

# THE CALENDAR IS OUT OF DATE

BY ANTHONY M. TURANO

WHEN Great Britain adopted the Gregorian Calendar, in 1752, making that year shorter by eleven days, irate Cockneys threatened a revolution to compel Parliament to "give us back our fortnight". To be sure, sophisticated moderns can easily perceive that no government can curtail a citizen's life by a stroke of the pen without following it with a drop of the axe. Yet the same affection for time-hallowed antiquities prevails in contemporary society. The absurd hodge-podge of months and days, invented by the Romans two thousand years ago, still regulates our economic and spiritual activities; and perennial headaches of varying intensity are stoically endured by all sections of the population.

If the housewife wishes to balance her budget, or resolve a personal question of progeny, she must pause to recite a stupid little rhyme about "Thirty days hath September". Grave legislators cannot fix terms of court, or the time for the discharge of civil obliga-

tions, except through such pitiful circumlocutions as the "first Monday after the first Sunday" of a certain month, and "if said day be a legal holiday, then the next succeeding day not a holiday". An employee who earns \$150 for twenty-four days of service in February may be succeeded by another man who receives identical pay for toiling twenty-seven days in March. As a public librarian points out, October 1935 had "25 per cent more work days than the shortest month of that year. . . . Expenses were increased but the library budget remained the same". The publisher of a weekly periodical promises to bring out fifty-two issues per annum. But the accumulation of odd days compels him to print a fifty-third number every five or six years, an expensive gift of which his subscribers are not even aware.

Without employing an expert to prorate and average his books, the shopkeeper who pays weekly wages is never sure whether he is in the black by an act of God or in

the red by the vagaries of a man-made calendar—a month with five pay-days will change his profits to liabilities. An even greater annoyance is that Easter may occur at any time between March 22 and April 25. To be sure, nobody clearly understands the sacerdotal thimble-rigging whereby the Lord's Birthday is allowed to recur on a definite date, while the anniversary of his Resurrection varies with the moon. Nevertheless, retail merchants, as well as wholesalers and manufacturers, must annually fit their activities to lunar caprice and theological fiction, never knowing, when Easter comes frigidly early or torridly late, to what degree shopping customs will yield to common sense. Similar speculations are necessarily made by transportation companies, to accommodate holiday travel; and the net result is an unpredictable displacement of trade. To prevent the annual scrambling of curricular schedules, many educational institutions have declared regular Spring vacations, regardless of the moon. Consequently, one set of students going home for the Pascal holiday may meet other members of their family returning.

The building expenditure of the Republic is about \$10,000,000,000

a year. Yet the contractor who files a bid without gambling upon such variables as unequal quarter years, uneven months, and wandering holidays may find himself finishing the job at his own expense. According to Clyde A. Mann, managing director of the Certified Building Registry of the United States,

payments are frequently retarded, interest charges are piled up, and the loss caused by this aggregate of oft-repeated delays amounts to many millions annually.

As Ogden Mills said, the only hope

of maintaining balanced conditions in industry and trade, in contrast with the haphazard adjustments upon which we have relied in the past, lies in gathering accurate information.

Yet statistical prevarication is inevitable under the prevailing calendar. For example, all Departments of the Federal Government are required to render quarterly accountings to the Director of the Budget. Gregorian trimesters contain respectively ninety, ninety-one, ninety-two, and ninety-two days, except during leap years; and the second semester is two and three days longer than the first. Consequently, according to Herbert H. Rapp, formerly Assistant Chief of the United States Bureau of Efficiency, errors "in existing

government statistics may be found in every Department”.

It is not surprising that, in response to a questionnaire circulated by the United Press in 1934, so-called “big business” voted 37 to 3 in favor of calendar revision. The same dissatisfaction with the prevailing system has been voiced by the American Labor Conference, the International Labor Office, the National Education Association, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

## II

Like many other inherited human institutions, the chart whereby we stumble through our three-score-and-ten is the result of cosmological accident, aggravated by mundane stupidity. It is doubtful whether this sad planet was ever intended for a calculating animal who must meet deadlines, serve ultimatums, and worship his Maker, all with due regard to the position of the sun in the heavens. And our arboreal ancestors, who could hardly count their fingers and toes, naturally failed to unravel the Creator’s primordial joke whereby a solar year was made to contain 12 synodic months, 12 hours, 44 minutes, and 2.7 seconds; or 52 weeks and about  $1\frac{1}{4}$  days; or 365

days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, and 45.51 seconds.

Consequently, the earliest astronomical observations of the race were probably limited to judging the seasons by the changes in the foliage. As P. W. Wilson says, the inhabitants of Tonga still have a month for “Little Yams”, another for “Yams with Small Protuberances”, and so on, according to the condition of their national vegetable. The first great mistake of mankind was the natural one of trying to compute a solar year by the phases of the moon. What makes lunar calendars unavoidably lunatic is the fact that a twelve-moon period is about  $11\frac{1}{4}$  days short of a solar year; and the accumulating lag eventually causes the Winters to arrive in Summer. The orthodox Jews, who still use a lunar calendar, synchronize their seasons by intercalating an extra month of thirty days every two or three years. But the equally moon-struck Mohammedans do not trouble with such adjustments, and every Mussulman who gives his age as 32 is really 31 according to Christian standards.

With more respect for cutlasses than calculations, the early Romans struggled along on a ten month year of 304 days until the Seventh Century B.C., when Numa

Pompilius added January and February. But the length of the year remained so uncertain that the high priests habitually shortened it when their political opponents were in office, and lengthened it to please their favorites.

In the meantime, by studying the shadows of their Pyramids, the Egyptians had agreed upon a solar year of  $365\frac{1}{4}$  days, which they divided into twelve months of thirty days, with five extra days for non-calendrical jollification, and a leap year in every four.

This system was adapted to the Roman world when Julius Caesar decreed that the year 46 B.C., which he called "the last year of confusion", be prolonged to 445 days, in order to catch up with the sun. But because of the current superstitions in favor of odd numbers, the five feast days were distributed alternately among the Roman months. A day was clipped from *Februarius* and given to *Quintilis*, which was renamed *Julius* in honor of the calendar-maker. On the theory that one emperor is as good as another, a second caesarian amputation was later performed on *Februarius* by Caesar Augustus, who thereby uninjured his own birth-month of August, previously called *Sextilis*. October and December were probably given odd

days to insure the better luck of the Emperor's friends.

The subsequent reforms were comparatively minor: in 325 A.D. the Council of Nicaea abolished the Roman Calends, Ides, and Nones, and substituted a paganized version of the Babylonian-Hebrew-Christian seven-day week, which began to travel in utter independence of the months and the years. It was further ordered that Easter must be celebrated on a day to be fixed partly according to the first full moon after the vernal equinox, and partly to prevent the holiday from coinciding with the Jewish Passover. In 1582, Pope Gregory corrected Caesar's astronomy by ordaining that three leap years be dropped every four centuries, but he was not troubled by the fact that January 1 occurs nine days after the Winter solstice, or that the ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth months are still labeled respectively the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth.

The ultimate result is a chaotic jumble of time units that is utterly incompatible with this age of speed and precision. The confusion is rendered even worse by the fact that some nations have adopted the Gregorian Calendar for international purposes, without enforcing it in all their internal

affairs. At present, there is a special New Year for Armenians, another for Moslems, and still others for Coptics, Hindus, and Hebrews. Thus a plane leaving London on January 5, A.D. 1938, reached Belgrade the same day, but on a date unofficially designated as December 23, 1937. A short-wave radio program broadcast from New York on February 9, 1938, was instantaneously heard at Kabul, Afghanistan, on Zulkhijjah 8, A. H. 1356. Such absurdities are mostly due to the refusal of certain religious creeds to accept a sectarian chart that is not much better than their own. If the same system of computation is ever to prevail in all parts of the world, the only hope is a purely secular plan that ignores all ecclesiastical traditions, and commends itself entirely for its practical adjustment to our life.

### III

That the need for such a calendar is being gradually recognized appears from the fact that when the question was first considered by a committee of the League of Nations, in 1923, representatives of the various countries came forth with 185 different proposals, each claiming some superiority over the prevailing system.

This babel of voices has since piped down to two plans of practical merit. One of them is the Positivist Calendar, conceived by Auguste Comte, and resurrected by the late George Eastman, the Kodak manufacturer. It would divide the year into thirteen months of four weeks each, with an unnumbered extra day between December and January, and a Leap Day, every four years, at the end of June. The new month, to be called "Sol", would be inserted between June and July.

The main virtue of such a revision would be a synchronization of the month with the weeks. But a thirteen-month year would be a total stranger to its Gregorian predecessors, to the added confusion of historians and statisticians. Moreover, while the baker's dozen has its merits in the purchase of doughnuts, the accountant knows it as a prime number, a sort of tough cheese, digestible by nothing but itself. There may be no rational argument in the fact that there were Twelve Apostles, or that the Tree of Life had a like number of fruits. But the superstitious would never see the blessings of a calendar with an unlucky Friday falling regularly on the thirteenth of each month, thirteen times a year.

For these reasons, the bulk of international support has lately gone to the so-called World Calendar<sup>1</sup>, a twelve-month scheme that would remove most of the faults of the prevailing system, without drastically upsetting established customs. According to this plan, the year would consist of equal quarters, each having a month of thirty-one days, followed by two months of thirty days. Every semester would have twenty-six even weeks; and each quarter would begin on Sunday and end

on Saturday. The 365th day of the year would be observed as a supernumerary Saturday, known as Year End Day; and there would be a quadrennial "Leap Day", also unnumbered, between June and July. By introducing the reform at the close of 1939, or 1944, the year would invariably begin on Sunday; and the calendar would be perpetual, so that any given month-date would fall on the same day of the week each year. Thus the bookkeeper could compare one quarter with another,

### <sup>1</sup> THE WORLD CALENDAR

First Quarter							Second Quarter							Third Quarter							Fourth Quarter						
JANUARY							APRIL							JULY							OCTOBER						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	..	..	..	..	29	30	31	..	..	..	..	29	30	31	..	..	..	..	29	30	31	..	..	..	..
FEBRUARY							MAY							AUGUST							NOVEMBER						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
..	..	..	1	2	3	4	..	..	..	1	2	3	4	..	..	..	1	2	3	4	..	..	..	1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	..	..	26	27	28	29	30	..	..	26	27	28	29	30	..	..	26	27	28	29	30	..	..
MARCH							JUNE							SEPTEMBER							DECEMBER						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
..	..	..	..	..	1	2	..	..	..	..	..	1	2	..	..	..	..	..	1	2	..	..	..	..	..	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	24	25	26	27	28	29	30

YEAR-END DAY, an extra Saturday follows December 30th every year.

LEAP-YEAR DAY, another extra Saturday follows June 30th in leap years.

without adjustment; and, though the months would vary as to the number of Sundays, they would all contain twenty-six week-days.

An incidental advantage is that Christmas and New Year would always be week-end holidays, a welcome phenomenon that now occurs at rare intervals. Although a like transposition of other mid-week feasts is no necessary part of any calendar change, the idea has been proposed in several American legislatures, as well as the United States Senate. In the case of two important holidays, the adjustment would be historically justified by the fact that the Declaration of Independence was actually adopted on July 2; and that George Washington, who was born under the Julian Calendar, habitually celebrated his birthday on February 11. There is no reason why the days of rest should break upon us at random like badly set alarm clocks, except the old clerical notion that holidays are duties imposed from above, rather than man-made contrivances to increase the joy of living.

It is not unlikely that, a few moons hence, dowagers born on the thirty-first of March, May, August, and December may skip their birthdays with legal approval. The World Calendar has been al-

ready endorsed by the representatives of fourteen nations; and favorable action by the American Government may be inferred from the friendly attitude of our Central Statistical Board, which is composed of four cabinet members. To be sure, France and England have postponed action, pending ecclesiastical agreement on the position of Easter. But although theological processes are slow, there seems to be no religious obstacle to either question. The Archbishop of Canterbury finds it "impossible to resist the pleas of reform" which come "with practical unanimity from the representatives of all the great organizations of trade, industry, and commerce throughout the civilized world". Similar opinions have been expressed by most of the Protestant denominations, as well as the Eastern Orthodox Church. According to the pronouncement of the Holy See, "no question of dogma" is raised by proposed calendar reform, or a stationary Easter, but "if it were shown that the general welfare requires some change" the matter must be decided by an Ecumenical Council.

Indeed, the only articulate objection to the proposed reform comes from the Seventh Day Adventists and other Sabbatarians.

According to their faith, the insertion of a Year End Day and a Leap Day would disturb the sequence of the weeks, which comes down to us inviolate from that primordial time when Jehovah worked six days and rested on the seventh. It might be embarrassing, of course, for any mortal to face the Eternal Father on Judgment Day, with a time-book that does not jibe with the celestial record. But in view of the many changes already undergone by the Gregorian Calendar, we are all taking our chances that current Saturdays may turn out to be biblical Tuesdays. Moreover, the doctrine of religious liberty does not mean that the whole world must accept the notions of Sabbatarian minorities, whose practice is even now at variance with the majority.

It has been argued that since absolute calendrical perfection is impossible, we might as well continue to endure an inadequate device that has been serving us well

enough. But this is the classical demurrer of Granny's ice-box against the new-fangled electric refrigerator. The same logic would impel us to ignore all astronomical instruments because the earth's circumference can be measured with a yardstick. Before the adoption of Standard Time, in 1884, New Yorkers took simultaneous notice of five or six different hours of the day, according to the section of the city. But there is no doubt that the present division of the globe into time zones was a positive improvement. A perpetual calendar would serve a like purpose for months and days.

Moreover, until we do adopt it, this age will continue to be ridiculously personified by the super-scientist who splits atoms to smithereens and measures stellar distances to the millimeter, but gets entangled in his own tapelines whenever he attempts to keep a dinner date or remember his wife's birthday.





# OUR NATION OF WISHFUL THINKERS

BY LAWRENCE DENNIS

OF Americans it may be said that happy is a people whose past has made them naïve and whose present allows them to remain naïve. A people like the French, whose territory has been devastated by invading armies and revolutionary mobs several times within one century, and twice by invaders within the memories of now-living persons, naturally find it difficult to take seriously many popular American illusions about international law and morality. Yet for a full decade following the late War, both Britain and France more or less shared our complacency: the three strongest democracies felt internationally secure as victors of the world's greatest war, and at home, safe in the arms of Croesus. But now the Depression, Munich, and the rising might of the three Have-Not nations — Germany, Japan, and Italy — and of the Have-Not classes within the great democracies, raise the question whether even Americans can any longer afford the luxury of wishful thinking. Shattering

popular illusions has ceased to be an intellectual sport for sophisticates; it has become as essential a part of national defense as the scrapping of obsolete armaments.

Faith in America is a good national quality; but faith in inoperative principles, and confidence in false assumptions about the weakness of the strong and the strength of the declining are dangerous delusions for us or any other democracy to cherish. In the frontier days, excessive self-confidence was an asset rather than a liability for white men subduing backward peoples. Those who marvel at Hitler's nerve should recall the exploits of the early conquerors of this continent. Pizarro, assisted by only three shiploads of nondescript Spanish adventurers, conquered Peru — a highly organized and disciplined nation of 20,000,000 inhabitants — made a prisoner of the Inca ruler, and looted him of millions in gold. Only an almost pathological degree of conceit could ever have enabled a handful of Englishmen throughout the