



Food surpluses a weapon for the cold war

THE RECENT NEWS from the western zone of Germany and Berlin especially has given new emphasis to Secretary of Agriculture Benson's thesis of turning food surpluses into opportunities. The United States and other western nations have apparently discovered the power of food as a political weapon, and in the current legislation before Congress the executive branch of the Government has expressed its intention to capitalize on the current domestic agricultural surpluses to aid American friends overseas.

At the end of June President Eisenhower sent a message to Congress in which he asked for the authority to give surplus foods held by the Commodity Credit Corporation to nations which are threatened with famine or for other reasons need food relief. In both bills proposed in Washington the wording of the measures has been changed to give the President the authority not only to help nations which are friendly to the United States but also to aid friendly peoples.

As the bills have now been passed the President will be authorized to give our surplus foods to hungry people almost any place in the world. In other words, the peoples under Communist domination as in the Soviet Zone of Berlin will be eligible to receive American aid despite their government. This is perhaps an important departure from the traditional American policy of foreign aid. We will be giving aid to peoples without bolstering their government.

At present American food is being shipped to Europe and other areas under a variety of schemes. One of these comes under section 416 of the Agricultural Act of 1948. Under this act, the Secretary of Agriculture is given the authority to set aside surplus foodstuffs for use of private relief agencies abroad. The private relief agencies distribute the

food free to refugees and others in need of supplementary food. The food is given to the relief agencies by the Commodity Credit Corp. on the recommendation of the Mutual Security Agency. At present about 5000 tons of dried milk from surplus stocks are on their way to West Germany under this program. The dried milk and other commodities will be distributed principally to refugees from Iron Curtain countries who have fled to Western Europe.

Berlin Food Markets

The Berlin food markets are not markets for surplus American food but they are distributing American food in American labels to the people from the Russian Zone of Berlin who will cross the line into the western zones. This is considered by many persons to be one of the most dramatic demonstrations thus far of the power of American food and it might be well to see how the system operates.

The food which is now being made available to the East Berliners is shipped to Berlin under a general escape clause of the Mutual Security Act. This clause, Section 513B of the act, directs that \$100 million of the funds made available under the act may be used at the discretion of the President which he feels to be in the best interest of the U.S. The clause specifically states that the usual restrictions on the use of funds regarding the eligibility of nations to whom they are directed and the normal regulations on the purchasing of supplies by government contracts are waived for these projects.

Section 513B has not been generally used by the MSA. However, this clause has been the legal justification for the food markets in Berlin which sprang up suddenly following the insurrection there in June.

Under the present Berlin food program the MSA buys American food supplies in

domestic containers, the same sort of labels that Americans buy in the corner grocery store. These groceries are shipped to Berlin and consigned to the mayors of the various boroughs of the western zone of Berlin. The actual distribution of the food to the people of East Berlin has been carried on by the Western Germans through a series of markets across from the Soviet demarcation line of the city.

The advantages of the clause in the Mutual Security Act were that when an opportunity to aid the Germans presented itself, the American government could go into warehouses and buy American groceries wherever they could be found without having to waste time with purchasing procedures. And, the MSA points out, an additional advantage of this scheme is that the containers and food packages are identical with those the American housewife purchases. No complicated propaganda apparatus is required to explain to the Germans where the food is coming from; they have only to look at the labels. The Russian blockade and use of force to prevent the German access to the food markets has been interpreted as evidence of the effectiveness of the scheme.

International Food Reserve

Earlier in the present session of Congress a joint resolution was introduced in the Senate to direct the U.S. to participate in the international food reserve program in cooperation with the food and agricultural organization of the UN. The food reserve program would provide that surplus American agricultural commodities would be put into storage in foreign countries.

Nations needing these commodities could purchase them with their own currency, preventing drains of their dollar reserves, and the foreign funds acquired by the U.S. under the scheme could be used by our Government for additional relief work or other purposes without a subsequent drain of our own money.

Any one of these food schemes taken individually could be interpreted as a tribute to the production of American agriculture and to American humanitarianism. When a group of measures such as these and others which the American government and private American agencies are considered, it gives new meaning to the power of American surpluses. For in the current struggle for men's minds between the free western nations and the communists, American food may, in the last analysis, be a decisive factor. As one German representative said recently when asked about the political implications of the American food program: "In the struggle against totalitarian governments, humanitarianism cannot be divorced from politics."