

Give 'Em a Chance

* IN LATE DECEMBER the nation was notified that the rationing of virtually all canned, dried and frozen foods and vegetables would become effective in February. In a broadcast deemed of sufficient importance to warrant the airways being cleared of all programs at the popular eight o'clock hour of a Sunday evening, Claude R. Wickard, Secretary of Agriculture, speaking as Food Administrator, explained the need for the drastic step and warned of future sacrifices on the part of the American people. According to the newspapers the suspension of programs on all stations was without precedent except in the case of an address by the President of the United States.

Public sentiment toward the measure will range from scornful antagonism, such as was expressed by Dr. Janet Rankin Aiken against a similar but far milder proposal in a letter quoted in the January FREEMAN, to enthusiastic approval on the part of New Deal bureaucrats so enamored of planning and regimentation, with the State prescribing everything from haircuts to hangovers, that they almost welcome the approach of national disaster if it but provide them the opportunity for putting their cherished plans into operation.

The great body of public opinion no doubt will rest somewhere between these extremes. Many will concede that the vilest dosage may be indicated in the case of virulent attack, but that does not mean that they will like it or will it blind them to the fact that the attack could have been averted by intelligent foresight and courageous action. Nor will they acknowledge the noxious treatment as anything more than a palliative of doubtful expediency.

To men and women of such mind, one paragraph in Secretary Wickard's statement will strike an ominous note. "The nations of the future must see to it," the Secretary said, "that their people have enough of the right kinds of food to eat. We have made a beginning toward this end. Now it is time to go further."

Actually, of course, the nations of the world must do nothing of the kind—not, that is, if their citizens are to lead lives of tolerable satisfaction

in spiritual and material comforts—because such satisfactions can come only with a substantial measure of freedom. And the regimentation and planned economy implied in Mr. Wickard's statement are indicative of anything but freedom.

The thing we have to fear in this post-war planning is an excess of State power. We must be on our guard against what the late Justice Cardozo termed "the erosion of small encroachments." Secretary Wickard to the contrary notwithstanding, the one thing the nations of the future do not have to see to, it may be emphatically repeated, is that their people have enough of the right kinds of food to eat. Give the peoples of the world, regardless of race, creed, color or nationality, access to the resources of the earth by taxing land into use; give them freedom to exchange by breaking down tariffs and all other restrictions to trade and no bureaucratic administration in any country need set for itself the impossible task of telling its people what kind of food is the right kind for them, how much they should have or how they should get it.

The people themselves, given the opportunity, will take care of the getting. They will take care of it through the free operation of what the Socialists contemptuously term "the capitalistic system of industry"; through what Max Hirsch, in *Socialism, the Slave State*, describes as a "worldwide, continuous and unconscious cooperation almost too vast for the mind of man to grasp." And Hirsch adds significantly, "This system, which is carried on unconsciously and voluntarily, has been developed unconsciously. No government, no parliament, no king has created it, though all of them have hampered its growth, and still hamper it. It has grown, is growing, and is daily becoming more highly evolved by the unconscious action of men seeking to gratify their desires with the least exertion, and who in order to do this, have to comply with the natural laws which direct the actions of man in the social state."

Would that Secretary Wickard might ponder those words long and earnestly.

—C. O. STEELE