in the concept of 'time poverty' (de Graaf 2003). In addition, of course, the post-War generation of so-called 'baby-boomers', having paid off their mortgages, had surplus income with which to become further indebted, or to pass on to their children. This interpretation is also consistent with a Regulation Theory approach, which helped to explain the ability of capitalism to stabilise itself in the 1970s and 1980s, but might also help explain the illusion of 'stability' during the long boom of the last decade (Aglietta 1976, Boyer 1990, Jessop and Ngai-Ling Sum 2006). The model of growth at the dawn of the twenty-first century was one of enhanced personal consumption on the basis of negotiated debt.

This 'model' of 'stabilised' debt management and enhanced personal consumption might at first appear at odds with what we refer to as 'sustainable consumption', but in fact it was quite consistent with the individual consumer-based policy discourses of the last decade. The increased purchase of consumer goods and services which carry an 'environmental', 'natural'

or 'ethical' imprimatur has been bolted on to a loosely regulated market that prioritised individual choice and profitability over more fundamental shifts in behaviour. The context for most sustainable consumption discourses during the last few years has elements which were consistent with credit expansion and indebtedness, rather than 'self-sufficiency' and deeper Green credentials, as we shall argue below (OECD 2002). In fact the sustainable consumption discourses were several, and often mutually contradictory throughout the period in which the idea of Green consumerism as 'sustainable consumption' has become established.

Discourses of sustainable consumption

The 'sustainability' discourse has a normative and politically powerful meaning that has disrupted and redefined existing designations of ethical behaviour, and created a new arena for managing political boundaries, where elements of the debate are framed in ways that background other elements and obscure the politics involved (Walker & Shove 2007). In this view 'sustainability' is an ambivalent category of language, which facilitates flexibility and changes in definition; qualities attractive to policymakers (Redclift 2005). Similarly, 'sustainable consumption' could be considered an ambivalent term: the discourse comprises many different parts, mobilised at different times and in different ways, and the academic literature reflects this heterogeneity (Clarke et al 2007, Barnett et al 2007,Littler 2009, Hobson 2002).

The discursive construction of 'sustainable consumption' has received considerable academic attention, perhaps reflecting the sense of political urgency that has been slowly building around climate change. Hulme (2008), for example, argues that the climate tends to be described in catastrophic terms and linked to a neoliberal perspective on globalisation, ecological modernisation and the emergence of a risk society, where these discourses of fear are founded on an unknown future. Unlike previous discourses of fear that were founded upon unknown causes and unknown places, the climate change exegesis sets up changes in 'culture' as able to control climate, which remains a Black Box, rather than an explanatory device. Other writers have specifically linked sustainable consumption itself to the climate change discourse. Slocum (2004) explores the ways in which experts seek to connect climate change to local, everyday experience by promoting the consumption of 'green' products such as CFLs (compact fluorescent light bulbs),or 'low energy light bulbs', arguing that this

strategy emphasises the false distinction between the global as geographically remote and the local as disconnected from global-local processes.

The local and the global are also integrated in discourses at the level of the product. Bryant & Goodman (2004) argue that fair trade products are connected to discursive themes of tropical conservation and social justice through marketing, where historical fantasies of an ecological Eden have come to underpin this form of alternative consumption and serve to simplify harsh realities and inequalities. They argue that these narratives link consumers to distant producers and environments, in turn connecting personal spaces and practices of eating and drinking to wider political contexts; effectively commodifying resistance to consumption. Guthman (2007) argues that such discursive tactics serve to reinforce the 'politics of no alternative'. Slocum (2004) argues that ethical consumption discourses depend upon setting up these false distinctions between the local and the global, which can backfire and make individuals perceive global issues as being well beyond local control. Ethical consumption's central concern of caring for distant others has been described as "outwardly universalistic in [its] ethical and political claims, [but is] related to routines of differentiation, discrimination, and distinction" (Barnett et al 2005:28); it "remains a benevolence, reproducing a set of oppositions between active consumers and passive recipients" (2005:42). Consumers in developed countries are constructed as active, generous carers while producers in developing countries are constructed as in need of our care, passive and grateful (Lawson 2007, Silk 2004). As Mark Duffield argues they are the 'uninsured' (Duffield 2007). It is through discourses of ethical consumption that globalisation is used to ascribe responsibility for other places and peoples that in turn are constructed as having the ability to empower individuals as 'ethical' consumers (Clarke et al 2007).

Returning to Slocum's (2004) analysis of the use of CFLs in an attempt to 'bring climate change home' and tie global issues to local practice, this form of discourse emphasises the contribution that the consumption of particular kinds of product makes to sustainability. The purchase of CFLs becomes a means of saving the world – individuals, their communities and distant others – from climate change, by combining an ethics of care and responsibility for the environment and for long-term social welfare with economic arguments aimed at individual rational economic actors to maximise utility and minimise cost. In this way, positive change for sustainability becomes discursively connected to spending – and then saving – money (Hardner and Rice 2002, Burningham & Thrush 2001). Legitimating

sustainable consumption on the basis of green consumerism, in turn dependent on concerns for short-term financial gain, shifts the focus of the discourse from a concern for the future back to a concern for the present, and reinforces the assumption that accumulating money is the principal goal of the 'consumer' or 'customer' (Slocum 2004).This simultaneously serves to embed accumulation in Green language and imagery (McManus 1996). Emphases on the purchase of particular kinds of products as a proxy for sustainability can mean that the act of consumption itself is rarely called into question and is instead presented as a force for social change (Guthman 2004). It is then possible to present sustainability as an achievable goal within existing patterns of personal consumption, without more challenging personal and communal change or a readjustment of the main institutional arrangements of society (Jackson 2006, Hajer 1995). This runs counter to arguments for combined efficiency and sufficiency, which posit that increasing efficiency alone is extremely unlikely to counter ever-increasing rates of consumption (e.g. Reisch 2001, Bond 2005, Jackson 2006). In this view, we should in fact be pursuing a kind of 'voluntary austerity' – the approach championed in the 'Wartime Spirit' campaign.

In terms of new opportunities for sustainable consumption discourses, Soper (2007, 2008) argues for a new 'hedonist imaginary' to subvert current perceptions of the attractions of a consumerist material culture and prior connotations of Puritanism, worthiness and the wearing of hair shirts (e.g. Littler 2009, Brand 1997). Soper argues that her vision of a sustainable consumption discourse that centres on 'alternative hedonism' rather than piousness is necessary to confront the seductions of Green consumerism.   Again, there are wartime parallels: the Energy Saving Trust's 'Wartime Spirit' campaign highlights public support for this new hedonistic imaginary through legitimating calls for voluntary austerity on the basis of wellbeing and self-sufficiency whilst simultaneously playing on the cult of the celebrity to glamorise thrift,(Boykoff & Goodman 2008).

In short, it is clear that there are a diversity of sustainable consumption discourses prompted by conditions very different from those of wartime Britain. Sustainable consumption addresses the 'demand side' of the market, just as end of pipe technologies, renewable energy and commercial waste management address the 'supply side'. It places the responsibility for change unequivocally within the domain of the individual consumer who, together with a benevolent state (and 'local state') can be expected to make the necessary changes in behaviour. Sustainable consumption thus suggests new forms of political compliance, rather

than political agency, and makes no demands of governance. The way that the political system manages the economy and organises the 'getting and spending' on products and services is left to one side (Fuchs and Lorek 2005). In seeking sustainability governments need only to influence demand management, and institute new forms of deliberation. Greater 'wellbeing', 'happiness', 'social cohesion' and similar constructs (Layard 2003, Abdallah, Thompson and Marks 2008,) will be achieved through the instruments of market incentives and more 'joined up' government.

Discourses of fear: climate and war

Wartime rationing and austerity represented a very different challenge from that of today. The rise in personal consumption which marked the last half of the twentieth century has served to obscure the experiences of wartime and post-war rationing and scarcity, which preceded it (Hickman 1995, Briggs 2000, Gardiner 2004, Hennessy 2006, Calder 1969). During the period of austerity, between 1940 and the end of rationing fifteen years later, the British people became accustomed to scarcity, to the imposition of administrative edict governing what they could consume and how they could spend (Sissons and French 1964, Longmate 1971, Briggs 1975, Hennessy 1993). The time line begins with enforced wartime austerity in 1940, when Churchill took over the new Coalition Government, and continues through the impulse of the Beveridge Report and post-War shortages into the late 1950s and 1960s. With the arrival of relative prosperity, the era in which the British public had 'never had it so good', in Macmillan's words, the level of personal consumption took a dramatic turn. The Great Depression of the 1930s had come about as a result of insufficient demand, according to Keynes, and the creation of the Welfare State and the post-War planned economy were attempts to enhance security and increase economic stability through increased demand. By the 1960s the improvement in household income levels suggested that the model had succeeded.

After 1940 the full effects of war were, for the first time, meted out on the Home Front, where in almost every respect the military conflicts were fought out at one remove – a vicarious war totally familiar to its citizens. However, even before the end of the war it became clear that the British public expected a radical transformation of their society as the price for the deprivations they had experienced. Even Churchill, no radical social reformer, belatedly recognised the future role of social security in "the rescue of the millions... which was necessary to national betterment" (Hennessy 2006, 25). One key example was the 1944

Education act, which "lit fuses beneath the enduring old social orders" and, together with other social legislation laid the basis for "a genuine mass-consumption society, once rationing and post-war shortages were eased or removed altogether" (Hennessy 2006, 8). By 1950 the national diet was already better than in 1939. For most working-class people the enforced boredom of factory canteens and ration books, however stultifying, nevertheless improved nutrition. As Peter Hennessey noted:

"It was the higher socioeconomic groups that had watched their servants disappear into those factories and canteens, never to return, and had spent the war years learning how to shop and cook and keep their families tolerably fed" (Hennessy 2006, 12).

There was no injunction to spend until the late 1950s, because there was little to spend money on and the injunction to save during and after the Second World War was not only a moral one, it was a necessity, given the scale of government borrowing.

In other respects, too, the new social order was manifesting social changes. Much of the appalling pre-war housing deficit, made worse by the bombing of cities, was beginning to be addressed by the early 1950s, and some areas of personal consumption, such as clothing and furniture, which had been rationed during the war, were beginning to be seen as market opportunities. The 'utility' brand introduced for clothes and furniture alike, was making way for 'ready-to-wear' and the creation of 'wants' rather than the fulfilment of 'needs' by the mid 1950s.

The legacy of the austerity years was that personal consumption was grounded in family and household security, for the first time. Personal credit was still largely a thing of the future, and the opportunities for savings were limited. Even in wartime Britain it was often difficult to distinguish between 'essential' and 'non-essential' items, as Juliet Gardiner shows, in her excellent history of the Home Front, but this distinction was even more difficult to make in the succeeding period (Gardiner 2004,).

The years of austerity laid the basis for modern consumer Britain, not simply in seeming to offer choice and individuality, where it had been absent, but also in helping to disseminate new social attitudes. The post-War consensus surrounding the British welfare state, continued in the 1950s under the soubriquet of 'Butskellism', the hybrid name given by Norman Macrae to the common perspective of R. A. Butler and Hugh Gaitskell (Hennessey 2006, 211). The Welfare State was constructed on the twin pillars of sound Keynesian economics,

and Beveridge's attractive policies for comprehensive social security. It was established to meet need, and succeeded in doing so, but not everyone envisaged it as the launching pad for wholesale advances in personal consumption and credit, such as ensued from the 1960s onwards. It was a generation for which 'everything was achievable', and those achievements would not be put fully in jeopardy for another half century, under the financial crisis heralded by a 'credit crunch', which began in the autumn of 2008 (Hennessy 2006, 27). Without the platform provided by the British Welfare State it is difficult to imagine an exit from the siege economy of wartime, but wartime austerity was the platform on which unsustainable consumption was built in the last quarter of the century.

Voluntarism and rationing

The situation of consumers in 1940, or 1950 for that matter, was very different in most respects from that of today, where 'voluntary simplicity', 'downsizing' or a 'lowered carbon footprint' is deemed desirable by advocates. Yet it is really only those who consume the most today who are able to both participate in these activities, and make a difference to the outcome (e.g. Bond 2005). Consumer 'satisfaction' was an oxymoron until the late 1950s, when a new era of consumerism was made possible through mass production and indeed encouraged to support economic renewal after the war. However, to what extent did the nation put on a united patriotic front to meet the economic challenges of war? In wartime personal consumption and market choices were severely limited, but people did acknowledge that changes in their work and daily life could also carry private advantages – this, perhaps, was an early precedent for Soper's 'alternative hedonism' (Soper 2008). Food production is a case in point.

The nation's food supply had been seriously jeopardised by pre-war shifts in production: much of the land was under pasture and the animals were fed on imported fodder, so reversing the trend was not easy to undertake (Gardiner 2004). Under the Emergency Powers Act the Ministry of Agriculture could requisition farms and intervene wherever farm production was unsatisfactory. In addition the government controlled the slaughter of livestock and the price offered to producers. 'Luxury' crops, such as cut flowers, were forced out and a massive campaign was undertaken to grow more food on allotments and smallholdings. By 1942 it was estimated that "over half the nation's manual workers had an allotment or garden", and by the end of the war probably one tenth of total farm production came from allotments (Gardiner 2004, 166). By 1944 there were over half a million new

allotments (Briggs 2000, 59). However, a closer look at this evidence suggests that the move to allotments was both more and less than an act of patriotic fervour. A survey in *The Economist*, published in the same year showed that only one fifth of allotment holders claimed to be working them to help the war effort. Over half said their main aim was to produce fresh food for themselves, family and friends, and about one fifth cited 'fresh air' and the desire 'to save money' as their chief objectives. This suggests that "a combination of public and private interest lay behind much voluntary, and even compulsory, war work" (Briggs 2000, 59). Self-sufficiency was engineered by necessity in wartime, yet contributed to the wellbeing of individuals and their communities. It underlined the wartime propaganda that personal sacrifices would ultimately contribute to military victory.

The 'war economy' of 1940 is often viewed, with hindsight, as a successful attempt to galvanise people for a common cause, setting clear economic and social priorities and enlisting widespread public support for them, under a national Coalition Government. It is worth recalling the scope of this challenge, "to direct the economy, straight and fast, towards the production of weapons" (Calder 1969, 69). In 1939 plans were laid for a three year war: shipbuilding was to be doubled, two million more acres were to come under the plough, and imported raw materials were to come under the monopoly control of the government. The Ministries of Supply and Food used a system of 'Controls' to manage production and control demand, working closely with the private sector trade associations. In the first few years of the war the 'belt-tightening' was highly selective, and most people who could afford luxury goods obtained them easily (Calder 1969, 70). There was rapid inflation, especially of clothing and food, although most unfurnished accommodation was subject to rent controls. By the spring of 1940 there was a real risk that inflation might even trigger more wage pressure, and even strikes (such as happened in the still privatised coal industry).

This was the context in which rationing was introduced to the British consumer, initially on a very tentative basis, but later on an unprecedented scale. The evidence, from Mass Observation and elsewhere is that the public were ready for it: "people minded doing without their usual quantities less than they minded the unfairness which came with the shortages" (Calder 1969, 71). At the same time in the early stages of the war it proved difficult allocating labour to sectors where it was most needed, such as munitions production. There had been too few skilled workers during the period of re-armament in the late 1930s, and more labour was needed to replace those who were being called up into the forces. Even the

full potential offered by women's employment, so obvious during the First World War, was only gradually re-acknowledged (Ciment and Russell 2007).

The emphasis on voluntary behaviour change prevalent in contemporary sustainability discourses was also a feature in wartime discourses of sufficiency. According to popular myth, encapsulated in television programmes like 'Dad's Army', about the Home Guard, much of the 'success' on the Home Front can be attributed to ordinary peoples' willingness to work together, even if it often appeared eccentric. Volunteer organisations exemplified the deeper voluntaristic tradition of the nation. It is argued that, in combination with labour controls, wartime voluntarism succeeded in forging a war economy out of a domestic economy – saucepans were literally turned into Spitfires.

The evidence, however, is more mixed. The methods of 'command and control' exercised by the state in wartime were most effective in drawing out the public's full potential when they were linked to voluntary efforts. Government edicts did not receive immediate legitimacy, especially in the first year of the war, and several critical studies of morale such as the reports from the Mass Observation archive, suggest widespread public unease with the inefficiencies, and injustices, of controls (Calder 1969, Calder 1992). As Asa Briggs has argued, the "distinctively British combination of voluntary effort and compulsory service... has to be charted occupation by occupation, region by region", it was not self-evidently successful (Briggs 2000, 35). In fact even mobilising women's labour on a voluntary basis was still inadequate for the war effort, and women were directed into jobs in 1941, the year in which civil defence also ceased to be voluntary. Again, contrary to the popular imagination the industrial war effort effectively reached its apogee in 1943, two years before the war ended, and after this date a major preoccupation of the authorities was how to return men and women in the forces to civilian work. Demobilisation rather than mobilisation was the policy challenge. In some respects the post-war years suggest that: "the 'war effort' deserved praise, but more than fifty years later it demands discussion as much as recollection and celebration. In some respects it left Britain less prepared for years of peace than its enemies". (Briggs 2000, 35). One aspect of this was that the wartime deprivations also contributed to the demand for social improvement after the war.

If voluntarism is only a partial explanation of the public mood in wartime, and one that needs to be prised from its ideological wrappings, so do the successes of rationing. The war

economy meant that resources of labour and capital were diverted from domestic production into the industries most directly employed in conflict. Food production needed to increase on the limited land base available to the British, to save on imports from North America, and to meet the ever increasing needs of the 'non-productive' sector represented by the war economy. The threat of famine, or its imminence, was not lost on political leaders, especially after the debacle at the end of the Great War, when Britain had been forced to ration most food, with the exception of milk, vegetables and fish. During the winter of 1917-1918 food rationing had ensured adequate supplies of food to British households, although imports from the United States proved necessary in 1918 (Ciment and Russell 2007, 299).

Food rationing had been anticipated by most of the public before it was introduced. Within a few months food rationing was in operation: the National Identity Card and the Food Ration card were familiar staples of wartime Britain, which only ended in 1952 (for ID cards) and 1954 (for ration books). Peter Hennessy argues that "selling rationing to the people during the war was the most successful Government public relations exercise" he ever encountered (Hennessy 1992, 47). The food rations were linked to recipes and good health, and cooking meals on limited resources was championed by radio celebrities, including Lord Woolton, the Food Minister and the 'Radio Doctor'. However, even Hennessy admits that "there is a danger of compiling an over-rosy picture of genius and solidarity at the store and tin the queue" (Hennessy 1992, 48). Food rationing enabled demand to be met by supply, ultimately through the introduction of a 'points system' introduced in 1941. As Gardner commented, "all rationing could do – and this was by no means negligible – was to ensure a fair distribution of basic items, be they food or clothing" (Gardiner 2004, 177). The existence of the ration also drew attention to those who were able to flout the rules, through wealth or criminality, and as such probably fuelled the feelings about inequality which helped to bring the Labour Government to power in 1945. The great success of rationing was to 'bring the battle front' into the home, putting women, particularly, into the 'front line' (Gardiner 2004, 181).

Wartime rationing was supplemented by campaigns to reduce waste. Richard Hoggart commented in the 1980s that the folk memory of people who had lived through the war was infected with "the built-in rules of thumb of the permanent siege economy" (quoted by Hennessy 1992, 308). "There is still", he wrote, "behind every dealing with money and things, the fear and the hatred of waste. That old phrase, "you'll pay for this", is joined by

"it's a sin and a crime to be so wasteful", "fancy good food being thrown away", "waste not, want not", and dozens of similar expressions all of which express the fear of excess. These ingrained attitudes and values reflect the fact that rationing, of petrol, clothes, furniture and food, was not a wartime phenomenon alone. In fact there was no easing of rationing until 1949, and in 1947, two years after the war ended, it was at its worst. It was to be several years before children saw, for the first time "the first pineapples and bananas, the first washing machine, the first television set. The world opening before us was not a pale imitation of one we had lost, but a lucky dip of extraordinary things we had never seen" (Susan Cooper quoted by Hennessy 1992, 309).

Thus the austerity associated with the war years was followed by conspicuous overconsumption, since this type of lifestyle was newly available to generations that had grown used to the tight rationing of resources. If wartime austerity and its discourses of 'waste not, want not' and 'make do and mend' were ultimately followed by overconsumption, then the use of this kind of approach in the present to generate voluntary sustainable consumption behaviours – as in the 'Wartime Spirit' campaign – could conceivably be misplaced, and have even less relevance when the economic recession subsides.

Energy and sufficiency: saving and reducing waste

Another area of public policy which seems to resonate with the more radical Green agendas of the twenty-first century is that of saving, localised sourcing and waste management. These are all key elements of industrial ecology and 'life cycle analysis' today, and are often heralded as areas of potential Green investment. To what extent did the call to self-sufficiency in wartime translate into better use of materials and resources, including fuel, and encourage people to think it terms of saving, rather than spending?

A key element in the wartime economy was the heavy dependence on hydrocarbons: electricity, gas and coal. Since most electricity was generated from coal, the mining industry was a key area of industrial participation, and despite government efforts there was a drift away from the coal mines throughout the war. Partly to address this problem, young men were conscripted into the industry as 'Bevin Boys', exempting only those in key, reserved occupations.

During wartime many other activities were labelled as forms of 'national service'. These included activities within the household, such as childcare undertaken by grandparents, which released married women for the labour force. Another activity which increased during wartime was recovering materials from bomb sites. The vast scale of child evacuation in the early stages of the war (much of it reversed subsequently) brought a new infant labour force into play – children, and especially girls, were expected to help around the house, and interviews with girl evacuees suggested "they were more in need of rest than of work" (Briggs 2000, 106). Organisations like the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides collected waste paper on an impressive scale. Responding to the government's campaign to encourage household pig rearing one Scout group even collected twenty tons of pig food in one month. In rural areas, "Scouts spent over two million hours in harvesting and other unpaid farm work, while in hospitals they were employed as cleaner, telephone operators and stretcher bearers", some of them even becoming known as 'hospital Scouts'(Briggs 2000, 108).

Conclusion

This paper has compared some aspects of the austerity programmes in Britain during the Second World War, and the subsequent decade, with contemporary measures to reduce consumption and enhance sustainability. It has argued that during wartime both austerity and sufficiency were key planks in the policy discourse, and that they were the product of increased government powers, enhanced regulation and more emphasis on voluntary measures throughout the civilian population. This conjuncture was made possible by the threat of military defeat and, indeed in the first two or three years, of invasion and occupation by German forces. The moves to austerity and sufficiency gained considerable public support and were bound up with – although always capable of undermining – national morale. There is both circumstantial and documentary evidence that, provided the burden of wartime austerity was shared 'fairly', the public response was largely positive. The largely favourable response to the Beveridge Report, which was published in 1943, underlines this claim (Nicholson 1966).

The period of rationing and austerity led, in turn, to demands to widen social insurance, and improve health and life chances in the post-war world, for which the principal architects were Keynes and William Beveridge. During the 1950s a broad consensus developed around

policies designed to reverse pre-war social and economic conditions. The period of austerity and 'belt-tightening' was followed by one of affluence, in which personal consumption rose and personal security increased. Economic growth was increasingly harnessed to provide previously unseen levels of private affluence, and helped to fund improved social services.

In time, however, the moves away from austerity not only increased levels of personal consumption; they also generated new levels of credit and debt, particularly associated with equity in house ownership and increased personal mobility. To some extent, then, the concern with environmental problems in the late 1950s was associated with 'plenty', rather than 'scarcity', and policies came to reflect a concern with the situation of succeeding generations, rather than past ones. The drive to sustainability was linked to intergenerational equity and fears for the future were linked to issues like climate change, rather than military defeat.

In this sense the comparison between austerity Britain and the current challenge to 'de-carbonise society' (Redclift 2009) are not so much historical parallels and contrasts as succeeding historical periods, linked inexorably by the experience of economic growth in the second half of the twentieth century, not only in the United Kingdom but throughout western Europe. Wartime austerity and sufficiency (1939-1955) gave rise to enhanced levels of personal and family security (1956-1997) when sustainability was largely seen as a desirable rather than necessary policy goal. Heavy reliance on new forms of financial capital, increased dependence on house equity, and easy access to credit, helped to precipitate both private and public sector indebtedness, and a loss of confidence in the markets which had made the protracted economic 'boom' possible. At the same time, the dependence on hydrocarbons became linked with 'externalities', principally Global Warming. The subsequent period (1997 onwards) was one in which increased insecurity was allied with calls for more sustainable consumption, not primarily as a new device to get people to spend, but rather as a way of managing limited resources more effectively. The major driver now is climate change, but the imperatives, unlike those of wartime, are not so tangibly identified, and are often politically contested, not least because personal consumers are not forced by events to make the necessary economies. Sustainable consumption, which only a decade ago might be seen as a market refinement, is now often viewed as a necessary (if inadequate) response to narrowing economic possibilities. Whether both the political will and the political means exist to consume more sustainably, the current policy dilemmas over

sustainable consumption are a product of the past, as well as a mirror to past periods of real austerity.

References

Abdallah, S, Thompson, S and Marks, N. 2008 Estimating worldwide life satisfaction, *Ecological Economics* 65(1) 35-47

Aglietta, M. 1976 *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: the United States Experience*, Verso.

Barnett, C., Cloke, P., Clarke, and N. & Malpass, A. 2005 Consuming ethics: articulating the subjects and spaces of ethical consumption. *Antipode* 23-45

Bernthal, M.D Crockett and R. Rose. 2005 Credit cards as lifestyle facilitators. *Journal of Consumer Research* 32 (1) 130-145.

Brand, K-W 1997 'Environmental consciousness and behaviour: the greening of lifestyles' in Redclift, M. & Woodgate, G. *The International Handbook of Environmental Sociology*, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd UK, pp 204-217

Braucher, J. 2006 Theories of over indebtedness: interaction structure and culture. *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 7(2).

Briggs, Asa 2000 *Go To It! Working for victory on the Home Front 1939-1945*. Mitchell Beazley/Imperial War Museum.

Briggs, Susan 1975 *Keep Smiling Through: the Home Front 1939-1945*. George Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Bryant, R. & Goodman, M. 2004 Consuming Narratives: the political ecology of alternative consumption. *Trans Inst Br Geog* NS 29: 344-366

Bond, S. 2005 'The global challenge of sustainable consumption', *Consumer Policy Review* 35 (2) pp38-44

Boyer, R. 1990 *The Regulation School: a critical Introduction*, New York, Columbia University Press...

Boykoff, M.T. & Goodman, M.K. 2008 Conspicuous redemption? Reflections on the promises and perils of the 'Celebritization' of climate change. *Geoforum.* 23 (2).

Burningham, K. & Thrush, D. 2001 *Rainforests are a long way from here: the environmental concerns of disadvantaged groups*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Calder A. 1969 *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945*. Pimlico.

Calder A 1992 *The Myth of the Blitz*, Pimlico.

Ciment J. and Russell, T. 2007 *The Home Front Encyclopedia* Volume One, Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO.

Clarke, N., Barnett, C., Cloke, P. & Malpass, A. 2007 Globalising the consumer: doing politics in an ethical register. *Political Geography*, 26 (3): 231-249

Cohen. 2003 *A Consumer's Republic: the Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, New York: Vintage.

Connolly, J. & Shaw, D. 2006 Identifying fair trade in consumption choice. *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 14 (4): 353-368

Cross, G 1993 *Time and Money: the Making of Consumer Culture*, New York: Routledge.

De Graaf, J. 2003 *Take Back Your Time: fighting overwork and time poverty in America*, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Elgin, D. 1993 *Voluntary Simplicity: towards a way of life that is outwardly simple and inwardly rich,* New York: William Morrow.

EST (2009) Wartime Spirit press release. http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/Media/Corporate-Media/Media-centre-images-docs/Wartime-spirit-campaign/Wartime-spirit-press-release. Accessed 11/05/2009

Ferguson, N. 2003 'The nation; true cost of hegemony: huge debt', *The New York Times*, 20, April.

Fuchs, D and S. Lorek, 2005 Sustainable consumption governance: a history of promises and failures. *Journal of Consumer Policy* 28 (3) 261-288.

Gardiner, J. 2004 *Wartime: Britain 1939-1945*. Headline Book Publishing.

Goodman, D.E and Redclift, M.R. 1991 *Refashioning Nature, Food, Ecology, Culture.* Routledge.

Guthman, J. 2004 'The 'organic commodity' and other anomalies in the politics of consumption' in *Geographies of commodity chains*, Hughes, A. & Reiner, S. (eds), Routledge, 233-249

Guthman, J. 2007 'The Polanyian way? Voluntary food labels as neoliberal governance', *Antipode* 456-478

Hajer, M.A. 1995 *The Politics of Environmental Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Hardner, J. And R. Rice 2002 Rethinking green consumerism. *Scientific American* 286 (5):88-92.

Hennessy P. 1993 *Never Again: Britain 1945-1951*. Vintage.

Hennessy P. 2006 *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties*, Allen Lane.

Hickman, T. 1995 *What Did You Do In The War, Auntie? the BBC at War 1939-1945.* British Broadcasting Corporation.

Hobson, K. 2002 Competing discourses of sustainable consumption: does the 'rationalisation of lifestyles' make sense? *Environmental Politics* 11 (2): 95-120

Hulme, M. 2008 The conquering of climate: discourses of fear and their dissolution. *The Geographical Journal* 174 (1): 5-16

Hylton, S. 2001 Their Darkest Hour: the hidden history of the Home Front 1939-1945. Stroud, Sutton Publishing.

Jackson, T. 2006 *The Earthscan Reader in Sustainable Consumption* London: Earthscan

Jessop, B.J and Ngai-Ling Sun, 2006, *Beyond the Regulation Approa*ch, Chichester, Edward Elgar.

Lawson, V. 2007 Geographies of care and responsibility, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 97:1-11.

Layard, R. 2003 *Happiness: Lessons from a new science.* Penguin

Littler, J. 2009 *Radical consumption: shopping for change in contemporary culture.* Maidenhead, New York: Open University Press

Longmate, N. 1971 *How We Lived Then: a history of everyday life during the Second World War,* Hutchinson.

Mackay, R. 2002 *Half the Battle: civilian morale during the Second World War*, Manchester, Manchester University Press.

McManus, P. 1996'Contested terrain: politics, stories and discourses of sustainability', *Environmental Politics*, 5:48-73

Nicholson, Nigel 1984 *Harold Nicholson: Diaries and letters 1930-19*64, Penguin Books

Norman, J. 2007 *Make Do and Mend: Keeping Family and Home Afloat on Wartime Rations.* London: Michael O'Mara

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2002. *Towards Sustainable Household Consumption? Trends and Policies in OECD countries*. Paris: OECD.

Redclift, M.R. 2005 Sustainable Development (1987-2005): An Oxymoron Comes of Age, *Sustainable Development* 13, 212-227.

Redclift, M.R (2009) The Environment and Carbon Dependence: landscapes of sustainability and materiality, *Current Sociology*, 57 (3) 368-383.

Reisch, L. A. 2001 The Internet and sustainable consumption: perspectives on a Janus face, *Journal of Consumer Policy* 24:251-86.

Silk, J. 2004 'Caring at a distance: gift theory, aid chains and social movements', *Social & Cultural Geography* 5 (2): 229-251

Sissons M. and French, Philip 1964 *The Age of Austerity*, Penguin Books.

Slocum, R. 2004 Polar bears and energy-efficient light bulbs: strategies to bring climate change home. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22: 413-438

Soper, K. 2007 Re-thinking the 'good life': the citizenship dimension of consumer disaffection with consumerism. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 7 (2): 205-229

Soper, K. (2008) Alternative hedonism, cultural theory and the role of aesthetic revisioning. Cultural Studies 22 (5): 567-587

Stern, N. 2007 *The Economics of Climate Change: the Stern Review*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sustainable Consumption Roundtable 2006 *I will if you will: Towards sustainable consumption.*

Thomas, L. 2008 Alternative realities: Downshifting narratives in contemporary lifestyle television. *Cultural Studies* 22 (5): 680-699

Titmuss, R. 1962, *Income Distribution and Social Change*, Allen and Unwin.

Tucker, D. 1991 *The Decline of Thrift in America: our Cultural shift from saving to spending.* New York: Praeger.

Walker, G. & Shove, E. 2007 Ambivalence, sustainability and the governance of socio-technical transitions. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 9 (3-4): 213-225

Welford, R. 2006, 'Comment' *International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development.*, 21 (4).