

At the Sign of the Cat and the Fiddle

CONDUCTED BY E. WYE

"AS I was saying to Mrs. Dowdy but last night, 'I lift my hat to the late Samuel Gompers.' Whereupon Mrs. Dowdy rejoined to me, 'Ephraim, how you have changed your mind!' True, my dear, returned I smiling, *Tempora mutant et nos mutamur in illis*." The Professor was standing with his back to our cheery fire at the Sign of the Cat and the Fiddle, and he teetered backward and forward with all the rhythm of contentment. "In these days of renewed uplift, especially of uplift on the Stock Exchange (here the Professor looked at us very waggishly) I have become an enormous optimist. My criticisms are a thing of the past, my cynicism has dissolved into thin air. I now maintain that this is the best of all possible worlds, and of this world our own dear country is the best, facile princeps—while the late election would seem to show whom, as our chosen leader, we most delight to honor." "You starta with some flower for old Sam Gompers," interrupted Giuseppe Bonfiglio, a recent accession to our circle. "To be sure," returned the Professor, "I do admire Gompers, for his mastery of the difficult technique of handling men. In this he was a wonder. I kept watch on his career, and at every annual convention I expected to see him unseated. But he rode through to the end in triumph. No small achievement!" "Scusi," broke in Giuseppe rather excitedly, "I know the whola game. Until I accepta da Single Tax I shouta for da old man same as you. I have been in da Federation many year. Dey tella me da old man was friend of Henry George. How dat possible?" "Our friend here," continued Professor Dowdy, not at all ruffled, "probably forgets that Mr. George on many occasions pointed out that he too had been a member of a trade union and that under economic conditions as they exist he approved of trade unions. To what base level, he asked, might not wages sink without them?" "Oh, cutta dat out," cried Giuseppe impatiently, with rising voice, "I knowa all dat. I am Single Taxer, hundred per centa. I no want a machina, artificial lika da Union, to regulate my wages. I am for freea land and freea men! When I no lika my job I wanta my own farm to go to and raisa my own crops. I taka my chance den. I hand over my landa rent with a kiss. It belonga not to me, but to all, because my landa may be better landa or better locate dan Giovanni's landa. We collecta all da landa rent, see, and maka it pay for da government, see, and cut out alla da taxes. No taxa on my house, on my car, on my wife sewing-machine, no income tax, no poll tax—only da collecta once a year of da landa rent, what you call da Single Taxa, see? It maka a great sum, da cities pays it lika da country, and

it grow so big dat every family get a pension from whata is left over each year. Whata in hell do Sam Gompers' trade union do for a workingman compare to dis? I am for Single Taxa, hundred per centa!" We were about to call the attention of the Professor to the interesting prediction made by Giuseppe of a pension to everybody out of the surplus of rent, remembering that William Saunders, a member of the first London County Council, stoutly affirmed that such a pension would be available, when the Professor rather hastily said that he had an appointment and begged to be excused.

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Mr. George Bernard Shaw, who is now a wealthy and very respectable character, is in line probably for the first Socialist peerage. The formula of bamboozle and paradox which he worked so industriously over his early readers—imitated by his fat friend Chesterton and followed by a whole school of smaller fry—is now developed into commanding pronouncements uttered oracularly at intervals, as by one having authority. This great man ought among other distinctions to be the presiding justice of the New World Court, so that his opinions might be broadcasted ex cathedra and his decisions have the finality of a *deus ex machina*. Nothing, we believe, would suit him better. Shaw is not a modest man, and he is not a republican: for him the purple has mystic lures. The Fabian Society, with its circles within circles, ever contracting like Dante's Hell, ends in an inverted apex, in which Shaw, the Webbs and one or two other devilish fine cronies stand on their heads and kick their heels at their gaping co-members, as well as at the world at large. Continuous self-landation and advertising have made of Shaw's pet, the Fabian Society, with its two thousand members, a sort of Jacobin Club, with much of the pretension but little of the acumen or backbone of the latter. The Fabians being by nature intellectual wobblers are in practice intriguers and trimmers. Their contributions to the press have been voluminous, but their contributions to the body of economic commonsense have been illusive.

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Just now, after the late unpleasant political cyclone in the British Isles, the unabashed and unabated Shaw has been prowling by midnight over the field of battle meditating on the fallen and the slain. He has it in for the followers of Karl Marx. It was these, he finds, who upset the well-laid official dinner-table spread before the Fabians, the Trade Unionists and the Socialists of the British persuasion, united in the love feast of the Labor government. It was these who clumsily tripped over a scrap of paper

while bringing in from the kitchen the unsavory course known as the Third International—with the result that there was a terrible smashing of crockery and a truly dreadful confusion and racket. Gentle reader, do you wonder that we have dared to intimate that among the the British Socialists the name of Karl Marx is in eclipse? In strictly Shavian circles the name is anathema. For to tell the truth, the Shavians have a ritual of their own, the finest Socialist mumbo-jumbo that ever came across. Whence it happens that Mr. Shaw takes the occasion of the late smashing of crockery to lecture divers and sundry Socialist cults not his own on What's What in Socialism, but especially does he belabor the Soviet variety of Moscow.

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Well, what does an outsider gather about Shavian British Socialism as oposed to the Russian brand? In the first place we know positively what British Socialism is not, nay, we have been told categorically what Socialism itself is not. Item, it is not the issuance of a declaration of common right to the Land, founded on the Bill of Rights of 1689. Item, it is not the introduction of a Finance Bill calling upon each landholder to pay to a common Land Rent Fund the economic rent of the land he holds as a tenant of the common estate. We know these things, because when these resolutions were presented to the 31st Annual Conference of the Independent Labor Party in April, 1923, endorsed by six of the nine Divisional Conferences, they were side-tracked by the managers of the Conference, headed by Ramsay MacDonald. "This is not Socialism!" declared MacDonald angrily—and that's how we know it. What then is Socialism? Unlike Pilate, we have waited for a reply—and here it is. Socialism, according to Messrs. MacDonald, Snowden, Webb, Shaw and the other pillars of the Fabian State (including the eminent cabinet trade unionists who dined with the King) consists in buying out the landlords of Great Britain at twenty years purchase of the present land rent, issuing government bonds to their lordships for the total amount (some billions of pounds sterling), paying them perpetual interest thereon, and setting up Circumlocution offices for the regulation of morals, the housing of the unemployed and the bestowal of doles to the worthy poor. This is genuine British Socialism, of the Stratford-atte-Bowe variety. Can you wonder, gentle reader, that the sellers of this brand of Socialism hate the rivalry of the unspeakable Russians—the Russians, who adhere to the well-established Marxian brand, the only and original gold-label brand of the Communist Manifesto? Listen to some of the mottoes printed on the label: Land and Liberty; the Rent of Land belongs to the people and must be collected for public revenue; expropriators must be expropriated; revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat where necessary: workingmen of the world, unite!—you have nothing to lose but

your chains! Yes, there does appear to be some difference between the British and the Russian brands.

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Mr. Shaw wants Moscow to get rid of the Third International and to tell M. Zinovieff that he must stop all his schoolboy nonsense or take the consequences. "The bourgeois idealism of the Third International and the childish inexperience of men and affairs which it betrays in every line have given a serious shock to the friends of the Soviet in England." "From the point of view of the English Socialists the members of the Third International do not know even the beginning of their business as Socialists." "Until Moscow learns to laugh at the Third International and realizes that wherever Socialism is a living force instead of a dead theory it has left Karl Marx as far behind as modern science has left Moses, there will be nothing but misunderstandings, in which the dozen most negligible cranks in Russia will correspond solemnly with the dozen most negligible cranks in England." "For many years after the death of Marx, Friedrich Engels kept the German Social Democrats estranged from all really effective English Socialists, because he was unable to conceive that he and Marx, two old men living in most jealous isolation from all independent thinkers, had been swept aside and left behind by the very movement they had themselves created. Nearly ten years elapsed before Liebknecht and Bebel woke up to the real situation, which was, and still is, that the living centre of English Socialism was in the Fabian Society and the Independent Labor Party, and not in a suburban bourgeois villa, where the survivor of the two great pontiffs of the Communist Manifesto lived in complete political solitude."

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We wonder what it can be that makes Mr. Shaw call names like these and be so very savage? We are inclined to think that he but remains true to form and again betrays his inability to see things level and see them whole. In the Fabian Essays, published in 1889, he had an essay, the first in the book, on The Economic Basis of Socialism. In it he gave as pretty a demonstration of the law of rent as you would want to read. Not satisfied with one appearance in the book he must needs favor us with another essay, entitled The Transition to Social Democracy, in the first part of which he again achieves a notable exposition of the law of rent. "Socialism involves economically the transfer of rent from the class which now appropriates it to the whole people. Rent being that part of the produce which is individually unearned, this is the only equitable method of disposing of it. There is no means of getting rid of economic rent. So long as the fertility of land varies from acre to acre, and the number of persons passing by a shop window per hour varies from street to street, with the result that two farmers or two shopkeepers of exactly equal intelligence and industry will reap unequal returns from their years' work, so long will it be equitable

to take from the richer farmer or shopkeeper the excess over his fellow's gain which he owes to the bounty of Nature or the advantage of situation, and divide that excess or rent equally between the two." Ab uno disce omnes. But wait a moment, says Mr. Shaw. There is the State, the Socialist State, to consider. What would be the effect of all this natural economic rent being dumped into the lap of an undeveloped, unregulated, unorganized, unready Socialist State? Too terrible to contemplate. And the balance of the essay is a series of trembling ifs and ands which constitute a "Shewing Up" of Mr. G. B. Shaw as the most lily-livered of all the Fabians. Being of a cowardly temperament he would let I dare not wait upon I would, like the cat i' the adage.

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Perhaps enough has been said. Yet a word more. In his diatribe against the Russian Marxians and the Third International, which was printed in the *London Herald* Mr. Shaw throws a bouquet at M. Trotsky just at the moment when M. Trotsky would seem to have lost his own grip and fire and begun to weaken and backslide. Says our friend Mr. Shaw, "The Russian writings which make the most favorable impression here are those of M. Trotsky, but even he has allowed himself to speak of H. G. Wells with contempt, which shows that he has not read Mr. Well's 'Outlines of History,' and has therefore no suspicion of what an enormous advance on 'Das Kapital' that work represents." And then this final blast. "It is this amazing Russian combination of brilliant literary power and complete emancipation from bourgeois illusions, with absurdly superstitious reverence for the early Victorian prophets of the London suburbs (there he goes again!) that makes the literature of the Russian revolution at once so entertaining and so hopeless." We can almost picture G. B. in the smoking-room of the Fabian Society leading his Right Honorable ex-cabinet minister friends (all of them now drawing comfortable pensions) in a rousing chorus of "Trotsky's a Jolly Good Fellow!"

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The foregoing considerations are but indicative of the pleasant colloquies that are held at frequent intervals at the Sign of the Cat and the Fiddle. It must be understood that the above is a mere paraphrase of a much lengthier discussion, in which many of our acquaintances took a part. We intend in closing to set down an interesting story recounted by Larry Wiggins, as bearing quite intimately on the criticisms made by Mr. Shaw on the subject of Karl Marx and "Das Kapital." We had been observing that it seems so strange that the unequivocal directness of Marx in the Communist Manifesto should have been followed by the tiresome obscurities of "Das Kapital." And then Larry (Greased Lightning) favored us as follows. We cannot give verbatim the exact stream of Larry's words, the voltage is too high—but his story ran about like this. "One day lately in a Second Ave. El train," said Larry, "I sat next to an old man who

was reading a Yiddish newspaper. Glancing at the sheet my attention was attracted to a portrait of Karl Marx. 'Hello,' thought I to myself, 'there's no news story afoot about that worthy,—it must be a reprint of Das Kapital. 'Karl Marx?' I asked, turning to the old man. He nodded. 'Great stuff!' returned I. The old man smiled faintly and went on reading. 'Das Kapital?' I queried, and the old man registered another affirmative and went on reading. 'Great Scott!' thought I, 'to think of the time when Henry George's portrait was seen in New York newspapers and when Progress and Poverty was printed verbatim! What is there in that man Marx that makes him so perennially popular? I never have been able to understand it.' And after watching for a while the old man reading the printed Hebrew backwards, I had reached my station and got out. About a week later one morning while dressing I suddenly found myself shouting, 'Eureka! I have deciphered the cryptogram! The old man reading his Karl Marx backwards gives me an idea. The Jewish workingman, is usually able to read Hebrew, and he is par excellence the student of Das Kapital—he understands it, he believes in it, it is his second Bible. Is not the beginning of a true Hebrew book at what we call the end of the volume? Starting from the last page one proceeds backwards toward the first, and each page in turn is read from right to left. Could Karl Marx,' I queried in my excited ratiocination, 'through certain obscure atavistic impulses have planned his great work, perhaps unknowingly, in this way? Was the key to the puzzle made known by Marx to his intimate circle and by them meticulously and surreptitiously disseminated among the more intelligent of the masses, among whom this Marxian legend continues its stranglehold? Either Marx was guilty of the most abominable craftsmanship in writing this work or he deliberately set about to perpetuate a literary and economic puzzle. I say and maintain that the key is to be found in his Hebraism, in the racial characteristic of looking backward. What I want to find is a publisher who will issue an edition of Das Kapital on the principle of the deformed transformed or the first shall be last. Following this principle of reversed order one can readily see that the land question was at the beginning of all his argument. I maintain that Karl Marx was a great man and on occasion he stated his convictions in a great way. In the Communist Manifesto of 1848, as a first demand he called for the abolition of private ownership of land and the collection of ground rent for the use of the community. Could anything be more to the point? That in Das Kapital Marx saw the radical and drastic portents underlying the land question might never be suspected by the casual reader, for it is safe to say that nine tenths of the gentiles who begin the book never get to the end of it. But following my discovery, if we begin at the end, what do we find? The divorce of the laborer from the land was and is the cause of the enslavement of the laborer in the towns. The enclosure of the commons

preceded and was part and parcel of the industrial revolution. Crowded into towns, where the new steam power and machinery awaited him, the lot of the laborer became a terrible one indeed, and this lot Karl Marx analyzed and dissected in its relations to industrialism with an understanding, thoroughness and keenness not known before his time. But since, as I have said, nine tenths of the readers of *Das Kapital* drop from fatigue before reaching the milk in the cocoanut of the last chapters and since by reason of this fact the Marxian movement in economics, before the Russian application of the Communist Manifesto, had become stultified and abortive, dropping into the hands of hairsplitters and becoming inextricably involved and obscure, surely it was time that, by the simple expedient of reversing the chapters, the casual reader should be introduced to the cogency and strength of Marx's underlying position and allowed the intellectual pleasure of his strictures upon the capitalist regime. "I sincerely believe," said Larry in conclusion, "that a rearrangement of Karl Marx's book, such as I have suggested, would do more than anything else to straighten the kinks out of the average Socialist's mind and get him to see aright the land question in its relation to the workingman."

The Baiting of the Cow

SIXTY years ago, or thereabouts, the first labor union in this country was organized. In due time it called a strike and was beaten. A dozen policemen ousted the strikers from the factory and replaced them with new men. That should have been, in the words of President Coolidge on a recent occasion, "a lesson to labor." But labor must have "played hookey" that day for the lesson was lost on it.

Then other unions were formed from time to time and occasionally one struck, but doing it singly, was defeated as the first one was.

Then the idea of concerted action suggested itself. When one union struck it was supported by the others, morally and financially. That made the movement more formidable and called for stronger measures to defeat it. So the militia was called upon to supplement the police. The fear of this kept the lid down for awhile, but by and by the seething forces underneath blew it off and the militia acted, leaving a number of the strikers dead on the ground. This created a situation sinister and tense and called for greater caution. The persuasive muskets were returned to the armory and those who had instigated their use cast about for some means of suppression equally effective with that abandoned, but less drastic. It was decided to head off the strike, if possible, while it was only impending. So the courts were applied to and an injunction procured restraining the strike leaders from acting, under penalty of a jail sentence if they disobeyed. This was partly successful in one instance, but only by the over-

awing presence of a part of the regular army, the state troops not participating because a courageous governor had refused to order them out.

This was a temporary check to the unions but it disclosed their temper and produced an intolerable situation which precluded any long continuance in this violent method of suppression. The positions of the unions, however, was not impregnable—concerted action was not yet complete. One aristocratic organization, composed of highly specialized workers and holding a position of considerable if not commanding importance, had always held aloof from striking. It had been singled out, therefore, from the first for special coddling. Its annual meeting had always been attended by some prominent member of the employer class who delivered the principal address, in the course of which he dispensed to the members liberal allowances of what the unregenerate call "soft soap." So successful was this for awhile that at a meeting of eleven hundred members of the order they solemnly resolved that their interests lay with the employers and not with the public.

But the day of toadying and cajolery passed quickly. The hoodwinked chief of the order died, and was succeeded by one more courageous and of clearer vision and, shortly after, the *elite* organization was swept from its moorings and found itself engulfed willy-nilly (but especially willy) in the swirling maelstrom of dissatisfied labor.

The way was open now for a decisive struggle. Then when each side had marshalled its forces and everything was keyed up for a final clash, a mysterious thing happened—the dove descended upon the employers' camp.

The growing membership of the unions had lifted them into political importance.

The effect was magical. The grim determination of the employers became "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." Their warlike spirit oozed away and the white flag of armistice was raised. Outside influences then suggested arbitration—arbitration, which implies a yielding of something by one side or the other, when each had declared that it could yield nothing.

Justification and excuse followed. The employers disclaimed any hostile intention. They even said that they had all along been in favor of labor organizing. It was plain to everyone then that the armed guards at the gates of their plants were stationed there by the owners to prevent a pleasure-loving public from crowding in too fast to the merry-go-rounds inside and the high fences built round them and topped with electrically charged barbed wire, were simply a device of theirs to keep out hummingbirds.

Thus the matter stands now between labor and monopoly. The approach of these two opposing currents to something like equality of strength, has brought about everywhere in the industrial world a slackwater condition of suspended effort, doubt, suspicion and apprehension,