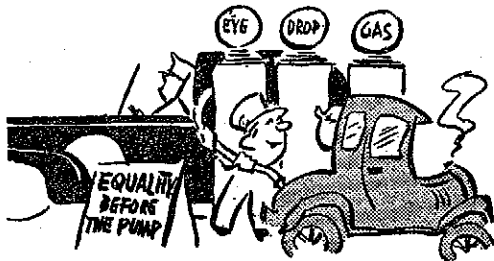


Rationing by Popular Demand

AMERICANS ARE NO LESS PATRIOTIC than the British. That's why both failed to respond to the call of voluntary rationing. It is odd how people will proclaim their willingness to die for their respective countries and then proceed immediately to satisfy their personal desires—such as filling up the gasoline tank when Harold Ickes says it's their patriotic duty not to do so.

Just before the Petroleum Administrator issued his call to gaslessness, a Captain Thurtle called the attention of the House of Commons to the "strong and still growing indignation of the people, who see the lives of sailors . . . being sacrificed in bring-



ing petrol to this country, and the evidence that it is being squandered in pleasure riding." And in England the matter is not on a voluntary basis. Yet somehow some people do manage to "fill 'er up"—some probably through the usual method of special privilege while others manage to obtain a larger ration by licensing an extra car or two.

And if we know anything about human behavior, we venture the guess that the "strong and still growing indignation" of the British people is not over the loss of sailors delivering the precious petrol but over the inequalities in the enforcement of the rationing law. It is their sense of justice, not their conscience, that is violated.

Now the time will come when we Americans will be put on ration cards; it is the inevitable consequence of a war-and-privilege economy. Will we object, openly, when our weekly usage of gasoline is prescribed by law? Not very much, because we will recognize the necessity of curtailment. (Of course, we will completely forget the fact that we might have had plenty of gasoline if the government had not for years, out of consideration for the value of railroad bonds, refused to permit the installation of more pipe-lines.)

The fellow who never could afford more than ten gallons a week will actually acclaim the rationing, for his dilapidated jalopy will by law be put on a par with the Packard which haughtily used to

pass him every Sunday. His sense of dignity will be flattered; his envy will be satisfied. He never could understand why he, an industrious, competent and ambitious worker, should be forced to ride in a rattling contraption, while the crooked politician, the useless son of the big land speculator or some other fellow who had no visible means of support should be purring by in a luxurious limousine. To him the rationing law is the epitome of justice—and justice is the supreme law.

Extend the rationing system to other things—food, clothing, theater tickets. If the system is rigidly enforced it will tend toward the levelling-off process which is the appealing note of Communism; it will break down the differences in social strata which carry with them the hurt of injustice. Even if some have to suffer a little by the rationing, the fact that others who have enjoyed so much more suffer more will be compensation enough. It is this feeling that the inequity in the distribution of wealth has apparently been broken which makes for the enforcement of the rationing system; it is the same psychological force that first brought popular support to Hitler.

If the rationing is impartially enforced it will be hailed by the vast majority of the people, not because they are patriotic, but because their sense of justice has been appeased. And that is why they will strive for its enforcement; every worker who could not buy more even if he had more cards will constitute himself an agent of the Department of Justice. Every maid will become a spy, every sandwich-man a self-appointed sleuth. And loud will be the applause when one "capitalist" is clapped into jail for breaking the law of equal rations.

Continue this system for a few years and the conditioning process will harden us to it, as it has hardened other people to it. Perhaps our traditional American habit of superlatives will take the form of the best and biggest rationing system in the world.

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