

# The Shovelcrats

By CRAIG RALSTON

(Continued from last month.)

His most startling theory was that Dry Lake City had actually been impoverished. The advance in shovels, he claimed, created an army of idlers and robbed the camp of wealth their labor would have produced.

To give work to these idlers, the camp embraced protectionism and the protective tax. The protective tax was a consumers' tax—that is, each consumer paid the tax in proportion to the beans he ate. Rich men devour about the same quantity of beans as their less affluent brothers; hence, rich and poor were taxed at the same rate. The poor, being more numerous than the rich, paid by far the greater share of the whole. Protection therefore broadcast increased poverty to the poor.

Under normal conditions, the affairs of Dry Lake City might have been expected to go on quite complacently. Employment should have been stable, the wage was sufficient, and every man was under contract to hold his job. The whole term to be occupied in the completion of this great project might have been counted on as remote from upheaval. This calm was broken by Martin and his theories of wealth.

Within two years, business and finance assumed bewildering complexity. The business element adopted the Martin dogma, and held its author in reverential awe. Bankers, who opened offices to accommodate the public, were its strongest sponsors and since they were supposed to be financial experts, their judgment carried weight.

Shovels came to be recognized as the basis of credit. The banks, which had become deeply involved in all affairs affecting shovels, preferred shovels as collateral, rather than the ability of the borrower to produce enough earnings to pay. So did trust, insurance, and investment companies. A huge artificial credit system was thus erected for which no one was responsible.

Martin utilized these facts as additional arguments for measures to sustain the value of shovels. Further, he demonstrated that any impairment of their value could not but ruin the financial institutions and their depositors and crush the city.

Morgan derided the credits and financial operations built on the going value of shovels. That shovels could be used as a credit basis, he did not deny—but he held it to be a questionable advantage. Men were buying shovels, gambling in shovels, and borrowing and lending on shovels—and some day, he thought, they would have a sad time.

The ensuing city campaign was keenly disputed.

Under Conservative guidance, great strides had been made in wealth and prosperity; Martin said so. Shovels were vastly more valuable. If Conservatives were returned to power they would revise the railroad farther outward, and make more work. He pointed with pride to what had already been achieved, and viewed Communists, of whom a few were about, with alarm.

What Conservatives did in increasing the value of shovels and revising the railroad outward was accomplished by utilizing the power of the State. Morgan protested in vain against the assumption that the

State should fix prices and wages and designate those to whom profits should go. When this is done, he maintained, the State will, to a considerable extent, select those who shall be rich. In a round-about way, it will at the same time nominate others to be poor.

"That's what the Reds want to do," Morgan said. "It does not change it to call it business when Conservatives do it, and confiscation when Reds do it. The results are the same—somebody gets what somebody else earned."

In fostering the doctrine that the State should allot wealth, Conservatives sowed seeds that would produce a bigger crop of Reds some day; so Morgan prophesied.

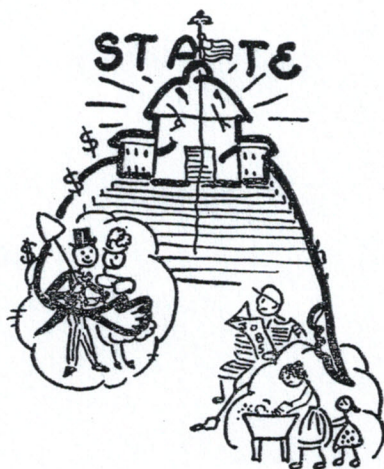
Martin won, and instead of being elected Mayor, Morgan went back to his trench with his \$7,500 shovel, protesting that its true value was \$1—the same shovel he started with, in breadth, depth, and material, except that it was a little worn.

Nature is patient. Her obvious purpose is to cooperate with man. When he blunders too much for cooperation, she tries to rectify his errors by striking a new balance.

When wealth accumulates as in Dry Lake City, it is because some expropriate the right of others to work. The losers are thus deprived of the chance to produce their own wealth and be their own masters.

In her own wise way, Nature intervenes. The expropriators, having made their piles, wax lazy and seek ways to enjoy their wealth in ease and comfort. This creates a new demand for service. In Dry Lake City, this demand gave employment to hundreds, who ministered to the wants and pampered the appetites of the new rich.

Others who could not obtain this work or did not care for it, begged on the streets or became criminals and held up those who possessed wages or dividends. This had a two-fold beneficial effect in affording relief; first, the mendicants and hold-



up-men established an occupation for themselves; second, it was necessary to employ a large police force, construct a commodious jail, and increase the number of criminal courts from one to five. All this afforded employment to some who patrolled the streets and arrested people; others watched the jail to keep the jail-birds from getting out; while a third group found jobs as judges sending them in.



An asylum for the insane had to be provided with a corps of guards and attendants. The rich went crazy in the struggle to get richer, and the poor because they were distracted with poverty.

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In the eight years the Shovelcrats have ruled Dry Lake City part of a new generation has matured. Boys grew into manhood and contended lustily for shovels and bid the price up to get them. These youths were the recipients of much good advice from the better element, which being composed chiefly of the owners of shovels, had abundant time to offer it.

They were advised to marry young; not to marry until they had saved enough to buy a shovel; to rear large families; to restrict their families to the proper size; to marry a girl whose father had two shovels; not to drink intoxicants; to drown their troubles in more intoxicants; to put their money in the

bank; to spend their money, and boom business; to endure the lack of a shovel patiently in this world, and look for reward in the world to come; and the like.

Despite this good advice, there were tendencies that encouraged immorality. Caution prevented men from marrying until they were able to provide for a family, and as this became more difficult, caution became a source of immorality. Not being sought as wives, women crowded into occupations. Ties of the old home grew lighter for women who did not find new homes for themselves.

The community was richer than ever before. Never in the world's history had shovels been worth \$7,500. Shovel owners stated that they had sought men to operate these valuable shovels, offering to permit them to retain two-thirds their wages. The offers were accepted reluctantly, or not at all; therefore, it was clear that some of the people must be inherently vicious, deliberately preferring dissipation to probity and industry. Much was said about the incompetent and the unfit.

The better element organized societies, which employed watchers and detectives to peep about and see what they could see. The crusades were thought to be effective by their promoters, who as evidence of achievement, pointed to large numbers of the sinful in jail. With uplift committees perpetually in pursuit, armed with admonitions, search warrants, and injunctions, life for the shovel-less became one swift sprint between two eternities.

Men and women joined clubs, played cards, sought culture, amused themselves with dress, called protest meetings, or organized Leagues to suppress this or that. So much idleness among the rich naturally gave the cultured folk opportunity to devise endless schemes to uplift the social order and try them on the dog. In this case, the dog was the idle poor. Being idle, it had plenty of time to be the dog, and get uplifted.

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As in all cities, journalists pilot

progress. Each has his favorite political party, which he asserts will increase the price of shovels faster than the opposing party. If he is not a party journalist, he turns independent, and searches relentlessly for good men with forceful characters to elect to office so they can rescue the camp from misgovernment, reduce the shovel tax, and thus increase the price of shovels more rapidly than the machine politicians.

In the theater the drama mirrors the longings and emotions of the people. Each workman would like to possess a shovel or a job, so that is the conventional theme.

The plot discloses the handsome youth, owner of perhaps 20 shovels who loves a beautiful maiden, who possesses no shovels. Over this incongruous situation, sentimental play-goers shed their tears—to be lifted into ecstasies when, as the curtain act, the affluent hero bursts the barriers produced by differences in shovels, and clasps the lovely, but shovel-less heroine to his manly bosom. Or it may be the well-worn theme of the honest, but indigent workman, whose shovel mortgage is about to be foreclosed in a snow storm, which affords the spectators the opportunity to hiss the heartless mortgagee.

(Continued next month.)

