Clipping of Note NUMBER 12

From an address by Mary G. Lacy, Librarian of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, (U. S. Department of Agriculture), delivered before the Agricultural History Society on March 16, 1922.

Food Control During Forty-six Centuries

A Contribution to the History of Price Fixing

THE MAN, or class of men, who controls the supply of essential foods is in possession of the supreme power. The safeguarding of the food supply has therefore been the concern of governments since they have been in existence. They had to exercise this control in order to hold the supreme power, because all the people need food and it is the only commodity of which this is true.

In connection with this control it would seem that every possible expedient and experiment had been tried. One of the most frequent methods of control used has been the limitation of prices by legal enactment. The results have been astonishingly uniform considering the variety of conditions and circumstances under which the experiments have taken place. They make an interesting record and one which contains food for thought. . . .

* * * * *

The history of government limitation of price seems to teach one clear lesson: That in attempting to ease the burdens of the people in a time of high prices by artificially setting a limit to them, the people are not relieved but only exchange one set of ills for another which is greater. Among these ills are (1) the withholding of goods from the market, because consumers being in the majority, price fixing is usually in their interest; (2) the dividing of the community into two hostile camps, one only of which considers that the government acts in its interest; (3) the practical difficulties of enforcing such limitation in prices which in the very nature of the case requires the cooperation of both producer and consumer to make it effective. . . .

Additional copies: 5 free, then 1¢ each. Reprint permission hereby granted. Information about The Foundation on request.

THE FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC EDUCATION, INC. • IRVINGTON-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK