

Just a No Good Capitalist

By MARSHALL CRANE

THE anthropologist, who studies man, and the economist, whose subject is man's property, really should know each other better. There must be a great deal of interesting information which they could exchange, with profit to both. Perhaps they would become better acquainted if they went on a little vacation together. With this thought in mind, I should like to suggest that the learned gentlemen go on a little tour around the various haunts of the many types of men who inhabited the earth before it needed anthropologists and economists, and to the many museums in which reminiscent bits of them and their works have been stored. My idea is that they consider the human antiques both as men, surely an interesting novelty to any economist on his day off, and as economic factors, producers of wealth. It is possible that an anthropologist would find this thought very entertaining. It would be a busman's holiday, but with amusing variations.

Some of the folks they encounter will prove to have been rugged characters, really tough citizens, in fact, but as they walk around shellholes near Neanderthal and Piltdown the tourist may learn not to think too unkindly of primitive standards of behavior.

There is one very interesting fact, which I am sure will attract the attention of the vacationers before their trip has taken them very far. It is that these pithecanthropi, dawn-men, and inhabitants of the early dusk had one thing in common at least, however they may have differed in size, facial angle, etc. They were invariably capitalists. They all employed private wealth in production. One might also say that this is one of the significant things that distinguishes them from the beasts.

At various spots, all around the world, people from time to time pick up flint and stone artifacts, knives, spear and arrow-heads, celts, handaxes, and hide scrapers. Some are works of art in every sense, beautifully designed, worked and polished. At the sight of them one asks, in wonder and awe, "How?" but the question is still unanswered. Some, the greater number, are simpler, just chipped tools, but even the cleverest technologist marvels at the craft that shaped them so expertly.

These are not all. As the travelers tour the museums they will come upon other bits of stone, which have only been identified as implements by the heaps of primeval ashes in which they have lain. Just chips, but with them too, work has been done, work that could not, or would not, have been done without them. They have been capital, just as the most finely fashioned instruments have, tremendously productive capital, relatively as productive as giant steel mills.

Most readers of economic works will agree that the theorists in this field are men of imagination. This has been said of the anthropological profession too, by their admirers and by others. I wonder if the sight of all these souvenirs of the past will not send my vacationists' minds searching back through the twilight, to ages when cephalic convolutions were less complicated, and when tools were simpler than even the crudest of these scraps of stone. Blowguns, slings and throwing sticks are the appointments of industry here, perhaps replacing the quickly snatched up club and the sharp

stick, its end hardened in the fire, and other such humble forebears of the assembly line. And before this? It is certainly difficult, and perhaps incorrect, to think of our fathers as "men" before they used utensils and weapons at all. This and articulate speech seem to be the supremely and peculiarly human characteristics.

The smoke of centuries of camp fires naturally clouds the sight-seer's view on these reverse-gear historical excursions. Still, it is very evident that the capital factor in man's industry has not always been an elaborate structure, and that its materials frequently had little or no value to him, except when they were used to further production. In fact, they often have only become "wealth" because he has stooped to pick them up. A fallen branch is perhaps no more than a bit of potential fuel. But when it is snatched from the ground and used to deliver the quietus to a Sunday dinner it becomes a piece of capital equipment. If its size, shape and weight seem particularly convenient, it may be treasured as valuable capital.

I wonder if it will not occur to my touring Ph.D.'s that capital—Pliocene or Big Steel—may, or may not, be wealth that has been "saved," but that it is always wealth that is *used*; and that it is used for a particular purpose—production. If they do they cannot help but recall that it is axiomatic that interest is created when capital is a factor in production, whether the source of the capital can be traced to a piggy bank or to a crap game.

Saving, ordinarily, is not the conserving of wealth, but rather a retarding of the final phase of its production—exchange. If this is true, it is surely illogical for analysts of interest to claim that it is a reward for interfering with production. (It is at least worthy of notice that there has been a sharp proportionate rise in savings just prior to each of the century's depressions.)

In modern society wealth has become as convertible as we have been able to make it. This is a tremendous convenience, but, like all conveniences, it may on occasion confuse us a little. We are likely to forget that this pleasant folding stuff which we save or, more often, spend, is itself just a token of wealth—any and all wealth—in the process of exchange.

The investor *spends* his money, completing the process of exchange. The wealth which he receives for it is employed, by himself or by others, in the production of rent, wages and interest.

Pithecanthropus erectus was no pin-up boy, and in the opinion of many he was not an especially brilliant chap. But even a prognathous schmo, if he is a successful capitalist from 'way back, may have a few helpful hints for us when we are attacking such a touchy problem as the "causation of interest."

"The Georgian plan is simply to set men free, in a way and to a degree we have not known.

"Firstly, free men and women are the best kind of men and women.

"The more people are free the more they can do for themselves.

"The more they can do for themselves the less the State has to do for them.

"The less the State has to do, the cheaper it can be run; it will need less taxes.

"The Georgian plan is to remove taxes from labor and put them on land value. The simplest tax to collect, impossible to evade."—W. E. Standring, Howard Street, Perth, W. Australia. *From The Standard*