

“Equitable Distribution”



Brannan. *To share poverty equitably?*

The President referred recently to the plan which Charles F. Brannan, Secretary of Agriculture, has submitted to Congress. This is the plan which proposes to let food prices find a level, set up a Government standard of income for farmers, and then to pay farmers the difference out of taxpayers' pockets.

The President spoke of this as “a plan that will create an equitable distribution of the income of the country among those who work on the farms, those who work in the processing of farm products, and those whom we call the consumers. This program is part of our effort to get the national income so distributed that every segment of the population can have its fair share of that income.”

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One must hope that Mr. Truman did not mean all that might easily be read into those words. “Equitable distribution of the income” sounds good. But the national income in the aggregate proceeds from what individuals produce. It has long been supposed in the United States that a person who earned an income by his work is entitled to more enjoyment from his effort than is someone else who may not have worked so well.

Surely Mr. Truman could not have meant that if hard-working Jones earns \$8 a day and lazy Smith earns \$4 a day, there should be established by law an “equitable distribution” that would give each of them \$6. Unfortunately his words lend themselves to an interpretation of that nature. Such an interpretation might seem justified by the President's support for a proposal that amounts to charging some part of every grocery bill to all the taxpayers.

A nation can not strengthen itself, nor strengthen the weak, by weakening its strong. The strength of the United States has grown as more and more people have become strong enough to save a few dollars and to invest those dollars in tools. With an increasing store of tools, more and more people, including many of the weak, have been able to increase their individual production. As they have produced more they have earned more. They have become stronger as individuals, and their total contributions have made the whole nation stronger.

Equitable Distribution

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The Brannan plan, if put into effect, would weaken American agriculture, the most vital and fundamental part of the nation's whole. It would reduce the incentive for farmers and farm groups to contend in the markets for the best possible prices, because they would be assured of a payment to maintain a certain level of income. Further, because one of the devices included would limit the extent to which any farmer could participate, it would put a ceiling on agricultural enterprise.

While the plan has other evils and weaknesses, those which are of most concern to most people are those which strike at the spirit of individual effort. Should the plan be enacted, other groups would naturally ask for comparable guarantees, and comparable relief from putting forth their best effort. Therefore its significance, and the significance of the fact that it is an Administration measure, should sound an alarm to those who believe that the nation's strength lies in the strength of its individual units.

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The United States would not need to go far to become a socialist nation, and thus to acquire all the troubles which afflict older nations in Europe. Every proposal which threatens to carry the country further in that disastrous direction needs to be understood, not alone for what it proposes to do, but even more for what it actually would do.

American progress for a century and a half has strengthened the earning power of the individual. If "equitable distribution" means any diversion from that course, it becomes anything but a happy phrase. The American way means the creation of more wealth by and for more people. It must never come to mean the equitable distribution of poverty.