

# Controls on Food Curb Freedom, Too

**A** TRUISM of history is that whoever controls food supplies controls people. Political leaders have a strong desire to control, even in free countries.

Political control of food may be stimulated by consumer complaints about high prices or short supplies. Ambitious politicians can hear the faintest demands for any kind of control.

Consumers are looking for solutions to their problems, and they do not always consider consequences of the solutions.

Food prices and movement of supplies may be regulated by allocations of markets, limits on production, rationing, encouraging or restricting imports or exports, and by use of subsidies.

The United States government has used all of these methods and others. The president is considering new "voluntary wage-price control guidelines." As price controls of whatever nature are expanded, more "food power" is centralized in Washington.

Surveys have shown consumer support for such actions as freezing prices or wages, rolling back prices, controlling profits, restricting trade and increasing imports.

Producers of food favor price supports but not price ceilings or roll-backs. They do not want export trade restricted by embargoes or tariffs, but they want imports held down.

They also have been willing to accept government payments in lieu of profitable market prices, along with loans and grants for conservation, crop storage and other purposes.

"Rising costs can't be contained by government decree, except at a steep price in freedom and service," says Anthony Harrigan of the United States Industrial Council.

The late Chester Bowles, who administered stringent economic controls during WWII, said in 1973 that controls will work only in a tightly sealed, highly centralized economy.

"The government must decide what's to be produced and have

power to distribute the necessary resources," Bowles said.

Other officials have pointed out that use of controls to push down prices may result in shortages, black markets, rationing and loss of incentive for suppliers to produce.

In totalitarian countries, food supplies and prices are centrally planned but they are not necessarily determined by supply and demand or by production costs. They are regulated by those in power to perpetuate their political advantage.

Recently, the president of the Federal Reserve Bank at Minneapolis pointed out in a speech that wage-price controls "merely attack the symptoms rather than the cause of inflation."

Centralizers cannot acquire or retain political power they want unless they also acquire control over necessities of life. Thus continued inflation is an aid to their cause.

Freedom of the individual can exist only in a land of plenty, where a free market operates to distribute essentials.