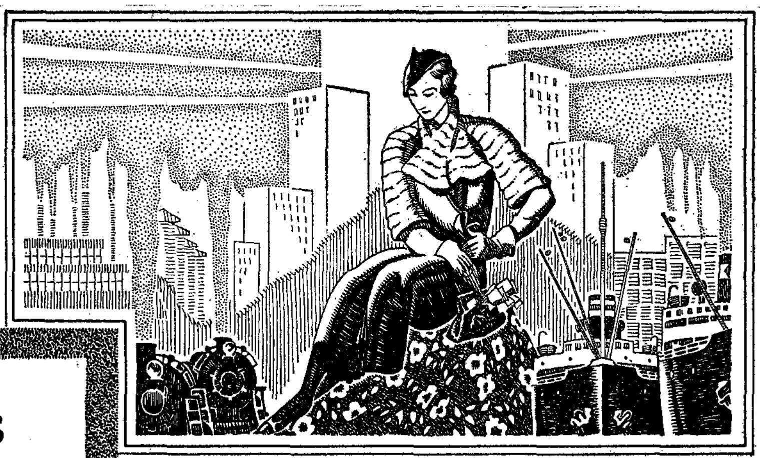
The consumer is not a man but a woman—an Amazon with great power over the economic future, says the author of "Your Money's Worth." He outlines three methods of financing the consumer, one of which, he holds, must be followed.



The Consumer's Tomorrow

By Stuart Chase

THE consumer, as every American knows, is a little, respectable, suburban clerk, with glasses, an umbrella, a lot of packages, and a worried expression. At the risk of destroying a time-honored national figure I submit that the picture is all wrong. The consumer is not a man but a woman—women buy at least three quarters of all goods for ultimate consumption—and, far from being puny, she is an Amazon, towering, portentous, blocking the whole economic horizon of the years before us.

She stands thus in my mind despite the miserable rôle she has frequently played in the past. Totally unorganized, she has time and again paid scandalously high prices for sleazy goods and services. Shrewd advertisers have shamelessly exploited her conscious and unconscious hopes and fears, promising her beauty by the jar, health by the bottle, sex appeal by the vial, superiority to her neighbors by the yard, well-being for her children by the pound . . . at good, round prices per jar, bottle, vial, yard, and pound. She has lived in a vast, impersonal, highly specialized economic world, where vendibility has completely overshadowed serviceability; where all face-to-face relationship between buyer and seller has been lost. She has not, save for a few local services, like that of the village dressmaker or cobbler, the slightest idea who makes the products she buys, or what sort of persons they are; while the maker in turn will probably never lay eyes on her, and she becomes simply a sales ticket for posting to his journal, and thus to ledger and profit-and-loss account. Under handicraft conditions the face-to-face relationship prevailed. The producer had to be careful of his reputation for workmanship and fair value. But under modern conditions, as Veblen says: "One can with an easier conscience and with less a sense of meanness take advantage of the necessities of people whom one knows only as an indiscriminate aggregate of consumers."

As I write, it appears that the consumer is faced with an exceptionally precarious situation. Her well-wishers tremble for her; she trembles for herself; the Consumers' Advisory Board of the N. R. A. is one big tremble. Anti-trust laws are held in abeyance under the new dispensation, thus tending to deprive her of whatever benefits free competition has afforded her in the past. Trade association control of prices, quotas, and markets makes for greater possibilities of monopoly and quasi-monopoly than the nation has hitherto known. Meanwhile the Administration is deliberately fostering higher prices, assuring us that they are necessary, inevitable, and to be expected. What is to prevent, the tremblers cry, unconscionable profiteering in a situation with monopoly encouraged and higher price levels blessed?

The outlook seems dark indeed. It may well be that in the next few months the consumer will be put upon one of the toughest spots of her whole tough career. Despite the earnest solicitations of the Administration, the decent co-operation of many business men, the very considerable amount of protective competition which still remains, and the screams of the Blue Eagle, she may find herself paying unprecedentedly onerous prices for unprecedentedly shoddy goods.

I confess, however, that I find it difficult to view this situation—if it comes—as more than a passing phase. We shall all suffer while it lasts, but four lean years have inured us to suffering. What concerns me is the long-range point of view. I have reason to believe that irresistible pressures have been long at work behind the scenes and are now bursting stormily into the open, which will make the consumer dominant in the years—if not in the months—immediately before us. She is being forced into an entirely new rôle. Mass production, as Edward A. Filene has pointed out, means nothing unless it means production for the masses. The country is committed to this technique. It is the American way of life, as well as its pride and joy. It cannot function without a vast body of consumers able and eager to receive its mammoth output. In this obvious fact lies the bright tomorrow of the American consumer—always provided the mass production system continues to function at all.

II

The maintenance of a given civilization depends on an equilibrium. There must be a working balance between man and nature—climate, natural resources, the man-land ratio—and between institutions, classes, power groups, within the community. Individual satisfaction may not be high, but it must be *over the line;* high enough to insure reasonable stability. When it drops below the line, equilibrium is lost and the social structure put in jeopardy.

In the economy of scarcity—low-energy cultures primarily devoted to agriculture and handicrafts—equilibrium, once established, tends to persist for relatively long historical periods. Having come to terms with nature and the food supply, men are loth to upset the balance, even if standards of living are low, and the surplus above subsistence passed on to landowner, noble or priest. All the world lived in the economy of scarcity up to a generation or two ago—America being no exception, save for the fact that her surplus was not transferred by use and wont to a time-honored ruling class. The surplus was shared, to a large degree, and when passed on, went to landlords, speculators, and financiers by anything but an orderly, traditional process. Throughout the American age of scarcity—say from 1620 to 1870—equilibrium was maintained; satisfaction, while not general, was sufficient to keep the economic system functioning, and steadily to increase the surplus.

About five or six decades ago, the growth of the technical arts and the utilization of new forms of energy in coal, oil, and natural gas, began to write finis on the economy of scarcity, and, for the first time in history, usher in an economy of abundance. A wit has observed that scarcity connotes pressure of population on the food supply; abundance—pressure of food supply on population. (My whole thesis in respect to the consumer is implicit in this quip.) Droughts and pestilences spell crisis in scarcity; glutted warehouses spell crisis in abundance.

With the coming of a high energy civilization, changes in transportation, manufacturing, construction work, merchandising, banking practice (but not theory) were to be observed, but equilibrium persisted. While it was apparent that a financial and price system, developed in the economy of scarcity, was having considerable difficulty in adapting itself to conditions of actual or potential physical abundance, by and large the adaptation was made.

By 1930, however, the limits of adaptation seemed to have been reached. The financial formula founded on scarcity had stretched as far as its tensile strength permitted, in an attempt to confine and control the brute pressures of technological abundance. It snapped, and the Great Depression followed. In my opinion, and in that of many students in whom I place great confidence, that depression was not of the order of earlier depressions—which simply operated to bring in line a relatively modest debt structure with a rapidly rising production growth curve—but a new kind of depression altogether. Equilibrium was definitely upset, and American civilization was faced with the problem of finding a different basis for social and economic stability. We can never, I confidently believe, revive the old basis—unless mass production, labor-saving devices, energy installations, invention, research, the whole paraphernalia of abundance, are scrapped, and we retreat, in panic and in terror, to the stabilities of genuine, physical scarcity.

The formula of capitalism has run out. Even while we mechanically repeat this conclusion, most of us still unconsciously deny it. Our eyes, round with wish fulfillment, look across a waste of bankruptcies, foreclosures, impounded bank balances, passed dividends, lost jobs, privations, and heart aches, to a corner which surely must be rounded. Eagerly we read, and eagerly editors supply, any scrap of evidence which points to a return of prosperity. We brighten as we hear that the Widget Company of Sauk Center has taken on ten more men. If on the same day the Atlantic Company of New York has dismissed 1,000, we do not hear of it, and we do not want to hear of it. Yet until last March the real news behind the printed news of the depression was of this character. But the astounding vogue of technocracy bears witness to what millions of Americans felt down deep. They knew in their bones that the formula was done for; that capitalism was no longer capable of furnishing sufficient economic security to keep the social structure functioning.

III

The distribution of income is such, under capitalism, that absentee owners cannot possibly spend all the rent, interest, royalties, and profits they receive. Squander as they may, most of the income to capitalists must be reinvested. When one insurance company, or one savings bank, takes the savings of a great number of poorer people, the same principle applies. Opportunities for profitable reinvestment, therefore, must be constant and expanding, for capitalism demands a compound interest return on its savings. This is readily proved by the growth of the debt structure in the United States. The curve of its growth for fifty years has been a compound interest curve. By 1930 the compounding factor was 8.2 per cent.[1] It is obvious that to fulfill this cardinal requirement of the capitalistic formula, markets must expand at an equal rate. During the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, markets did so expand, with four raw continents to develop, and with the population of the world doubling in something over a century. The field for profitable investment was wide and lush.

The formula does not allow the distribution of goods on the basis of human need; it knows nothing of serviceability, only of vendibility. To secure goods for consumption a financial token must first be presented. The presence of that consumer's token is chiefly dependent on wages and salaries. Wages and salaries are dependent partly on opportunities to make the goods, and partly on opportunities to extend the apparatus—factories, steel mills, power houses—whereby consumers' goods are produced. The formula demands a *capital goods sector* of continuous investment as a flywheel for the whole process. For it is only by employing millions to make new plants, machines, power dams, railroads, that consumers receive a sufficient wage and salary total to take the goods off the shelves. Madam Consumer's purchasing power is all tied up with the capital-goods sector, which is all tied up with profitable investment, which is all tied up with headlong expansion.

When expansion reaches the physical limits of mathematical compounding, as it seems to have done in 1930, the opportunity for profitable investment disappears, capitalists large and small sterilize their savings by hoarding their funds in the banks, which find difficulty in reinvesting them; workers are no longer employed in the capital-goods sector—at least their number drops alarmingly—leaving them without wages and salaries. Total purchasing power is no longer adequate to clear the shelves of consumers' goods save at ruinously low prices. This spreads bankruptcy and unemployment throughout the consumers'-goods sector. In short, the flywheel has jammed, and the capitalistic engine will not turn over.

There is no theoretical reason, of course, why the formula cannot be revived. All the corner-rounders cherish such theories. There are one or two practical reasons, however. Where shall we find a new continent to develop? How shall we reverse our population trend, which now rapidly approaches a plateau? Where are gigantic new industries (not, if you please, the revamping of old industries already soggy with debt, but brand new ones) to be found? How is the march of technological unemployment, which is constantly eating away at purchasing power, to be stopped? Where are the possibilities of vast foreign markets? The answers that come back are: (*a*) air conditioning; and (*b*) the Russian market.[1] Not good enough, gentlemen, not nearly good enough. I stand ready to reverse my opinion when I can be shown a new field for profitable private investment capable of absorbing, say, a fifth of all wage and salary workers, to begin with, and capable further of expansion at a compound interest rate. I am afraid I must stand a long time. (I admit with Mr. Lawrence Dennis that a good, grade A war would keep the formula going for a time—always provided that any of us were left alive to enjoy it.)

[1] Bassett Jones, *Debt and Production.* The John Day Company.

IV

Social systems abhor a lack of equilibrium as methodical consumers abhor an unbalanced budget. The new balance must come in one of two major forms: (1) a retreat to the economy of scarcity, following a harrowing period of utter breakdown; (2) a re-alignment of political and financial institutions, which must be sufficiently flexible to function in an economy of abundance, and which must not demand a rate of expansion in the capital-goods sector based on compound interest.

On March 4, 1933, the government of the United States definitely turned toward the second of these alternatives. It adopted a policy perpendicular to the remorseless, automatic deflation which had steadily been gathering momentum since the summer of 1929. (Production, you remember, began to fall some months before the stock-market crash.) Had do-nothingism continued much longer, we should probably have been driven to the first alternative; a new equilibrium on the basis of scarcity. Already some of the familiar institutions of scarcity were beginning to appear. Barter groups were forming everywhere; barter is, of course, the trading norm of primitive scarcity societies. Farmers were allowing their tractors to rust in the fields and going back to horses and mules. There was much talk and some action in respect to subsistence colonies, and the back-to-the-land movement made considerable headway. Hoovervilles, piano-case communities, were springing up like mushrooms. I have in my files reports of Western farming towns which all but re-established local self-sufficiency, growing their own food, grinding their own grain, cutting their own fuel supply, much as their pioneer forefathers did three or four generations earlier. The net migration from cities to

[1] Another answer is, of course, public works. In the first place the three billions already appropriated is insufficient. The capital-goods sector normally needs twelve to fifteen billions a year. In the second place, public works are not consistent with the formula; they do not provide opportunity for private investment except indirectly. Many projects are not income yielding in the capitalistic sense. In my opinion, the formula cannot be salvaged by public works alone, admirable and necessary as public works may be. If we could colonize the moon, and open it to profitable exploitation, then we should have something.

the farms in 1932 was well over a million persons. In a blind, pathetic way, the social organism, badly wounded, was searching for a new balance. Failing positive leadership of any kind, equilibrium was to be found only in retreat to the economy of scarcity.

Delightful as this retreat, pursued to its logical conclusion, might be to Mr. Ralph Borsodi, or to Mr. Ralph Adams Cram, it would be pretty hard on the rest of us, particularly during the transition period. When the period was over, I suspect that the population of America would have been reduced by half. At least that proportion of our fellow citizens are alive today because of the economy of abundance.

To President Roosevelt and his advisers belongs the honor of halting the winter march from Moscow. They began to reorganize the drifting, disintegrating army, renew its confidence, set up field hospitals for the sick, close the ranks, and wheel right about face. The clear promise of abundance was not, it appeared, to be lost without a fight. Equilibrium on the basis of the second alternative was what the New Deal meant. The entire nation applauded the choice. However inept may be some of the specific attempts to carry out this policy, we must never lose sight of the importance of the policy itself. We may be sure that history will not neglect the day that the formal government of the mightiest industrial nation admitted in effect that the capitalistic formula had run out, and that a new equilibrium must be found.

V

Very good. We are pledged to the establishment of equilibrium in a culture which includes mass production, a steady increase in labor-saving devices, a rapidly mounting curve of invention, and a per capita consumption of energy at least forty times that of scarcity societies. There is no precedent to guide us. High energy cultures have been hitherto unknown to *homo sapiens*. The idea of looking to Russia for a major technique is unrewarding. Russia is still carrying on in scarcity and will continue to do so for several decades more. She is a long way from pressure of food supply on population —which is the hallmark of abundance. A recent calculation shows that the United States now produces some 40 per cent more food than the population can possibly eat. Not *buy*, mind you, *eat*. Our stomachs, including those of all the hungry, all the unemployed, all the garbage-dump scavengers, are simply not big enough to hold the food we actually produce.

Failing precedents, one must experiment. Here again Mr. Roosevelt shows his acumen. He proposes a frankly experimental economy, and likens it to a football team. If one play does not work, try another. Keep trying; keep fighting. While experiment may be the order of the day, it does not mean that equilibrium must be groped for completely in the dark. Much of the preliminary exploration has already been done. There is an impressive body of theory, supported by intelligent and inquiring students the world over, covering the basic principles indicated in coming to terms with technological abundance. And here, patient reader, is where the consumer, so long neglected in the argument, re-enters and makes her bow. The argument is given at length because I do not see how it is possible intelligently to discuss the position of the consumer in the modern world without this background. Mass production demands mass consumption. The consumer moves to the forefront of any valid action directed toward the new equilibrium.

I am not sure that Mr. Roosevelt and his advisers are yet aware of her transcendent importance; but they will learn. They must learn, or their experiments will prove futile. Dr. Rexford G. Tugwell has learned it, as the following words from his recent book show:

"The discharge of a thousand debts is contingent upon the consumer's purchase. . . . It is quite clear that he must be both willing and able to pay the price, or the whole scheme will go wrong. All along the different owners of the good have had this in mind. Not only their costs are important; this willingness and ability of consumers is equally important. . . . The consumer's approval of productive efforts is not registered until *after* the good is completed; after countless expenses have been incurred, after numerous bargains have taken place, even after enormous commitments to overhead expense have been made. If the consumer should refuse, the whole structure would collapse."

Here is the economic apparatus, drawing raw material from all over the world, great ships bearing it, locomotives straining at it, vast mechanical operations grinding and processing it, jobbers, wholesalers, retailers bargaining for it, bookkeepers recording it, long-distance calls hastening it, bankers financing it, trucks delivering it—all into a gigantic hopper with a little valve in the bottom. The consumer has her finger on that valve. If she pulls it open the hopper discharges, to fill again. If she fails to pull it, or pulls it only half way, the hopper chokes; the ships, the locomotives, the mine hoists, the processing machines, the trucks, the jobbers, the banks, the very telephone girls, must bring their operations to a halt.

She opens the valve if she is willing and able. By and large she is willing enough, though stupid salesmen have grossly overestimated her saturation point in certain departments. So long as the capitalistic formula worked, she was able to buy—not to the extent of her willingness, God knows, but enough to keep the hopper reasonably clear. With the collapse of expansion and the capital-goods sector in 1930, she was no longer able to buy in sufficient volume. The hopper choked and will remain choked until she is able to buy again.

How apparent this all is in the proposals for, and the operation of, the Recovery program. Production spurted in the spring, spurred by returning confidence and the threat of higher wholesale prices. It shot up to the "normal" level of 1923–25. Shelves were restocked, warehouses filled, cotton-mill consumption rose to twice the normal level. But the activity was all predicated on one cardinal assumption: *that in the fall, the ultimate consumer would be able to buy.* Failing this, the manufacturing spurt was just one more exercise in overproduction. The Agricultural Adjustment Act was a bold, experimental attempt to furnish the farming community with ability to buy when the day of reckoning came. The National Recovery Administration was a bold attempt to meet the day of reckoning on behalf of the urban and industrial consumer. The public-works program was an attempt to provide the unemployed with purchasing power.

By the time these words are in print the awful day may have arrived. Can the consumer then open the valve? Not nearly far enough, I am afraid. Will this mean that Roosevelt has failed; that equilibrium cannot be won? No. It will only mean that the quarterback must try another play. But you see how the strategy of all plays, of every set of signals, must be directed out from the consumers' goal line. She is the alma mater of the team. Equilibrium under abundance can never be won by saving; only by spending.

Under the capitalistic formula it is probable, as we have seen, that the consumer can never again be adequately financed. From the War to 1930 she was financed only at a terrible cost; by piling up the debt structure to a colossal total, and by grossly over-extending the capital-goods sector until it was equipped to produce at least twice what the market called for. That was expansion's last gasp. We must turn to a new type of financing altogether. What form this will take I do not know, save that it will probably be the joint product of conscious planning and the blind pressure of circumstances, with the latter rather more in evidence than the former. The consumer *must* be financed—or back to scarcity we go. The method may have to be hasty. As I see it, there are three major methods. Let us explore them briefly.

VI

The consumer can clear the shelves of an abundance economy by:

1. The straight rationing of food, shelter, clothing, and other necessities under a rigorous economic dictatorship. This is the most remote of the three methods, except, possibly, during a brief transition period. In the event of a sudden financial collapse it might well be resorted to. We were not a hundred miles from it last March, with every bank closed. It is almost inconceivable as a permanent method, as it dispenses with any medium of exchange. A flexible medium of exchange is essential in any specialized industrial society. It does not follow that the medium need be kept so relatively scarce that a few collectors can accumulate a large proportion of it, and rent it out at compound interest.

2. The consumer might be provided for by a series of huge corporate monopolies, dealing in the essentials of life, owned and operated either by the state or by other collective device. In return for a calculable number of hours of labor devoted to these enterprises, every family in the nation would receive certificates (money) entitling its members to a high standard of living from birth to death. Reinvestment of these certificates cannot be tolerated. Any such proposal would have been fantastic before 1915, but today our productive capacity is such that, technologically, the method presents no insuperable difficulties.[1]

Corporate organization has already reached a point of nation-wide integration which furnishes the equipment, the energy installations, the manpower and the technical staff, to operate under such a plan. The only substantial change would be a financial one; absentee ownership would be disallowed, and the present "control,"[2] until lately so engrossed in discomfiting the investor, the worker and the consumer—one or all—would be invited to join Mr. Insull in contemplating, permanently, the sublimities of the Acropolis. Most of these gentlemen are of no managerial value whatever in operating the properties as industrial enterprises; their untiring concern has been with windfall profits in connection with rapid revaluations (expressed usually on the Stock Exchange) of the securities of the several corporations. If such profit has been consistent, from time to time, with ruining the investors, or with wrecking

[1] I have calculated elsewhere that on the basis of the present plant, a standard of living three times greater than the usual health and decency budgets (which average around $2500 a year) is possible for every family, at a work week of not over 30 hours. This does not allow immediately, however, for adequate housing facilities. Housing is a 10-to-20-year job for the public-works division.

[2] See Berle and Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property.*

the technical operation of the industry, they have not hesitated to take it. Relieved of what Veblen has called their "businesslike sabotage," there is reason to believe that the properties could enormously increase their output of sound goods and services, at a fraction of the cost per unit prevailing hitherto.

I, for one, should not quarrel seriously with some equitable settlement in favor of the investors—who, with the public and the workers, have suffered at the hands of finance capital control—provided that the settlement is a non-interest-bearing lump-sum payment, reasonable in amount, and a complete quitclaim on any title to interference with a functional, balanced load management in the future. Such payment must be spent for consumers' goods, not reinvested.

Under this method, one would not expect all economic activity to fall within the scope of the collective corporate plan. Only the strategic essentials of food, fuel, clothing, shelter, transportation, health, and education would so fall. (The last two are already operated to a considerable extent as collective, functional enterprises.) A sizeable sector covering luxuries, style goods, handicraft, novelties, personal services, might well remain under private ownership and operation, subject to traditional competitive conditions.

3. The most probable form of financing the consumer, certainly in the immediate future, is through the device of consumers' dividends. More and more opinion is being driven to this choice, notwithstanding that it violates all the taboos of scarcity covering the morality of work. If technological conditions are such that a man cannot find work, while at the same time an abundance of goods can be produced, there is no reason, save the compulsion of an antiquated moral code, why he should starve to death. Already the code has been undermined by a wide variety of free services—or dividends—in the form of schooling for children, recreational and sanitation facilities, clinics, hospitals, and, lately, straight relief allotments in money, or in kind. The consumer, after all, is heir to the technical arts, and as such has a good moral claim to be a joint beneficiary of an abundance economy.

The principle already in force may be pushed to its logical conclusion—the consumer will be financed for the essentials of life whether he or she works or not. Needless to say every opportunity to provide useful work must be given, and performance demanded. Probably the most equitable way of doing this will be to keep everybody at work at shorter hours while maintaining high real wages. This the N. R. A. is already attempting, but its code hours average 40 per week, where I figure they should not exceed 26,[1] and its wage schedules are inadequate to clear the hopper.

[1] "Recovery and Unemployment," Stuart Chase, *Current History,* Nov., 1933.

Another way of receiving a quid pro quo for consumer dividend paid would lie in a huge public works program, utilizing all surplus labor in housing and highway construction, pest control, reforestation, flood control, rural electrification, and the numberless other things which would make America a healthier and more beautiful place in which to live. The principle is already in operation through the Civilian Conservation Corps. (Observe there is no nonsense about "pump priming" in this proposal. The pump-primers look on public works only as a means to restore the old formula. We are discussing a new formula.)

The financing of the consumer under this general heading probably involves the nationalization of the supply of money and credit, together with the disallowance of a very substantial share of the present debt structure, whether by inflation or otherwise. A strict functional planning authority must displace the automatic processes of *laissez faire*. It is extremely likely that Mr. Bassett Jones's law of a one to one relationship between the growth of physical production and the growth of capital claims must be deliberately applied, to maintain equilibrium. It is probable that the nationalization of certain key industries—the railroads, the power supply, the coal mines—will be in order. It does not follow, however, that private ownership and management will be dispensed with as summarily under this method as under the second method above. The whole strategy of the program will be to maintain a flow of income to the consumer adequate to clear the industrial hopper; *to keep that valve open*. Whatever private interests stand in the way must be removed.

VII

The political problems raised by these three methods of establishing a new equilibrium under the dictates of an abundance economy are, needless to say, profound. I am not, for the moment, considering those problems. I am only trying to chart and delimit the economic objectives of any political movement looking toward equilibrium.

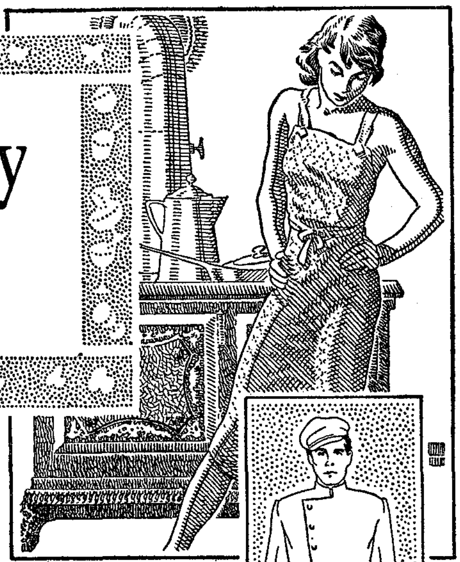
Mr. Roosevelt has clearly announced his rejection of the old formula, but to date has not clarified his objectives. He wants purchasing power for the consumer and apparently wants also a modicum of debt service for the absentee owner. This is becomingly generous, but he may find that he cannot have both. Sooner or later, I believe, his objectives must definitely fall into one of these three patterns, or a combination thereof. If they do not, other hands must take up the work where he drops it. Even if America should be forced back to the economy of scarcity, it would not be without a bitter struggle.

Whoever is to direct that struggle, must wage it on behalf of the consumer. If she does not win, we shall all lose.

Every Day's a Holiday

A STORY

By James Gould Cozzens



FROM the front verandah Mr. Jamison called angrily, "Emily! You, Emily!"

"Oh, God!" she said. She slung the can opener into the sink, dumped the contents of the can of peas into a saucepan. "Howard! Get that liquor out of your car and make Father a drink. Make yourself one. Take them out and talk to him. He's going to run me crazy." She looked toward the door, noticing her father's chauffeur standing idle with a cigarette. "Mike, chop some ice."

Howard Hoyt had been sitting on the kitchen table, lax, in a sort of sad, dumb absorption. He stirred and stood up, removing his eyes from the stretched yellow linen of Emily's frock, the taut lines of her legs under it. Her feet were planted apart, stockingless, in ruined satin slippers which had once been gold-colored.

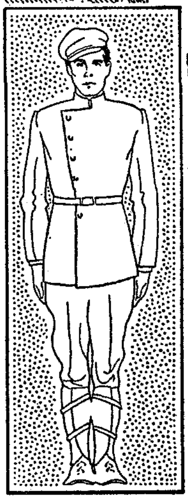
Mike said, "Where is the ice, Mrs. Brennan?"

"What would you think of looking in the icebox?" she asked. "And don't call me Mrs. Brennan. If you can't call me Emily, call me You. Do you think I like to be reminded of that bum?" She struck back her curly, dark-red hair, glancing the other way over her shoulder. "Howard, did you hear me?" Seeing his face, she turned squarely about. "Now, look here," she said, "if you're going to act like that, you can go home. Right this minute. Go on, get out of here! I won't stand for it. Those Peters people were down last night, and I forget who the night before, and they drank every drop of that other liquor. Now go and get what you brought and shut up!"

The screen door slammed gently after him. "Honestly," she said, "sometimes that man makes me want to scream. If he thinks he can be like that after we're married—put the ice there, Mike. Listen, is Father going to send you to the inn in the village? You can't sleep anywhere here unless you want to try the hammock on the porch. I told him Howard was coming. You didn't hear him say how long he was planning to stay?"

"No, I didn't, Mrs. Brennan."

"Listen, you aren't my chauffeur. I told you not to call me that. It kills me. If I liked to hear it, all I had to do was stay married to Brennan." She went to the door and yelled, "Phyl!" Her sister's muffled response came down to her. "Lord, she's still giving little Emily her bath. Do you know how to lay a table? Well, go and lay it. We'll never get supper."



Mike moved away with a creak of his black leather leggings, wiping his wet hands on his whipcord breeches. The screen door swung, admitting Howard, who lugged a case of bottles.

"Open one," Emily begged, "open one! Father will be howling again in a minute." She whipped about and cried, "Phyl! Phyl! Look at little Emily! That child's down here without a stitch on! Honey, don't you know you can't walk around with a lot of men that way? Get upstairs and let Aunt Phyl put some clothes on you—" she dissolved in laughter. "She's just a slut at heart, like her mother. That's right, Howard. There's the ice. There are the glasses. Wait a minute. How about me?" She picked up a coffee cup. "Give me half an inch. And don't be such a lemon. I'm warning you."

In a few minutes her sister appeared calmly. "Your daughter is dressed, Emily. You're welcome."

"Where's Keith?"

"I was going to tell you. I think he's upset. I told him to go to bed."

"And I told him if he ate any more cake at Mrs. Miller's I'd tan the hide off him. She just gets the little simpleton up there to try to pump him. God, these farmers!"

"He was there, all right."

"I know it. You can't do anything with him. He's just like Brennan."

"Emily, you jackass! If Father ever heard you say that——"