

Dear Food - A Self-Inflicted Wound

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AS I write this the £ is suffering from a worldwide loss of confidence. The position could be described as very serious but the general public is in no way alarmed and the Government is not in jeopardy. It is not on fundamental issues such as this that governments risk defeat but rather on domestic issues which touch the pockets of the electorate direct — issues such as wages and price of food. The latter is of the greatest importance today. We are supposed to be enjoying the benefits of a wages and prices freeze. Of the wages freeze there is abundant evidence but of the prices freeze none at all. The frequent publication of allowable price increases especially of food items would become monotonous if it were not so serious.

The Government claims that owing to abnormally high world prices it is unable to control the price of goods. On the face of it this sounds reasonable and one could do worse than discover the reason for the high world prices. In a word the fundamental cause is bureaucratic interference with the ordinary laws of supply and demand. Prior to 1970 the western world was in a position of oversupply of practically every item of human food, the bureaucrats spoke of the embarrassing surpluses of food. All at once governments decided to seek the advice of these well informed gentlemen and act upon it. In the event the USA paid her farmers not to use 60 million acres of agricultural land, to allow it to lie fallow or to grow weeds and scrub. In Canada the prairie farmers were paid to take 20 million acres of wheat-producing land out of production. This 80 million acres i.e. 125,000 square miles represents about half the entire land surface of France or more than the entire land surface of England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland

and Eire together. Australia placed a quota on the amount of wheat her farmers were allowed to grow. In Europe Dr. Sicco Mansholt persuaded the Agricultural Commission of the EEC to slaughter a million cows because there was a surplus of dairy products. Although it sounds incredible today Dr. Mansholt was actually planning to remove from agricultural production 12½ million acres of land, an area equivalent to the whole of the agricultural land of Ireland.

Two years ago Russia had a catastrophic harvest and China an extremely bad one owing to adverse weather conditions. Both of these countries came on to the world market to buy grain, they literally cleared out the granaries of the western world. There is no doubt that if the absurd policy of restricting production had not been put into operation the accumulated surpluses of the world would have been quite adequate to meet these abnormal demands. In the same way the non existence of calves from the slaughtered cows of Eur-



ope subscribed dramatically to the shortage of beef. In short the high price of food today is a direct result of planned undersupply, planned by bureaucrats.

Today matters are quite different. Governments have seen the error of their ways and the USA and Canada have brought their idle acres back into production, Australia has removed all restrictions and the Commissioners of the EEC no longer speak of laying land aside or of slaughtering cows. Today all reports are of bumper harvests, the prices of soya beans and of maize

in America are falling fast. At this moment the British Government could be congratulating itself on the fact that food prices would soon fall to reasonable levels. In fact this is no longer on the cards because in the meantime the Government has made the fundamental error of becoming a member of the EEC (without the full-hearted consent of the people). Now we are members of a cartel which is committed to keep the price of food high. Now the Government can no longer honestly claim that it has no control over the price of food because it has itself adopted the dear food policy of Europe and especially of France.

There is no sane reason why this should have been allowed to develop. In a sane world cognisance would be taken of the fact that no one, not even bureaucrats, can foretell the effects of adverse weather conditions on agricultural production. In times of plenty we should store up foodstuffs against the day they again become scarce. Did not the Egyptians and Romans gather grain into their barns against the lean years? Under private enterprise the western world did just this. The writer remembers during 1942 or 1943 examining carcasses of Canterbury lamb which had been put into cold storage in 1919, the meat was as good as new. One may point to the butter mountain in Europe and surmise that storing up food is a very expensive process. It is indeed expensive but we do not know how quickly the butter mountain would melt if it were put on to the European market at world prices today.

There can never be any excuse for the destruction of food or the limitation of production until the entire world is well fed and assured of supplies for the foreseeable future, and then that will come about only by the natural laws of supply and demand; nor is there any rational excuse for subsidising the production of surpluses and guaranteeing their price at the expense of consumers which has recently led to panic measures for the disposal and distribution of excess of "unwanted" food.