

Causerie

BY THOMAS N. ASHTON

SHOCK ABSORBERS

BRAVE men of brain and brawn long have battled with the enervating effects of their self-imposed tax system. Taxes to the right of them—taxes to the left of them—into the valley of bankruptcy our brave men have blundered; into the valley of chaos rides two hundred thousand times six hundred.

Yet ever and anon some brave soul invents a gadget—or perfects a plan—whereby society may be succored in its misery without disturbing the cause of its miseries succurrere disco. That's it! To raise taxes without hurting too much. Ah, if we could but find that metaphysical point of maximum efficiency in taxing industry to the hilt without invoking the law of Diminishing Returns upon our hare-brained, hapless heads!

To this end serious souls have lain awake o' nights cogitating upon the lucubration of lessening the impact of taxes upon ability-to-pay.

Comes an inventor with an invention to succor society from the succubus and succuba of its own tax torture.

This time it's shock absorbers.

The idea is simple.

"Government policy should be directed to maintaining a condition of moving equilibrium between farm incomes and city incomes—that is, it should soften the shocks of adjustment of the farm industry to changing economic conditions."

Don't you think that's a swell idea—or don't you?

Nothing could be simpler. All we need is governmentally to provide a spiral-shaped, round and resilient gadget for quickly interposing between the seat of the farmer's jeans and the toe of the tax assessor's boot.

Does that make it clearer and more inviting?

"We have always had a farm problem," sez the shock-absorber economist.

Surely, no one who has read "Progress and Poverty" will contradict this statement by the professor. Under our present tax system the farmer can reap naught else but headaches from tax-bill to tax-bill—from loss of market to loss of market, season in and season out.

"Farmers in the past have suffered from five kinds of disturbances: disturbances in price levels, technological change, or mechanization of farming, political changes induced by the world war—principally the growth of the policy of economic nationalism, population changes in the United States, and changes in consumers habits."

Obviously, the farmer must be secured against this five-way fee-fo-fum, and the first thought which occurs to us is that the Legislature "orter pass a law" preventing the consumers from changing their habits—preventing them from changing anything but their linen. This might be the first step in shock-absorber stabilization.

We've tried price fixin'—'taint so hot.

Political changes, like the poor, we have always with us. That's out.

The technological changes might be precipitated into the two distinct elements of mud and water by the Technocrats. There's a possibility.

Population changes might be placed under the authority of birth control boards and thus relieve the farmer of that headache.

These merely are suggestions for consideration by those economists whom are too busy to read George's "Science of Political Economy."

"There is not one farm problem, but many; the problem of the sharecropper in the South; of the wheat farmer in Kansas; of the lemon grower in California; of the dairy farmer in New England, and many other types of original problems."

In short, there are as many farm problems as there are farms.

"The main problem is how far shall the power of the state be used to give the farmers of the country an assured economic position."

With customary courtesy, and in keeping with professional policies on economics, the problem of constructing an efficient shock-absorber is left in your laps.

CLOSED SHOPS

Vice-Chancellor Berry, holding court in chancery for the State of New Jersey, has ruled that a contract providing for a closed shop in that State is "unlawful and unenforceable." He employs the words of a United States Supreme Court decision, as handed down in 1892, to the effect that

"Whatever enthusiasts may hope for, in the country every owner of property may work it as he will, by whom he pleases at such wages and upon such terms as he can make; and every laborer may work or not, as he sees fit, for whom, at such wages as he pleases; and neither can dictate to the other how he shall use his own, whether property, time or skill."

This freedom to contract is the Utopia which we hope to see established someday in these United States. It bespeaks the only everlasting mode for continuous harmony between employer and employee. Unfortunately we are not living in Utopia. Unfortunately neither the tax-assessor nor the union delegate will permit that happy state to come to fruition; the statute law requires otherwise of the assessor and the law of survival compels the employment of labor delegates to offset the ravages wrought by our tax system.

Alexander Hamilton expressed the conviction (*Federalist No. 79*) that "a power over man's subsistence amounts to a power over his will." In those twelve words lie the key to the economic duress which, since the enclosure of England's commons, has never failed to prevent the Anglo-Saxon laborer from exercising a true freedom in