The Birmingham Eccentric

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NOTE: The Eccentric is pleased to publish stories of events which have news value and which are written by persons not connected with the editorial staff of the paper. All copy must be presented before noon on Wednesdays. The right is reserved, however, to make such superficial changes in the work submitted as are necessary to the style of the paper and as are required by laws of the state. Because of a mechanical situation in the composing room, headlines written by those other than members of the staff cannot be used. Any erroneous reflection upon the character, standing or reputation of any person, firm or corporation which may appear in the columns of The Eccentric will be gladly corrected upon being brought to the attention of the publisher.

Professors Are Often Impractical

In a recent article in The Christian Century a writer states that college professors should give their own personal beliefs and convictions along with their presentation of other knowledge upon the subject. He cites the case of an economics professor who, after revealing the thoughts and ideas contained in textbooks to his students, fails to give them his own notions upon the subject.

Well, admitting that most college professors are able to reveal the knowledge of others to students, we must also admit that most professors live in a world of academic reality, and not in the world of practical reality. Therefore, if they do reveal their own beliefs and convictions, are they not more academic, therefore less practically realistic, and therefore of less tangible value to students?

Oh, we do not oppose idealism, whether it come from the professors' easy arm chairs or from the office of a business man; without idealism, visions of a desired Utopia, the world would never make progress; we admit the need of a goal, an objective, for the pursuit of any journey.

Our suggestion is that when an economics professor, or anytother, sets forth his academic beliefs and convictions, that he also ask practical men and women to address those same students; the latter can reconcile the academic to the practical, and upon this reconciliation build a better world for his and succeeding generations.

Nutty Taxes

Down in Denver, Colorado, the city fathers are hard put to get enough money to pay for old age pensions; so the city council recently decided to create several types of "nuisance taxes"—and here is where you must marvel at the ingenuity of stupid government in its inventions of new tax devices. One device Denver invented was to tax each wheel of a motor car or truck 50 cents; now, Folks, ain't that a grand thought! We'll wager that if automotive engineers were able to eliminate wheels on cars, the Denver council would probably figure out a tax device on door handles—anything, you see, against which to levy a tax. There is about as much intelligence in this method of taxation as there is in holding up a gasoline station; the former is accepted as legal, that's the only essential difference.

Hot and Cold, 'Way Up High

Man's effort to learn more about this universe is interesting and nothing is more remarkable than the willingness of scientists to abandon erroneous beliefs once they are convinced that new facts have been discovered.

For years, balloon observations have led scientists to believe that the stratosphere is icy cold, but recent experiments by Dr. Fred L. Whipple, of Harvard University, seem to indicate that this theory is altogether wrong.

Dr. Whipple says that his experiments indicate that at an altitude of twenty miles, the temperature rises from about fifty-five degrees below zero until at thirty-eight miles it reaches one hundred degrees centigrade, which is the boiling point of water.

Still farther out in space, the scientist reports, the temperature drops again and at fifty miles is ninety degrees below zero. Then it increases again until at seventy miles and higher the temperature is about twenty degrees centigrade, which is ordinary room temperature.

Just what this information is worth at this time may be a matter of speculation, but you can take it for granted that scientists will use it as a basis to ascertain new facts. Eventually, when all facts are available, we might begin to understand something about the universe, of which the world is only a tiny part.

'Painful' Adjustments Ahead

We regret to bring up the subject, but Mr. Isador Lubin, Commissioner of Labor Statistics, predicts that prolongation of the European War will increase American prices and bring about a "period of painful economic adjustment in the United States."

We dislike this "painful economic adjustment" phrase. So far as we are concerned, we are about satisfied with past experiences with regard to such adjustments. The nation, as a whole, has already had a prolonged period of painful economic adjustment and it is too bad that an economist of Mr. Lubin's reputation foresees another period of stress ahead for us all.

IN 1920, on the basis of weight, an American automobile cost an average of 48 cents a pound; in 1939 the average cost decreased to 29 cents—which ought to convince some people that improved manufacturing and merchandising methods do result in more for less money.

Advertising Michigan

As has been its custom for a number of years, again the Michigan Bell Telephone Co. is telling the world, through advertising, part of the story of this State's great out-door recreational advantages. With candor, the Telephone Co. writes us:

"The general theme of the series is, 'Whatever your favorite winter sport, you can find it right here in Michigan.' For we still believe that the lakes and streams, the hills, and the northern latitude that make Michigan an unexcelled summer playground, make it equally outstanding as a center for winter sports.

"We feel, too, that to promote Michigan as a winter sport center is to add to its prosperity, and that the Michigan Bell Telephone Company along with all other businesses will share in that prosperity. Winter travel, like summer travel, will promote the use of the telephone. So in each advertisement we've included a reminder of the advantages of Long Distance."

Well, that's fine; sort of "killing two birds with one stone," we would say.

One thing about the modern telephone is that wherever you may roam, you're not far from home: Long Distance on land is reduced by the magic of modern communication systems; though out of sight of home and friends, one is always within speaking distance of any place where the telephone is. And that's about everywhere!

A Few Prophecies For 1940

For many years human beings have sought to penetrate the veil of the future and to know, ahead of time, what is coming. Generally, people are interested in the prophecies of almanacs and reputed soothsayers. In Europe, for many years, Old Moore's Almanac has had a great vogue among people who fall for such stuff. Some of our readers may be interested in its predictions for 1940.

According to the unidentified savant, Hitler's health will fail and Field Marshal Hermann Goering will succeed him and this may open a pathway to a reconciliatory peace. Generally, it says that there will be a strengthening of the monarchies of the world and a disintegration of authoritarian governments. Important monthly predictions for 1940 follow:

In January, an important Soviet political leader will die; in February, Japanese Imperialistic aims will be sharply checked, probably by the United States; Germany and Italy will have economic and political crises; something sensational is promised in March about a Nazi leader; Prime Minister Chamberlain will make a major political achievement in April, leading to pacification of Western Europe.

In May, there will be a cyclone off Florida, adverse conditions in Wall Street, possibly revolutions in Germany and Italy and much military activity in Poland, Russia and Rumania. In June, Premier Mussolini and King Victor Emanuel must watch their steps because the signs are bad. In July, military activity will threaten Russia, Iraq, Hungary, Poland and Rumania.

In August, the United States will break off diplomatic relations with the totalitarian states, either Mexico or Cuba. In September, international affairs will take a turn for the better and in October, will follow moves for peace, which, in November, will continue and, in December, there will be a new orientation of world politics, with the United States taking the leading role.

These are the predictions given by this British Almanac. The reader can take them, or leave them, as he or she sees fit. Personally, the editor will leave them. Anyway, they make interesting reading and excite the imagination.

Is College A "Waste of Time"?

We see by the papers that Edward Matthews, formerly a member of a college faculty, expresses the opinion that college is "just a waste of time."

Frankly, we cannot agree with the brother who has established a high school where youngsters can earn their education by making shoes. He has been overwhelmed perhaps by the necessity of practical education, taking cognizance of the fact that many college graduates do not "know how to get a job."

We think Mr. Matthews has gone to the extreme. We agree that there is a failure on the part of schools and colleges to train students in a practical way, but there are evidences that a new spirit is fast mending this deficiency. The danger, it seems, just now is that the pendulum will swing too far in that direction.

Education, to be popular, must, of necessity, fit individuals to become economic successes, but we should never lose sight of the value of an education, regardless of the dollars and cents return. The development of an individual personality is worthwhile even if the profit motive is entirely forgotten.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL FRANK MURPHY spent Christmas with relatives in Detroit. He told reporters that President Roosevelt will not run for a third term unless "a national emergency exists, and then he easily could be re-elected." Knowing Mr. Murphy and his political Party as we do, we will not be surprised to discover, before the summer is over, that the United States is confronted with "a national emergency."

DOWN IN A SMALL Indiana town early this week the sheriff, aided by many farmers, started out to locate and shoot a lion that had been prowling about, causing most people to stay indoors over Christmas. Practicing up, maybe, for next year's crop of politicians.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT now has about 2,000 "economists" on its payroll; the United States imports a billion pounds of rubber each year. Some of the rubber goes into tires; some of it on lead pencils to rub out the mistakes of economists.

IT IS STATED that the United States has 95 per cent of all the bathtubs in the world. Which suggests, then, that if our nation were as clean inside as it ought to be outside, it would be a cleaner nation.

Michigan Mirror

NON-PARTISAN STATE NEWS LETTER

LANSING—The right of state government to fix prices was given a disturbing jolt here in a ruling by Judge Leland W. Carr of the Ingham county circuit court holding Michigan's so-called "fair trade" law to be unconstitutional.

Although the court opinion affected only the 1937 statute covering petroleum and bakery products, it indirectly casts a shadow over the 1939 milk price-fixing act, which is already under judicial scrutiny. This law is now in litigation seeking to test the right of the state to invade private industry in the ostensible interest of the public welfare.

Judge Carr's opinion will echo in the 1941 session of the Michigan state legislature. For if there was anything certain it is the likelihood that retail forces in the state will gird again for battle over fair trade legislation. The past two sessions have been battle scenes, and the 1941 round will be no exception.

What is all the shooting about anyway?

And where does the consumer come in?

NRA and Competition

The fair trade movement is an American hang-over from the idealistic NRA of 1933, the "Blue Eagle" child fathered by the United States Chamber of Commerce and mothered by the Roosevelt administration—a paradoxial couple!

To bounce the business chisler, to prevent unfair competition and to assure everyone of a decent profit was the modest goal that the Blue Eagle sought to achieve. It was a nice idea at least, and everybody was for it as long as there was a chinaman's chance of it getting somewhere.

But when the United States supreme court unanimously knocked out the national recovery act as an unwarranted invasion of legislative rights, the American business man was left just where he was before—dependent upon himself to solve his business problems.

That is where fair trade legislation came in.

The motive was the same; the scene for action was transferred from Washington to Lansing; the state government, not the federal government, was to be the rescuing angel.

"Abridgment," Says Judge

The 1937 legislature received the fair trade orphan with sympathy.

Idealistically, no one sheds a tear for the chiseler, the big bad man of the business world. The "rub" came in when legislators sought to decide how big the fair trade tent should be. When the cutting was all over, the big-per was reduced to petroleum and bakery products which had maintained powerful lobbies supported by special contributions. Lawmakers decided that something had to be done in the name of fair trade; a "law" had to be passed, and so the measure was enacted.

Judge Carr of Lansing, however, doubted the wisdom of the act from the consumer's point of view as well as from the retailer's. He said in part:

"In the exercise of the police power, the principal has been commonly recognized, and rather firmly established, that the public welfare is best served by freedom of competition, rather than by arbitrary curtailment. This is at least an abridgment of the right of the owner to fix his own selling price."

How About Milk?

The knock-out court opinion on the fair trade act also threatened unofficially Michigan's new milk price-fixing law, passed in 1939.

Observers are wondering what Judge Carr would do if he were asked to rule on the constitutionality of this startling step of state government into private enterprise. The milk act vested authority in local milk control boards to fix both producer and retail prices. Through a "check-off" system the expense of maintaining these boards was automatically provided for.

The state of New York was one of the first to experiment on price-fixing for milk producers and consumers. In a test case, the United States supreme court declared that, because of the element of public health, the state possessed police powers under the New York constitution to regulate milk prices.

But Michigan's constitution is a different document. It is being freely forecast in Lansing that the new milk price-fixing law will be declared unconstitutional. Except for the point of public health, Judge Carr's legal reasoning would seemingly apply also to the matter of milk prices.

Consumer

The experiment of the state government trying to fix prices for the consumer is not an isolated incident to Michigan.

It is a national trend in which is involved a new movement known as the "consumer movement."

The government is to look out for the organized interests of special groups, who is ging to look out for the consumer?

Once again the problem has been taken to the United States supreme court. Legislatures in California and Illinois enacted laws which established minimum retail prices of manufactured products where the manufacturer entered into contract with the retailer. The California and Illinois laws were upheld, the court pointing out that the retailer could remove brand names from a price-fixed product and sell it without regard to the contract price provided he did not refer to the brand or its maker.

These fixing of minimum retail prices has been legalized by Congress through the Tydings-Miller amendment to the Sherman act.

While stabilizing prices of nationally advertised products, the act left a loop-hole for stores which could offer their own private non-advertised brands and thus undersell competitors. Actually the national chain drug interests appeared before a congressional committee at Washington in support of the minimum price bill.

That the result has been to increase retail prices for the consumer was the substance of a survey made by the R. H. Macy and Co., New York retail store. Average percentage price increases on branded items ranged from 6 per cent for cosmetics, 18 per cent for drugs, 17.6 per cent for books to 16 per cent for miscellaneous items.

Advertising Cost

It was inevitable that the cost of advertising should enter the fair trade picture.

Advertising costs have been a mystery to the average consumer.

Hence it was timely when the Distribution Committee for the Twentieth Century Fund, a Fiterne enterprise, reported last fall that the total expenditure for advertising probably amounted to less than 3 per cent of the aggregate sum paid by the consumer. As the "American Consumer" magazine stated in December, the Fund study furnishes facts to affirm the opinion of the great bulk of American consumers that advertising in itself is a sound economic device, performing a valuable and profitable consumer service and is not an "economic waste" as has been charged.

Since the cost of advertising is a modest part of the consumer dollar and actually a means to effect lower prices through greater distribution and production—the automobile being a Michigan example—the fair trade problem simmers down to a question of what is best for the consumer, the great American public.

And that is food for thought.

Happenings of Long Ago

Fifty Years Ago
Jan. 9, 1890

Henry Shuler is having another "layoff" from working on the railroad. This time it is poison ivy that got its cruel work in on Hank and disfigured his head piece. Henry says he'll trade with most anybody.

A tidy wedding took place at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John G. Wilson, New Year's night at which time Mr. Frank Render and Miss Lillie Wilson were united in the holy bonds of matrimony in the presence of a jolly crowd of relatives and friends who had been called in to enjoy the festivities.

The oldest son of George Seeley met with a severe and painful accident in trying to separate two hogs that were fighting. One turned upon him and bit him in a severe manner.

The State prohibition convention will meet in Detroit, Feb. 12. Papers will be read by Rev. John Russel, Prof. Samuel Dickie, Mrs. Mary T. Lathrap and others. Ex-Gov. St. John of Kansas will delived an address in the evening.

Anyone wishing their colts handled would do well to call on D. Pearsall. He beats 'em for ladies' use.

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Twenty-five Years Ago
Jan. 8, 1915

The Eccentric campaigns for more good pavements in Birmingham.

Mrs. W. C. Aldrich is recovering from a very serious illness for a few days. The doctor is well pleased with her nurse.

Watch your clothes lines. A man attempted to strip Mrs. Adair's line Monday evening but was frightened away by Rev. L. L. Houghton.

F. J. Watkins took five of his registered Shetland ponies to the Hotel Tuller, Detroit, New Year's Eve. At 12 o'clock Father Time with hour glass and scythe, led the infant "1915" through the dining room, followed by five ladies, cabaret singers, riding the Shetland ponies.

The London Daily Mail has received from its Sluis correspondent a report that several British warships steamed close to the shore and fired five shells into Zeebrugge, the Germans' base for hydro-aeroplanes. The coast batteries answered but missed the vessels.

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Five Years Ago
Jan. 10, 1935

Two Pontiac men, both ex-convicts, today are again police prisoners, following their unsuccessful attempt Saturday night to hold up a motorist on North Woodward avenue, in front of Wilson's Drug Store. The attempt was frustrated when the intended victim pushed and kicked one of the gunmen away from the car, and sped off to police headquarters to report the incident.

The three firemen who are still confined in St. Joseph Mercy Hospital at Pontiac with injuries they suffered in a fire at Turtle Lake Farms, Square Lake and Klingenschmith roads are all doing "very nicely," hospital attaches report.

A slightly larger percentage of school taxes have been paid in the Birmingham district to date than had been collected on a corresponding date last year, it is reported, indicating that the Board of Education's campaign to stimulate payments may already be showing results.

ALL SET FOR SOME FANCY SKATING

Knocking on Wood!

with JOHN H. HARWOOD

Year's Best Idea

This column's prize for the biggest and best idea of the year goes to the town council of Cambridge, Mass., home of Harvard University, for passing an ordinance forbidding any publication from using the word "Lenin" or "Leningrad," the idea being to thus halt the advance of Communism.

This observer chides himself sorely for never having thought of this solution before

The councilman who proposed the noble ordinance forgot the radio, however. But the problem should not be insurmountable. We would suggest a big cast iron wall around Cambridge, say 200 feet high, which would effectively shut out radio broadcasting stations which allow the words Lenin and Leningrad to be used over their facilities.

Then, of course, the Cambridge Plan could be used to combate other evils. Take taxes, for example: If no one ever mentioned the hateful word, or if the word never appeared in print, no doubt it would not be long before there were no taxes.

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EVERY month or so the spotlight turns on some deputy sheriff or constable racket. Ever will it be thus as long as sheriffs' offices are political playthings.

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Saloon Problem

Our neighbors across the border abandoned prohibition some years before the United States, yet they did not revert to the saloon status which prevails here. We are almost back to the same state of affairs which prevailed before the 18th Amendment was passed; Canada did not slide back that far. There is no such thing in Ontario as a saloon, while Michigan is full of them, catering to men and women, and boys and girls, 21 years and older.

The liquor problem must be brought under control in progressive steps, and the problem must be approached from the angle of general welfare, not from the standpoint of the vested interests of those in the business. With most big newspapers packed full of whiskey advertising, which most certainly must stimulate the use of this product else the ads would not be run, this observer will not be surprised when agitation arises for a ban on hard liquor advertising.

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Christmas Tree Slaughter

Denuded and dry, the Christmas tree lies outside the house, ready for the rubbish man. The idea has occurred: Why not assess a five-cent tax on every tree sold, the money going for the sole purpose of forestation? For every tree cut, a new tree ought to be planted somewhere.

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Like a group of feudal barons exacting toll from all who pass their way, our Western Metals Bloc holds sway in Congress. Holy Silver! Holy Copper! To these sacred elements every administration does homage.

Millions of dollars are being spent by Congress, for example, to buy the silver output of our mines and thus keep up the price. The silver is promptly buried somewhere, although it is listed as assets on the books. Then there is a tariff on copper which keeps up the price—and profits, but the tax is paid by the consumer of copper—by the citizen of Birmingham when he pipes his home with the non-rusting red metal.

Every citizen pays a tax as a special favor to the copper industry, just as he pays a tax on sugar, and other commodities. In light of these facts, questions present themselves. Are the owners of Western copper mines growing rich from this special bounty? The mine worker is given a job, of course, but as a common man does he get his share of the special largess paid by other common men?

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"George Norris . . . the Senator from Nebraska has not been a Senator from Nebraska. He has represented to the best of his ability, the whole country . . . It seems that if a man is big enough to think in national terms, his built-wick becomes proud of him and keeps him in office, regardless of his views on the protective tariff for the chief industry of the home town."—W. K. Kelsey.

Congressional Comment

by Representative George A. Dondero 17th Michigan District

The Congressional Program: Despite an evident desire that the coming session of Congress be a short one, there is an extensive program of legislation ahead that will require considerable time for adequate consideration.

The third session of the 76th Congress gets under way at noon, Wednesday, Jan. 3, and it will take up legislation at the point where the first session left off. The second session, the special, considered and disposed of but one subject.

Without considering deficiency and supplemental appropriation bills, of which there are usually two and sometimes as many as five, there are 11 regular appropriation bills which are up for enactment each year. In the first session of the 76th Congress the first regular appropriation bill did not receive final legislative action until March 13 and the last of the group was enacted into law just two days before the beginning of the 1940 fiscal year.

No time will be devoted in this session to organization as is the case in the first session of each Congress and this will contribute to earlier consideration of appropriation bills and other legislative proposals. Organization consists of the election of a Speaker and the designation of other officers in addition to assignments to committees. These committees, which first consider legislative proposals, are ready to function on the opening day of this session.

Many Bills on Table: There are many subjects now awaiting disposition by the Congress. The House of Representatives has 124 bills on its calendars awaiting floor consideration; the Senate has 46 such bills. In addition there are a number of measures which have been passed by one branch of Congress and are now pending before a committee in the other.

Included in the calendar of the U. S. House of Representatives are bills to increase the lending power of the United States Housing Authority, to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act, to establish a cooperative system for preventing water pollution, and to enlarge the discount powers of the Home Loan Bank Board.

The Senate program includes bills for Federal supervision of coal mine safety and health conditions, bills affecting aliens, the House approved rivers and harbors authorization bill, an amendment to the Agricultural Adjustment Act to afford higher tariff protection against imports when an export subsidy is paid on shipments of any farm product, an amendment to the Communications Act to forbid advertising alcoholic beverages by radio, and a measure to secure uniformity in rules and practices of the administrative agencies.

May Change N.L.R.A.: The committee now engaged in investigating the National Labor Relations Board will undoubtedly be in a position to recommend changes in the National Labor Relations (Wagner) Act. Now that both labor and industry have expressed a demand for changes in this controversial law, it is reasonable to expect that legislation on this subject will be enacted before this session completes its work.

Another subject which will come up for consideration, in the Senate, will be control by the Senate over reciprocal trade agreements in the event that Congress extends the period for the negotiation of reciprocal trade treaties by the State Department.

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