

## BLACKOUT FOR THE MUSIC INDUSTRIES

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THE full implication of certain recent industrial orders by the government as they affect our musical life — now and in the immediate future — have not yet, I believe, been widely grasped. Manufacturers of pianos and other musical instruments have been directed by the War Production Board to convert their plants into factories for war-time materials by May 31, 1942. Not even firms holding Army contracts for band instruments are excepted; the WPB now prescribes the number of drums and bugles for the Army. On March 31 the building of new organs was stopped by an order issued from Washington denying further allocations of tin after that date to organ builders. Firms already having contracts were allowed permission to complete them, provided they already had the necessary materials on hand. Repairs on old organs were likewise permitted, on condition that the builders could supply materials from stocks of metals in their factories.

The troubles of the music instrument manufacturers began in August of last year. Despite protests from important musical interests in the country, commercial and professional, the Senate Finance Committee refused to delete from the Tax Bill the luxury levy of ten percent on musical instruments, which is the rate applied to lip-sticks and costume jewelry. The argument was advanced that such a levy imposed a direct tax on educational, general cultural, even religious activities, but it proved unavailing. Then limitation in the allocation of certain strategic metals reduced these manufacturers to the use of only one-eighth of their 1940 requirements. Next came the restriction of time payments to fifteen months on purchases of smaller musical instruments. Most of the instruments in the thousands of school bands and orchestras throughout the country are purchased individually by the parents of the young blowers of saxophones and tooters of trumpets, families who are largely in the lower income groups, where time payments have been the only possible solution.

The schools supply only the musical monsters – the string and brass basses, tympani and bass drums, instruments which are hardly welcome in the average small home. Only in very rare instances does a school have sufficient funds to furnish other instruments for its band or orchestra. According to the latest ruling from Washington time payments on musical instruments including pianos must now be completed within a term of twelve months. Soon there will probably be none at all to purchase.

Now that the final word has come from Washington ordering the complete discontinuance of musical instrument manufacture, it behooves us to make the best of what we have for the duration, perhaps even for some little period after that. For a time it was hoped that piano makers and others might be permitted to operate a small portion of their plants for their original purpose, so that a nucleus of essential and irreplaceable artisans from their staffs might be held together for the future. But even this faint hope has now almost gone a-glimmering; if it is realized, it will be regarded as a miracle – for Washington is not very music-minded these days. Let us therefore follow the morning admonition of the radio-announcer, "Care saves wear." If a piano string snaps, a double-bass player needs a new copper-wound E, or a clarinet-player breaks his mouth-piece, there is no assurance yet that replacements will be available. We do not know whether the manufacture of parts will be permitted, although there is a precedent for this in other industries. The National Music Council still hopes to get favorable consideration for this matter, as many of our musical instruments will otherwise rapidly become useless. The manufacturers are fully aware, of course, that nothing must be allowed to come ahead of the steady and ever-increasing flow of the tools of war. Nor will they go to the poor-house under the new rulings. They have remodelled their plants and they have the satisfaction of knowing that they will actively help to keep 'em flying, rolling, shooting. Some factories are already engaged to seventy percent of their capacity in making airplane accessories and other necessary parts.

A scarcity of instruments is not the only bottle-neck that has threatened musical activity. Printers and publishers of music, with allocations of all sorts in the air, have shared the worries of the instrument makers. Would there be paper even for printing music? Fortunately the National Music Council was able to get, last December, from the Chief of the Pulp and Paper Branch of the Office of Production Management, the following

letter: "In my opinion music is one of the prime essentials of civilian morale. It is the plan of this Branch to make supplies available for the essential musical needs of the country." At the request of the Office of Production Management, a committee, of which I was a member, made up a schedule of the standard sizes and weights of papers to be used in music printing during the war. So that, barring any further unfavorable developments, composers will apparently continue to see their works come from the presses, even under the stress of wartime conditions.

Canned music has been a very real sufferer. Following the order for discontinuance of the making of radio receiving sets and phonographs, came one for a seventy per cent cut in the manufacture of records, this latter due to the shortage of shellac from India.

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But what if, looking ahead, we can foresee a decline in American music standards? A general reduction in musical activities on a large scale may eventually prove a depressant to spirits of men in the forces and the civilian population at home. When such symptoms become apparent, we shall have to profit by England's example. For there at the beginning of the war music was indeed treated as a stepchild. Now, after stern experience, it has been restored to the rank of a first-born. England learned that the spirit of her people could not be nourished by war-bulletins alone. Music is one of the cultural assets of a free nation. To keep music from performing its essential role in a national crisis was to deprive the all-out war effort of a most powerful ally.

Yet, though we must face the fact that music in America will not be helped by any of these war conditions, the situation is far from hopeless. There are hundreds of thousands of musical instruments in the country. With a little governmental leniency these can be kept usable for the duration of the war. Let us see that they are so kept. And also that they are used to make the best music we are capable of. We hear much talk about the "home front." Music is one of the finest weapons for that service. As the war goes on, it will conquer even governmental indifference or lack of understanding. Meanwhile, every effort should be made to sustain our musical activities so that they may help to stimulate and preserve at a high level, the nation's courage and confidence.