

DEFENCE OF THE REALM ACT (DORA) 1914

When war was declared on 4 August 1914, the country erupted in jubilation. However, behind the scenes, the government was terrified.

Trade unions had a long history of holding employers to ransom, the suffragettes were causing unrest in the quest for universal suffrage, and there was a deep mistrust of German business and 'spies within our midst'. Fearing insubordination and disorder, the government rushed The Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) through parliament.

The proclamation said: 'We strictly command and enjoin our subjects to obey and conform to all instructions and regulations which may be issued by us or our admiralty or army council.'

It took just 4 days for DORA to achieve Royal Assent, being published in London Gazette supplement no. 28869 on 11 August 1914. It would prove to be an act that would touch the lives of every British citizen over the next four years.

In a nutshell, DORA was designed to help prevent invasion and keep morale high at home. It gave the government wide-ranging powers, such as the authority to requisition buildings needed for the war effort, or by creating new criminal offences. It also ushered in a variety of social control measures.

As the war progressed, as did DORA, being amended and extended 6 times over the course of the war. The two main themes included:

- press censorship
- the taking of any land the government wanted

Also, no civilian could:

- talk about naval or military matters in public places
 - spread rumours about military matters
 - buy binoculars
 - trespass on railway lines or bridges
 - melt down gold or silver
 - light bonfires, fireworks or fly a kite
 - give bread to horses or chickens
 - use invisible ink when writing abroad.
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- buy brandy or whisky in railway refreshment rooms
 - ring church bells.

This meant that:

Licensing hours were introduced Pubs could only open for 2 hours at lunchtime and 3 hours in the evening making sure the workforce was awake and sober for factory work. DORA even intervened in British drinking habits, people were banned from treating others to alcohol, and even the strength of alcohol was reduced. If anyone broke these rules they could be arrested, fined, sent to prison even executed.

Newspapers and radio broadcasts were censored and the Government could control what people heard about the war which made sure the public continued to support the war effort by only hearing good things.

Food was rationed and the Government took over land and used it for farm production ensuring there was enough food to feed the public and the army, despite German U-Boat attacks.

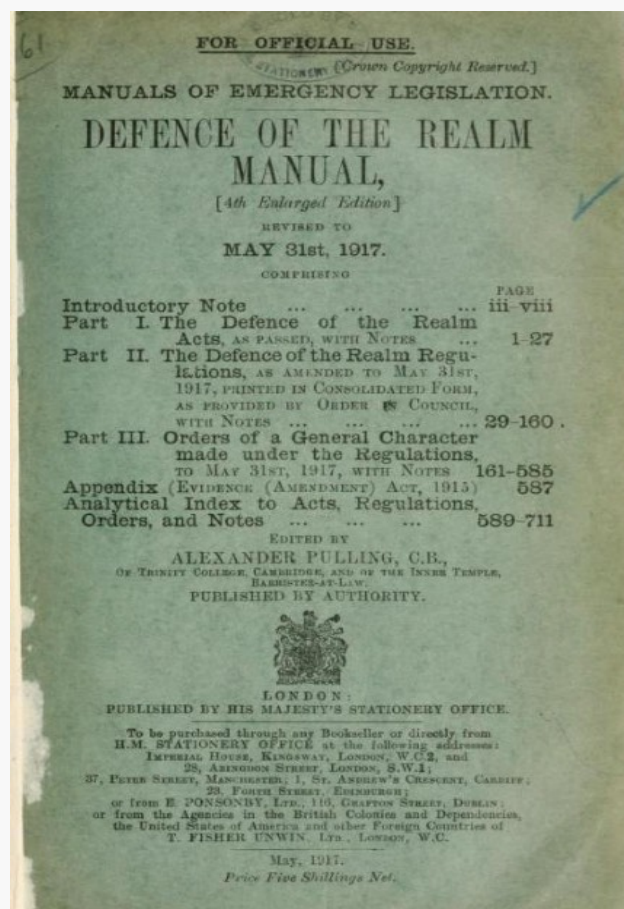
Beer was diluted and the Government allowed publicans to make beer weaker which ensured the workforce didn't drink so much as to make them drunk or hung-over while at work.

British Summer Time was introduced and the Government moved the clocks forward by an hour in the summer which ensured factories had maximum daylight, meaning they could operate later.

Mines and railways were taken over by the government meaning they had ultimate control over them so the production of coal, and the movement of trains, would be prioritised for the war effort.

The Act itself

In addition to these strict rules, people were affected in other, more curious ways. They were forbidden to loiter near bridges and tunnels, and whistling for a London taxi was banned, in case it could be mistaken for an air raid warning.



A revised edition of DORA in May 1917.

DORA gave the government the power to prosecute anybody whose actions were deemed to 'jeopardise the success of the operations of His Majesty's forces or to assist the enemy.' This gave the act a very wide interpretation. It regulated virtually every aspect of the British home front and was expanded as the war went on.

WHISTLING

Whistling for London taxis was banned in case it should be mistaken for an air raid warning.



LOITERING

Forth Bridge defences at Inchgarvie during the First World War. People were forbidden to loiter near bridges and tunnels or to light bonfires.



CLOCKS GO FORWARD

British Summer Time was instituted in May 1916 to maximise working hours in the day, particularly in agriculture.



Farm hands, boys and girls and German prisoners on a Suffolk Farm, 1918.

DRINKING

Claims that war production was being hampered by drunkenness led to pub opening times and alcohol strength being reduced. The 'No treating order' also made it an Offence to buy drinks for others.



A woman brewer securing the lid of a barrel of beer.

DRUGS

Possession of cocaine or opium, other than by authorised professionals such as doctors, became a criminal offence.



Female chemist at work in a laboratory.

BLACKOUTS

A blackout was introduced in certain towns and cities to protect against air raids.



Searchlights over London 1917 by T.B. Meteyard

PRESS CENSORSHIP

Lieutenant Colonel Charles à Court Repington, prosecuted under DORA for disclosing

secret information to The Morning Post. Press censorship was introduced, severely limiting the reporting of war news. Many publications were also banned.



POSTAL CENSORSHIP

Private correspondence was also censored. Military censors examined 300,000 private telegrams in 1916 alone.



Women sorting newly arrived mail for despatch to the various censorship departments.

WHITE FLOUR

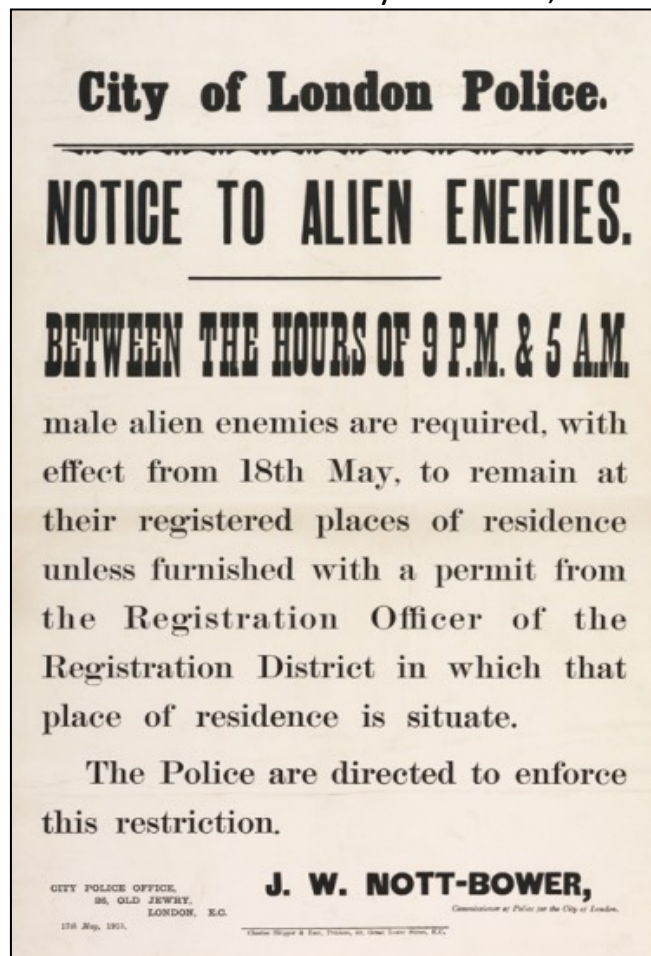
Fines were issued for making white flour instead of wholewheat and for allowing rats to invade wheat stores. Further restrictions on food production eventually led to the introduction of rationing in 1918.



Female workers pack flour in a mill at the works of Rank and Sons, Birkenhead, September 1918.

FOREIGN NATIONALS

DORA put restrictions on the movement of foreign nationals from enemy countries. The freedom of such 'aliens' was severely restricted, with many interned.



Poster, Notice to Alien Enemies, 1914.

Why so harsh?

Though some provisions of DORA may seem strange to us today, they had their purposes. Flying a kite or lighting a bonfire could attract Zeppelins; limiting time in the pub helped to reduce drunkenness and would increase productivity; and when rationing was introduced in 1917, banning feeding wild animals helped to prevent food wastage.

Censorship of the reporting British troop movements, their numbers, or any other operational information, prevented the enemy from finding out sensitive information, which potentially saved many lives.

The effect of DORA at home

The first person to be arrested under DORA was John Maclean, a Scottish Marxist and revolutionary. He was arrested for uttering statements that were deemed 'prejudicial to recruiting'. He was fined £5, but refused to pay. He spent 5 nights in prison and was dismissed from his post as a teacher by the Govan Board of Education (anybody with a criminal conviction was not allowed to teach, practice law or medicine).

It's estimated that almost a million arrests happened under DORA, but for the 11 unlucky few accused of being a spy, it ended with their execution.

German spies that were caught in the UK during the war were dealt with under various sections of DORA. Carl Lody was the first person in about 150 years to be executed at the Tower of London, and the first of the 11 convicted spies to be shot.

According to official records, Lody was charged with 'attempting to convey information calculated to be useful to an enemy by sending a letter from Edinburgh on 27 September 1914 to Herr J Stammer in Berlin, which contained information with regard to the defences and preparations for war of Great Britain'.

He met the firing squad on the morning of 6 November 1914, just 3 months after the outbreak of war.

A full list of the 11 executed spies under DORA:

- Carl Lody, 34, executed 6 November 1914
- Carl Muller, 57, executed 23 June 1915
- Willem Roos, 33, executed 30 July 1915
- Haicke Janssen, 30, executed 30 July 1915
- Ernst Melin, 49, executed 10 September 1915
- Augusto Roggin, 34, executed 17 September 1915
- Fernando Buschman, 25, executed 19 September 1915
- George Breeckow, 33, executed 26 October 1915
- Irving Ries, 55, executed 27 October 1915
- Albert Meyer, 22, executed 2 December 1915
- Ludovico Zender, 38, executed 11 April 1916.

PACIFIST PROSECUTIONS

Bertrand Arthur William Russell, 3rd Earl Russell, OM, FRS.

During the First World War, Russell was one of the few people to engage in active pacifist activities and in 1916, he was dismissed from Trinity College following his conviction under the Defence of the Realm Act 1914. Russell played a significant part in the *Leeds Convention* in June 1917, a historic event which saw well over a thousand "anti-war socialists" gather; many being delegates from the Independent Labour Party and the Socialist Party, united in their pacifist beliefs and advocating a peace settlement.

The Trinity incident resulted in Russell being fined £100, which he refused to pay in hopes that he would be sent to prison, but his books were sold at auction to raise the money. The books were bought by friends; he later treasured his copy of the King James Bible that was stamped "Confiscated by Cambridge Police".

A later conviction for publicly lecturing against inviting the US to enter the war on the United Kingdom's side resulted in six months' imprisonment in Brixton prison.

John William Muir was the editor of *The Worker*, a newspaper of the Clyde Workers' Committee, who was prosecuted under the Defence of the Realm Act for an article criticising the war.

Born in Glasgow, by the early 1910s Muir was the editor of *The Socialist*, the newspaper of the Socialist Labour Party. However, he resigned the post in 1914, as he was in favour of World War I.

He became involved in the shop stewards' movement, and was a member of the Clyde Workers' Committee, an organisation that had been formed to campaign against the Munitions Act, which forbade engineers from leaving the works where they were employed. For publishing an article in *The Worker* entitled "Should the workers arm?" Muir was jailed for twelve months, alongside Willie Gallacher. In 1917, Muir joined the Independent Labour Party, and became close to John Wheatley.

William Gallacher was a Scottish trade unionist, activist and communist. He was one of the leading figures of the Shop Stewards' Movement in wartime Glasgow (the 'Red Clydeside' period) and a founding member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. He served two terms in the House of Commons as the last Communist Member of Parliament (MP).

He was opposed to Britain becoming involved in World War I. He was Chairman of the Clyde Workers' Committee, an organisation that had been formed to organise Clydeside workers and to campaign against the Munitions of War Act 1915, which forbade engineers from leaving the works where they were employed.

In 1916 the Clyde Workers' Committee journal, *The Worker*, was prosecuted under the Defence of the Realm Act for an article criticising the war. Gallacher and the editor John Muir were both found guilty and sent to prison, Gallacher for six months and Muir for a year.