

The League of Women Voters

Bulletin of the Committee on Food Supply and Demand

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THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S ARRANGEMENT WITH THE PACKERS

The members of the National Consumers League and of the League of Women Voters have read with extraordinary interest the public announcement of December 18, 1919, that the five big packers of America—the Swift, Armour, Morris, Wilson, and Cudahy Companies—are willing to make surrender in court to the Government of the United States, not only in advance of the trial, but even before the filing of threatened suits demanding their partial dissolution and punishment for monopolistic combinations in restraint of trade. The present situation must impress onlookers as one very logical result of that recently growing agitation against the control of food by the packers, at the outset of which, on April 10, 1916, certain confidential representatives of Swift and Company warned that Company and the other associated packers, "that as it stands today nothing could stop criminal prosecutions."

The proposed compromise of litigation is of particular concern to the League of Women Voters and the National Consumers League, because it almost immediately follows a speaking tour of several weeks' duration during which their representatives frankly discussed in many states of the Union the critical nature of the present food problem and the desirability of placing it under the national supervision and control of a well-equipped administrative governmental agency to be provided by law. In the face of that campaign, it is inevitable that the Attorney-General's settlement shall be carefully scrutinized. Added reasons for caution exist in the sudden collapse of the packers' long publicity campaign, which has probably been the costliest example of private propaganda this country has ever known. Out of the implied admissions, it would appear that the Federal Trade Commission has emerged in good repute and measurably vindicated. Accordingly it becomes of first importance to determine how far the Attorney-General's contribution meets or falls short of that Commission's original remedial legislative recommendations which have been widely discussed by the League of Women Voters, and have received the explicit endorsement of the National Consumers League.

The proposed court decree will really settle nothing in the wide field in which monopoly threatens and middle-men add private profit to private profit in handling the nation's food supply; whereas, under proper laws, the Federal Government can definitely clear the road that lies between producers and consumers, so that consumers will have an opportunity to buy necessary food without any hampering restrictions of special privilege and without monopolistic interference. Even more so on that account, the legal capitulation of the big packers to the Attorney-General will serve a highly useful purpose if it results in focusing public attention on the necessity of our broader statutory needs.

In brief, the Attorney-General's plan involves punishing future transgression of the law by the big packers through a court injunction. This suggestion comes almost simultaneously with the remarkable and admitted failure of our courts to settle a nation-wide coal-strike by injunction; and it is difficult to believe that any citizen, not reared in lawyers' traditions, will place much confidence in the sufficiency of any

court injunction to settle our fundamental food requirements any more effectively than an injunction operated with respect to our recent fuel famine menace. The real question to be determined is: will conditions that will help feed undernourished children and will supply the family table of the average citizen be more definitely advanced through governmental injunction; or through continuous governmental machinery, proceeding, under the mandate of our highest law-making body, along lines of perpetual watchfulness? The answer appears unmistakable: the public safety requires definite, anti-monopolistic and anti-profiteering laws, faithfully administered.

CONSUMING THE CONSUMER

By

MRS. EDWARD P. COSTIGAN

(An address delivered at Minneapolis, Minnesota, October 28, 1919, during the series of Suffrage Ratification Conferences in Western States.)

The Food Problem and the Children

The conditions confronting the world today are nothing less than appalling. Recently, when Mr. Herbert Hoover reached San Francisco on his way home after five years devoted to feeding the hungry of the world, he said, "I am going to Palo Alto, where I hope no one will say to me, 'I am cold, I am hungry.'" To women there is something in that simple statement reminiscent of the lines of Mrs. Browning: "Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers?"

Mr. Hoover's effort to retire will be in vain. When one has once heard the cry of children he can never withdraw from the sound of that heart-breaking appeal.

Undernourishment and Its Results

In our country today, the Children's Bureau tells us, from three to six million children are underfed. One child in every five in the United States is not getting enough to eat. These children are our concern. We know from the experience of Europe the last three years how seriously the semi-starvation of children affects the welfare of a nation. The children of the poor die at three times the rate of those in well-to-do families. A diet of bread and potatoes leads to scurvy, tuberculosis, rickets, and anaemia, and nervous diseases are thereby