

Our Staff of Life

By ANTONIO PAULINO

THE ORGANISATION OF THE Rice and Corn Administration in mid-November to supplant the Bigasang Bayan as the Government's control agency in staples gives validity to the fact that war imposes upon governments the duty of supplying the basic needs of their people. Events of the past many months have in fact argued for governmental control of the staple crops. For precisely the reason that profiteering is a natural result of developments that dislocate normal channels of distribution, private enterprise cannot and should not be depended upon especially in the matter of prime goods.

Travelers from the north speak of lush fields in the Central Plain—hundreds and hundreds of yellow stalks freighted with a rich harvest. The RICÓA'S job is to see that this harvest sidetracks the profiteer's bodega and goes direct to the pot.

Two facts must be acknowledged. The first is that the profiteer and the crooked police agent are at the base of the whole business. The second is that the people are willing to go almost any length in helping eliminate these two, but that their cooperation ultimately would depend upon how uncompromisingly the Government would deal with them.

This season's rice crop, allowing for adverse factors such as attacks by pests and unfavourable weather that usually subtract from a normal

harvest, should aggregate at least 450,000 cavans of palay in the Central Plain alone. Grain which has been hoarded for various reasons ought to number 50,000 cavans more. All of this total—or as much of it as can be made available—should go to the people's larder beginning this Christmas.

If this is to be made more than a mere wish, the mailed fist should be used. The Government should establish moral restraints calculated to make profiteering—and in fact the least intention to abet the profiteering—really dangerous business. The maximum penalty would be given offenders under martial law.

Profiteering begins at the source of the goods. Any serious attempt to discourage profiteering should begin at the same point.

Hoarding of rice in the Central Plain results from two general causes; namely, the steady and swift climb of prices, which makes speculation attractive to producers, and the difficulty of transporting the grain from farmer to buying center due to risks on the road. Organised banditry and the natural desire to stock up against a day of need add to these factors. Faced with bodily harm if they sell their grain, farmers are cowed into keeping most of it. In the Central Plain the practise is widespread to hoard a considerable portion of the harvest as a reserve to

draw from in case the next crop should fail.

Rice producers should therefore be extended full assurance of security. Their entire output should be controlled by the RICOA; trade in the cereal other than by this one organisation should be outlawed.

Apart from the fact that it faces great temptations to profiteer, private enterprise is handicapped by the restrictions imposed by war. Consequently there is a one-sided disparity between production and consumption. As the Government—and the Government only—is in a position to hurdle these restrictions, it should take unto itself what normally is a function of private business.

As an operating company the Government can muster the country's farms, mines and forests to yield the raw materials it would require; consolidate factories and work them under its management or control; and construct *cascos* and *hoteles* that it would need to procure raw materials and distribute finished goods. With these facilities, it can turn out the basic articles needed by its customers: the people.

An office of production management, of which the RICOA should be a part, can coordinate the production, transportation, and distribution of prime goods. Already the RICOA has addressed itself to solving the key problem: rice.

The rice problem is at bottom one of human values. For this reason, the farmer should be taken for what he is; the foundation upon which rests the economic edifice of an agricultural country such as ours. He should be familiarised with his key position in this edifice. Rice is the staple food. It is scarce at this time. Producing it is a responsibility which he is duty-bound to discharge because it is vital to the national existence.

He must in fact be taught that it is his duty to plant his land with the people's crop. Only that part of his

harvest which is sufficient for his needs may he legally keep; the people should have the rest.

The grain should be husked only in authorised mills, transported only in government conveyances. A minimum price which would allow the farmer a reasonable margin of profit should be fixed—and the Government should stick to it.

A question becomes pertinent here. At this minimum price, how is the farmer to meet the rising living cost?

Profiteering runs in a vicious circle. A majority of profiteers are not innately bad; they profiteer so that they can pay the price of other profiteers. Most of those who profiteer in coconuts, for example, are forced to it by the desire to meet the terms of those who profiteer in rice.

The Government should enable rice producers to have little traffic with profiteers. As much as it possibly could, it should satisfy their basic wants: food, clothing, and shelter. Weekly or bi-weekly rations of prime goods would increase their morale and indirectly the price fixed for their crop.

Rice travels a long way from field to pot; in between, the police agent holds destiny in the palm of his hand. His privileges should, for that reason, be no less.

A private in the Constabulary gets free clothing, quarters and board, and a basic pay of P60 a month. The cheapest kind of cigaret, at current prices, cost one peso apiece. No matter how good his arithmetic, it is hard to see how he can keep his budget balanced.

The government should recognise the fact that honour is a very fine thing but that no amount of black magic will enable an empty sack to stand upright. Constabulary officers and men should be given rations of those prime goods they need most—as many rations per week as would be sufficient to eliminate every ex-

cuse for bribery in the force.

If in spite of these privileges they should persist in alining themselves with profiteers, they should immediately be arraigned before summary courts-martial. If found guilty, they should be disgraced in front of their companies and shot at dawn.

The Government has, in times past, handled the profiteer and the crooked policemen with silk gloves. The Filipino people, it has been stressed by those who expertise on such things, have a peculiar psychology; they are more amenable to policies of attraction than of force. It has in fact become common to read of high public officials asking the cooperation of rice producers with tears in their eyes.

Clearly, the Government has been patient enough; it has tried that policy and it has found that it does not work. The corrupt peace officer is still with us; the profiteer still lingers on. Better results will perhaps be achieved if we take these people for what they are—souless scoundrels who should join the devil in hell—and line them up against the wall.

That would seem un-Christian and would shock many of the devout this Christmas. But at a time of zooming prices and precious little money, it would probably mean the difference between a bitter rejection of God and a calm assurance that He's still in His heaven and all's right with the world.



Giving Up Chungking—

HANSON BALDWIN, Military Commentator of the New York Times: Japanese forces are surging toward their military objectives. As a result, Chungking has been thrown into confusion which seems to be beyond relief. It is advisable for us to reconsider the role of Chungking in this war.

When we deal a decisive blow on Japanese forces, it will be possible for the Americans to attack the heart of Japan from the air and from the seas with the use of troops to be detailed from insular bases which are already in our possession. We, therefore, have no need of continuing prolonged hostilities on the China continent.