

We Don't Like It!

► ISN'T IT ODD, how whole peoples behave like individual obstreperous children when suddenly confronted with an unaccustomed food!

Those who can remember the first World War will doubtless recall their annoyance at hearing that the starving Belgians refused to eat corn when it was offered to them by Herbert Hoover's famine relief commission. The difficulty lay partly in the fact that they did not know how to make cornbread and other corn foods, but to a very large extent it was sheer balky unwillingness to adopt and get used to something they had never eaten before.

Corn was something they had been accustomed to importing and feeding to cattle: therefore it wasn't fit for human beings to eat. And that was that. So we Americans gave up some of our wheat and ate the corn ourselves, though we grumbled at the Belgians for their stubbornness even while we munched our johnnycake.

Now we are showing signs of putting up a very similar performance ourselves. We've had to give up a good deal of our meat, especially beef, so that fighting men may have it. To keep proteins in our national diet up to a good working level, we are offered supplements of soybean products to "stretch" the meat we have left.

And we don't like it. We wrinkle our collective nose, pound on the table with our national knife-handle, and yell for beefsteak. Some of the clamor, to be sure, is synthetic. Part of the outcry comes from cattle-raising sections, and can therefore hardly be called disinterested. More of it comes from political "outs" who hope to become "ins" at the next election, and is therefore simply

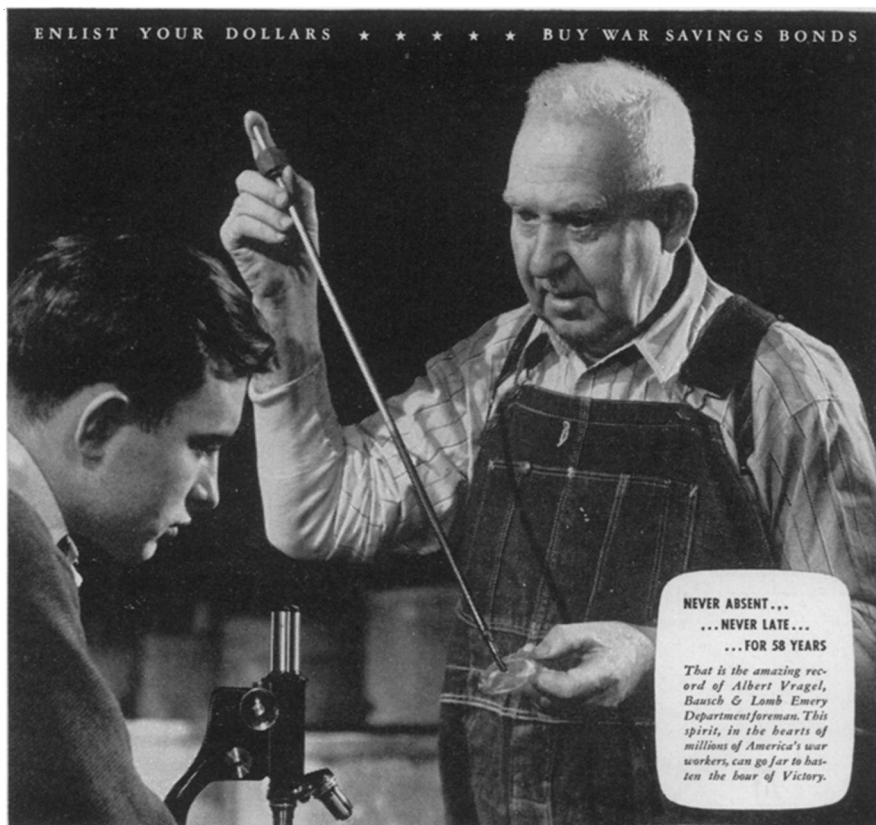
dishonest. But even interested and self-seeking parties would not be raising a row if they didn't think there was a fairly solid body of national discontent to capitalize for their own purposes.

As a matter of historic fact, we have changed our national food habits radically since the days when the Republic was young. The "groaning board" about which writers enthused a century or so ago would make us groan ourselves if we were confronted with it now. It was loaded to the limit with meat, fowl, fish, usually highly spiced, smoked or pickled;

there were plenty of breads of various kinds, as well as starchy vegetables, but not a great deal in the way of green ones. Salads were rare or lacking, and fresh fruits, except for a few locally raised products, were rarer still.

In short, our great-grandfathers would have thought our present-day meals anemic; to us an eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century banquet menu looks almost cannibalistic. Which goes to show that national food habits, after all, are not unamendable.

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