

Tros Tyriusque mihi nullo discrimine agetur

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Apéritif

For Throttlebottom

A READER of the *New English Weekly* must sooner or later be brought up gangling by the thought of a certain consequence if Major Douglas's Social Credit plan were put into successful effect. This is the suddenness with which all of us would need to find other things than worrying about money to occupy our minds. A conservative estimate of the time spent on this process could surely be no less than a fifth of our waking hours—a tidy little sum for the United States of 449,315 years of worry every day, if children are included, as they well deserve to be in view of the fact that their parents worry twice as much as single people. Aside from contributing materially to the great mass of gray hair evident in the world today, this worrying constitutes an important part of our life, and it would be no light matter to deprive us of it as suddenly as the Douglasites propose.

Perhaps it would be as well to emphasize here that the problem touched upon is not to be confused with the what-to-do-with-more-leisure question which a committee designated by the

NRA has set out so courageously to solve. The difference can be appreciated by imagining a man who faces a four-foot putt which he needs to win a golf match, and upon which five dollars will be lost if he misses. Just as he has completed a careful analysis of the slope, the distance and the condition of the turf and has decided how to putt, he remembers that his insurance premium must be paid the next day. It also occurs to him that there is only enough money in his bank account to make the payment—not enough to do that and pay also the five dollars if he misses this putt. There is naturally very little chance by now for him to sink it.

Our point is, of course, that leisure, even if paternalism provides it with healthy diversions, can still be used for worrying about money. But an economy which had as its set purpose the assurance of sufficient universal purchasing power to buy all products, however vast in quantity, would do away with the grounds for worry and necessitate a quite new slant on things.

NOW and then, for instance, some one comes along and announces that the state of our productive capacity

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is such that every citizen could be assured of things to the value of \$20,000 a year, if money and production were sensibly managed. The "economic Puritan" of Gorham Munson's unflattering description in the REVIEW last month goes limp at the suggestion, thinking how impossible highways would be all choked up with Rolls-Royces, or speakeasies with plumbers' assistants. But how would the plumber's assistant's wife adjust her mental processes to the idea that no bread was coming out of her children's mouths while champagne was going into their father's? How would a bank clerk keep from being horrified at the demolition of his painstaking budget when his wife was given so startling a chance as a Rolls-Royce to splurge on for once in her life? What would happen to the hours of bickering over the expense of a permanent wave as compared with lodge dues? How could housewives keep from scrimping who had always had to scrimp? How could men enjoy luncheon at the Ritz who had always had to eat in cafeterias?

It is all very well to criticize wealthy people who insist that it would be bad for the poorer classes to have too much money thrown in their laps, and to decry a philosophy of scarcity in an age of plenty, but for the sake of self-preservation most of us in the present order have had to acquire scarcity habits and they could hardly be any easier to discard overnight than believing in the intrinsic value of money—which latter habit, although it must be discarded before we get a chance to alter the others, according to the Douglasites, has hardly altered at all.

Similarly there are personal idiosyncrasies in the way of economy even more difficult to eradicate. Every one has

known a millionaire who stole postage stamps or insulted members of his family for owning an extra tube of toothpaste, when he would think little or nothing of buying them expensive cars or trips abroad. While the population was being reëducated, production estimates for maximum consumption would be constantly knocked awry: a half million Harvard graduates would spurn their quota of new hats, die-hard devotees of the Model T Ford would linger amazingly in this vale of multi-cylindereed speedsters and toothbrushes would continue by the millions to be tortured long past their prime.

For most of us nowadays, going to the movies involves not only the degree of relaxation which hard seats and bumble-headed producers will allow us; it involves also readjustment of our budget for the week: beans instead of a pork chop for tomorrow's lunch, taking a subway instead of the Fifth Avenue bus, and all the rest of it. Even while we sit in the theatre half immersed in its too palpable fiction, part of our minds is engaged in working out some such budgetary problem, or worrying hopelessly about it. Consider the movies without such necessity for half-subconscious effort: with our attention undivided could we stand them at all? There is room for doubt. And there must be many other leisure-time pursuits which are only to be borne by half our consciousness. A poker game could hardly keep its devotees up all the night if it made no great difference to them whether they lost or not.

In somewhat similar fashion business itself would be altered by the assurance of sufficient income for all. There is a good deal of argument over the feasibility of the accounting system in the Douglas plan necessary to control

prices and the national dividend, but, if it did work, its burden on Government employes would be more than offset by the time saved business men in releasing them from haggling, from hours wasted in worrying over the financial consequences of a mistake in judgment. And this too would be part of the problem. What would they do with the shrewdness and cunning they have had to build up for the conduct of negotiations and the browbeating of employes? How could they change overnight their whole attitude to their daily work? What, in short, would they do with their business hours, let alone their leisure?

IT is, to repeat, more than the problem of filling extra leisure with harmless activities: it is the problem of preparing our minds to enjoy those activities, of achieving an unprecedented degree of placidity. Whether it has any significance at this time is highly debatable. Few people not converted to the Social Credit theory would think so, but practically all the people who are not converted to the Social Credit theory seem to wallow in a bottomless bog of uncertainty about everything, while the Douglasites themselves have a sublime assurance. They do not, it is true, assert the likelihood that their plans will be put into effect *in toto* overnight; on the contrary, they insist that the overwhelming portion of influential mankind is too stupid to see their point. But they do state unequivocally that if their plans are not acceded to, and soon,

catastrophes will occur the like of which our most lurid Sunday feature writers can not approach in imagination.

Meanwhile they point out that parts of their programme have been plagiarized in a left-handed fashion here and there, as in the Japanese export policy and our recent threat to sell wheat abroad under cost. They also give a good deal of attention to President Roosevelt on the theory that he is the only power in the world flexible enough mentally to give their programme a hearing, and perhaps a trial. Moreover, as "Cognosco" points out this month, our own monetary policy is now being decided upon, and it seems to be more likely than ever that it will contain radical features. Though there is not the slightest indication that it will go as far as Social Credit, the number of American converts to that philosophy does seem to be increasing rapidly and it is not in the least safe to predict any Hindenburg Line these days behind which the forces of conservatism can not be pushed.

Consequently, it may not be at all premature to begin selecting a committee, let us say, to study our problem. The chances are that by the time it reports its findings some very great change will have occurred in the world, whether in the direction of security for all or chaos. For the sake of economy its members ought, as far as possible, to be already on the public payroll. Our own nomination for its chairman is John Nance Garner. Where is he, anyhow?

W. A. D.

Prologue for Autumn

BY FRANCES FROST

ALONG the hills the woolly throats
shake gentle, tarnished bells, and bleat;
the shadow of a mare's-tail floats
where pause the little drifting feet.

Here, while noon slips down the stalks
that tremble in the nudge of wind,
and honeysuckle burns the rocks,
the pale moon-yellow oats are binned.

So quietly does summer fail,
so calmly does the sun descend,
the hungers of the soul prevail
upon foreknowledge of the end.

Although the winter weeds shall fold
the heart till even dying cease,
fearing disaster and the cold,
my soul goes gravely and in peace.