

The Book Trail

SIDNEY J. ABELSON

It seems that at New York University, following the Biblical formula of the left hand and the right hand, the Professor of Sociology knows not what the Professor of History is doing.

Last month Mr. Bernstein contributed to this department a review of Henry Bamford Parkes' "Marxism: An Autopsy," in which the author's astute analysis of collectivism was properly evaluated as an analytical *tour de force* in anti-socialistic literature. So much for the Professor of History.

This month another member of the N. Y. U. faculty lends his mite to the steadily mounting pile of economic literature. In "Economics for the Millions" (Modern Age Books, \$2.50), Henry Pratt Fairchild, the aforementioned Professor of Sociology, provides a *reductio ad absurdum* in the art of simplification. In words of one syllable or two, and in thoughts as elementary, he attempts to outline the complicated science of economics for capsule consumption by the masses. None of the advantages and all of the dangers of simplification are the reward for this effort.

Written in an annoying kindergarten style; with contradictions and amateurish superficialities following each other in cloying regularity; and studded with flippantly propagandistic chapter headings such as "Fallacy of Profits" and "Socialism Not Political," "Economics for the Millions" stands out in graphic contrast to the dignified and scholarly work of Professor Fairchild's colleague, Professor Parkes.

To discuss seriatim Fairchild's pyramided errors would be but to torture the rules of fair play far beyond decent limits; and yet readers of this column are entitled to a sample or two of the professor's curious logic.

"The next point," reads the bottom of page 229, "that calls for clear understanding is that Socialism is

not a political system, but an economic system. In essence, it has nothing to do with the form of government whatever."

But at the end of the same paragraph Fairchild writes: "Practically speaking, a socialistic system must always be associated with a form of government that is essentially democratic," and two paragraphs further on, in the manner of a professorial daring young man on the flying trapeze, he flies clear back to his first statement: "Socialism," he says, "is not necessarily involved with the form of governmental organization."

Which does Professor Fairchild really believe, that Socialism "has nothing to do with the form of government whatever," or that is "must always be associated with a form of government that is essentially democratic"? The reader has no way of telling. But what is apparent is this: that Fairchild would like to convince his readers that though "historically Capitalism (i.e. private enterprise) and democracy have grown up together, and have to some extent, at least, supported each other" they are not inseparable partners. Thus, on the one hand, he would have us believe that it is not unthinkable for democracy to embrace Socialism; hence the proposition that Socialism is an "economic system" and not a "political system." Then, on the other hand, anticipating the common and wholly justifiable fear that Socialism, if ever embraced by democracy would return the affectionate gesture with deadly enthusiasm, tries to give reassurances—and thus, though Capitalism and democracy are not inseparable partners, Socialism and democracy are practically Siamese twins, in spite of the fact that "economic systems" and "political systems" are seemingly hardly more than forty-second cousins.

Such inept logic is more than a source of scornful or sarcastic criticism; it provides a serious lesson to those who all too readily abandon basic theory for the purpose of better serving a supposed uniquely exigent circumstance. There is in "Progress and Poverty," which, curiously enough, like "Economics for

the Millions," was written directly for mass education, a skein of logic, a correlation of basic laws which provide a means for judging every situation within the purview of economic activity. The emergency situations which fluster the "make-it-up-as-you-go-along" economists are not qualitatively different from "normal" situations. If measures of government planning are theoretically inapplicable to solution of the problem of poverty in "prosperous" times, they are equally unavailing in times of depression.

Like monetary inflation government planning has an ineluctable tendency to feed upon itself; it must grow out of bounds and out of control. To understand the full force of this fact requires painstaking scholarship; it can never be comprehended by the type of economist who kow-tows to the tabloid mind.