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BIRMINGHAM
\$1.00 Per Year in Advance
F. E. VAN BLACK, Publisher
Entered as second class under the post-office at Birmingham, Michigan.

BUIWARK AGAINST WINTER SHORTAGE

Some Facts About Cold Storage and the Charges of Manipulation and Exorbitant Prices.

Once again the subject of cold storage has come into the limelight of public attention; and this time in connection with the nation-wide strike after the cause for the high cost of living.

There can be no argument in behalf of hoarding and holding back food supplies for speculative profits. But this is a matter quite apart from the true and legitimate purpose of cold storage; and, unfortunately, because of the much agitation and damaging publicity that have centered about it, subject from time to time, the real service performing function of cold storage has been largely obscured.

Laying In Winter Stocks.

City-wise people, and even country farmers, have long since forgotten, amidst the conveniences of modern life, that there was a time in the history of our country when "laying in a winter's stock" developed into a household industry. Today, one does not even need to remember that eggs are not an all-year-around product; that butter is a product of a certain amount in the winter, and cheese likewise. Not a few would be completely surprised to know that even meat production has its seasons in the year. The buyer for the household in these days simply goes to the store, any day in the year, expecting to find these and similar commodities on the market.

Are Storages Overstocked?

However, we are told that storage stocks of certain commodities are at the present above the normal level compared with this time last year. It has been computed that the combined excess of a number of important foods is about 200,000,000 pounds, or 10 percent. While on the face of it, this looks like undue hoarding of reserves, yet it must be remembered that commodities with last year are altogether including. Inasmuch as a great number of commodities have increased tremendously, our exports for June were double what they were a year ago, and in part due to these exports were foodstuffs.

More Reserves Last Year Were Inadequate. Those who recall some of the extraordinary prices of certain foods last winter and who know precisely what it means to have too small holdings in storage. That we are better prepared for next winter than we were for last should be used as the basis of a wholesale condemnation of our methods of providing for our future wants.

How Prices Are Determined. Cold storage has been criticized severely as an instrumentality that lends itself easily to the taking of excessive profits. Without a question its ability to export has been grossly exaggerated. Storage warehouses are scattered throughout all portions of the United States and their contents are owned by thousands of competing firms and individuals. About half the storage space in the country consists of great warehouses that rent space to whoever wants it, either for small lots or big ones. Tabulated figures of the amounts in storage are actively being disseminated by the government monthly; and the amounts in holding from month to month figured against what should normally be in storage during those months for the estimated demand form the basis for prices.

Some Figures on Profits. But the best information as to profits in the cold storage business consists of actual figures, and such are published regularly by the Federal Department of Agriculture. These show, for instance, that in the season of 1915-1916 butter stored in June and July at an average of 29.64 cents a pound, sold from November to March at an average of 27.45 cents a pound, giving a gross profit of 0.81 cents a pound, or scarcely enough to pay for storage and nothing for net profit of interest on investment. In 1916-1917 the gross profit was 7.79 cents a pound, and in 1917-1918 it was 8.00 cents. These gross amounts must cover storage charges and interest on the money tied up for several months before the net profits are arrived at. It is apparent from these figures that storing of foods is an uphill and downhill business with its fat and lean years, and affords an average profit which is not excessive in view of the risks that are run. Figures on storage eggs for 1915-1916 show a net loss of 22 cents a dozen; for 1916-1917, an unusually prosperous year, the net profit was 5.54 cents a dozen; and for 1917-1918 there was a net loss of 1.44 cents a dozen.

Exaggerated charges of manipulation and control of prices are precipitously absurd in view of these seasons of losses. The ups and downs of prices simply indicate the hazards of the game; for the best laid plans of men can not foresee when a warm spell may come which will start the hens to laying, nor, on the other hand, a cold snap that will shut off production entirely. Year in and year out, as the figures would indicate, the consumer pays but a modest sum for the hoarding of cold storage which takes upon itself, with all risks involved, the task of laying in his winter stores for him.

Frank Denninger will leave next week for Palm Beach, Fla., where he will spend the winter.

DO NOT WANT LICENSING BILLS

Farmers, Stockmen and Merchants Oppose Packer Legislation at Washington.

Representing a diversity of interests and including farmers, feeders, retail butchers and produce dealers, fully a thousand individuals have made their way to Washington to enter their protests against the packer licensing bill now in hearing before the senate agriculture committee.

Far from solving in any measure the ills which afflict the proposed legislation if passed would be a dangerous experiment for everyone, is the consensus of opinion held by these witnesses.

"We've had government control of railroads and telephones and telegraphs until we're plumb worn out, and we don't want any more," W. P. Carpenter, stock feeder of Tipton, Mo., told the committee. "I'm in favor of the man who can produce the cheapest going about as far as he can. That's the way to cut down the cost of living."

That the packers dominated the stock markets was an idea scouted by testifying stock feeders, who said they found the stock yards places of keen competition.

Taking away the packers' refrigerator cars was as reasonable as taking away their butcher knives, was the contention expressed by J. P. Lynch, another feeder from Tarkio.

The concern of stockmen and butchers who fear that hampering the packers will only result in disrupting the great industry without benefit to anyone, was not the sole interest displayed at the hearing. Business men throughout the country are strongly against the licensing bill, which would establish a precedent for bringing government control and politics into the conduct of all manner of business.

Many business organizations have expressed themselves formally through resolutions, as against the principle of bringing business under government interference of the kind proposed in the Kenyon and Kenyon bills.

In speaking for the chamber of commerce of Monticello, Ga., C. T. Caldwell said: "We've got Swift & Co. down there, and they've holed more than anything else we've got our farmers diversified. The live stock business needs their national distribution."

THE PACKERS AND REFRIGERATOR CARS

Whether refrigerator cars should be owned by the railroads or by the packers—a point to be determined by legislation now pending in Washington—may seem to be a question rather remote from the interests of the average person. But, inasmuch as these "ice boxes on wheels," as one of the packers terms them, are the commodities which bring our foodstuffs to our doors, we may assume that we have a certain concern about them. If they have anything to do with the price of the foodstuffs which we eat, they are of our concern.

It is maintained by some that these cars give the packers who now own them an unfair advantage over competitors. The packers, on the other hand, who offer as proof the fact that they pay the same freight rates as any shipper; and they assert that the only advantage they enjoy is in being able to get through the railroad lines by furnishing them themselves instead of depending upon the railroads to do so. In this they are backed up by a report of the Interstate Commerce Commission, made after an investigation of all privately owned cars, to the effect that there were no instances in which a railroad charge would adversely affect both shippers and the public.

While not opposing, in principle, railroad ownership of refrigerator cars, the packers maintain that there are not enough of these cars to go around and that the legislation in question makes no provision for insuring that the railroads shall furnish them in sufficient number. On the other hand, to pool their cars and take chances of getting what happened to the packers' cars, would seriously hamper the distribution of their perishable meat products. The stream of shipments from the packing plants would be blocked, which in turn would block the buying of live stock and the industry, which is founded on a basis of rapid distribution, would be badly injured.

In these contentions pro and con, there are three parties whose interests are at stake: the packers, their competitors and the public. Only one of these parties could gain a position of advantage if the packers' cars were taken away from them, viz, the packers' competitors. The cars are now uniformly handled on an even and efficient basis, and no charge is justified unless unfairness is definitely and absolutely proved—which would be inasmuch as the Interstate Commerce Commission has already rendered on the subject. The public would pay the bill for the inefficiency in the packing industry, and it has no desire to get into the bill in order to help a few of the packers' competitors.

On Peace-making. For a nation to make peace only because it is tired of war, and as it were, a order just to take breath, is in direct violation of the end and aim of the war which was its sole justification. "This like a poor wayfarer food traveler getting up behind a coach that is being pulled the contrary way to himself," says the poet.

Speaking of Trees. "A fellow must have a heart of oak if he doesn't pine after he finds he ain't popular with that peach he met."

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