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FOOD CONTROLS BEGIN TO STIR MISGIVINGS.

By OLWEN WILLIAMS.

(The following article is reprinted from the June issue of the "CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR" by courtesy of the Editor.)

The Swiss, while still accepting the necessity for continued food rationing, wish to avoid the possibility of making rationing and import restrictions an instrument of commercial policy, which may not be in the best interests of the nation.

The broad mass of the people offers little criticism of the rationing system, which they have supported loyally for eight years. What criticism there is, is more technical and is levelled at the food authorities for not reviewing their whole policy in the light of present-day economic developments.

The whole question, too, of controls and regulations is coming more and more under the watchful eye of the press. Apart from those who see the solution of most economic problems in more and more state planning, most of the population desires a return to the days of free enterprise and decentralization of control.

The Federal Department in charge of rationing and food supply recently stated that the maintenance of rationing and the control of food imports were still necessary, because of the disadvantageous position of Switzerland as a neutral country in the allocation of the world's grain and meat supply and similar items. Its general policy may be summed up as unwillingness to deration goods before there are enough reserves in

hand to make a public scramble for goods in short supply unnecessary.

Marcel Clément, Director of the Food Office of the Canton of Geneva (Economie de Guerre), recently showed that in the case of sugar, for example, there would have to be a reserve stock of 25 kilograms a head before it could be taken off the ration. This the authorities do not have, and, therefore, there is no chance at the moment of derationing that commodity. (The sale of limited stocks of imported sugar does ease the sugar situation in practice, as well as the generous allocations of extra sugar for home jam making.)

As many foodstuffs as the authorities find possible are being freed from control. Thus, chocolate, tea, coffee, canned fruits, honey, mutton, and latterly unsweetened condensed milk can be sold freely without coupons. Prices remain fairly high in these groups, but, apart from a temporary disappearance of chocolate at the beginning of derationing, and the present shortage of mutton, the shops are well stocked on the whole, Cereals like barley, oats, and maize are likely to be next on the list for derationing.

Bread, flour, butter and cooking fats, sugar, milk, and cheese and meats, however, will continue to be rationed for some time. This country is not altogether free to buy where it likes in the world food market, and the importation of food, on which it is so largely dependent, is more difficult now than during the war in many ways. For the first half of 1947, for example, the Swiss allocation of meat from abroad was only 7,000 tons. To bring the meat supply up to the pre-war level would require an importation of 70,000 tons,



in addition to the home production of 120,000 tons in a year.

In the case of wheat, the authorities have reserves sufficient to maintain the present ration for three months, whereas before the war they kept a 10 months' supply on hand. The present bread and flour ration is ample, it must be said, even though it has to serve, too, for the great variety of pastries and cookies, which are displayed in such quantity in all Swiss towns and villages.

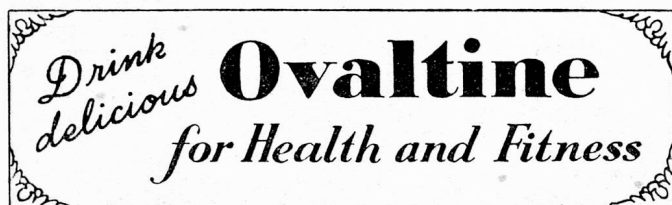
Headlines in the press like, "Argentine butter, where is our good Swiss butter?" show the perplexity of the ordinary man, who compares the present small butter ration of 300 grams a month with memories of prewar plenty, and even export. There is, however, still a great shortage in numbers of dairy herds, due to wartime call-up of men, and the migration of agricultural workers to other and better-paid jobs.

This reduction in milk supply since the beginning of the war has been estimated at some 540,000,000 litres. The lack of agricultural workers still persists, and it will take some time to make good the gaps in dairy cattle breeding. During the recent severe winter, too, there has been a further reduction of milk supply, amounting in some parts of German Switzerland to 20 per cent.

Criticism of Federal food policy has received a further impetus through the publicity given to the recent Government appeal for a halt in demands for wage increases, so as to stop inflation, and maintain the purchasing power of the franc. The authorities, it is said, should set a practical example by facilitating the import of cheaper foodstuffs from abroad, and thereby start the downward trend of prices, which is the only real way of halting inflation. To this the Government replies that any such changes must be made warily, with an eye on possible repercussions on home trades, and on the maintenance of state revenues from import duties.

What of the patient customer who has to return each month to his local food office to exchange the old ration card for a new one? The answer is that the system works smoothly, and has become so much a part of the pattern of living of the citizen that it is accepted like the payment of taxes and other civic duties. It is on the small tradesman, however, without help in business, that the burden of rationing falls heaviest. All the unpaid clerical work attendant on rationing, and the sorting of coupons, has to be done after closing hours, while profits are controlled and surveillance strict.

In a time of world shortages and postwar dislocation, the problem of feeding even a small country like Switzerland, which was not in the war, are complex and difficult. And though many talk of the country's being "administered," and not governed, because of the strict system of controls, there is nation-wide admiration for careful planning behind the rationing system, which even in the darkest days insured the distribution of available foodstuffs.



NICHOLAS VON FLUE AND THE CONFEDERATION.

(A talk given by Mr. H. Marfurt, on June 1st, 1947, at Westminster Cathedral Hall.)

We are assembled this afternoon to commemorate a man whose name and whose picture are well known all over Switzerland. Nicholas von Flue owes his renown not only to the qualities which induced the Church to elevate him to the dignity of a saint, but to a very great extent also to his merits as a peace-maker.

It is no exaggeration to say that the existence of the Confederation was seriously endangered by the differences of opinion which had arisen between the town and the country cantons. The situation was desperate. And it is again no exaggeration if we say, what many famous historians have confirmed, that it was thanks to the intervention of the hermit of the Ranft that the diet of Stans could be concluded with the Charter which consequently became one of the pillars of the Confederation.

This fact is, therefore, reason enough for us to go through, to-day, the history of those days and to become aware of the situation that our forefathers had to face. We shall realize that the Charter of Stans has not lost its significance and its importance and that Nicholas von Flue's famous words have now for four centuries been the basic principle of Swiss foreign policy and still express the meaning and the object of Swiss neutrality.

The diet of Stans was not the first occasion on which Brother Klaus appeared on the political scene of 15th century Switzerland. He had already been an outstanding figure before in the public life of his home country, the upper valley of Unterwalden, and of the Confederation.

As a youth he took part in the old campaign of Zürich. And when, some years later, the Swiss conquered the Thurgau, he commanded Obwalden's unit. For his renowned sense of justice his fellow citizens made him arbitrator for various lay and ecclesiastical matters of local and national interest. Later on he was elected judge and magistrate and even offered the country's highest dignity of the Landammann. It was already then that he felt that God had other plans for him, and he refused. He was well-known when he was taking an active part in public life, but he became more famous still all over the country and even abroad for his wisdom and his saintly life when he had retired into solitude. It is therefore not astonishing that he succeeded in reconciling the disunited Confederates.

The dissension between the towns and the countries that manifested itself as a sequel to the campaign of Burgundy and became dangerously critical during the diet of Stans had been latent in the Confederation for several decades. It was caused by the different social and political structure of the towns and countries. It had always been the aim of the three original cantons to assist their neighbours whenever and wherever they had to fight for their independence. That is how the unions with the towns of Lucerne, Zürich and Bern originated.

The tendency in the towns, however, was to strengthen the position of municipal authority, to secure and to maintain its sovereignty over rural areas.