

stantial mechanical contrivance or relation, nor need it materially disturb the relations, either as workman or as consumer of goods and services, of any appreciable number of persons now engaged in productive industry. In fact, the disallowance will touch nothing more substantial than a legal make-believe. This would, of course, be serious enough in its consequences to those classes—called the kept classes—whose livelihood hangs on the maintenance of this legal make-believe. So, likewise, it would vacate the occupation of the 'middleman,' which likewise turns on the maintenance of this legal make-believe; which gives 'title' to that to which one stands in no material relation."

Absentee ownership, whose abolition would be necessary to usher in rule by technology, is "the idol of every true American heart." So wrote Veblen.

For this and other reasons, Veblen was not sanguine as to the possibilities of putting his plan into operation.

"The economic-moral sense of the American community today," he wrote, "runs unequivocally to the effect that absentee ownership is fundamentally and eternally right and good; and it should seem reasonable to believe that it will continue to run to that effect for some time yet."

Absentee Owners Revered

"The most tenacious factor in any civilization is a settled popular frame of mind, and to this abiding American frame of mind absentee ownership is the controlling center of all the economic realities."

Regarding absentee ownership, Veblen wrote:

"It is the substance of things hoped for and the reality of things not seen. To achieve (or to inherit) a competency, that is to say to accumulate such wealth as will assure a 'decent' livelihood in industrial absentia, is the universal, and universally laudable, ambition of all who have reached years of discretion; but it all means the same thing—to get something for nothing, at any cost. Similarly universal is the awestruck deference with which the larger absentee owners are looked up to for guidance and example. These substantial citizens are the ones who have 'made good,' in the popular apprehension. They are the great and good men whose lives 'all remind us we can make our lives sublime, etc.'"

Veblen realized that a proposal to disallow absentee ownership will shock

the moral sensibilities of many persons, particularly the absentee owners. He therefore mentioned the "moral aspect," admitting that absentee ownership is legally sound today with the Constitution including a clause that safeguards its security. If and when the law is changed in this respect, he remarked, what is so legal today will of course cease to be legal.

Another reason why there need be no present fear of a revolutionary overturn was stressed by Veblen.

"Safe" Business Men

"By settled habit," he said, "the American population are quite unable to see their way to entrust any appreciable responsibility to any other than business men; at the same time that such a move of overturn can hope to succeed only if it excludes the business men from all positions of responsibility. This sentimental deference of the American people to the sagacity of its business men is massive, profound, and alert. So much so that it will take harsh and protracted experience to remove it, or to divert it sufficiently for the purpose of any revolutionary diversion. And more particularly, popular sentiment in this country will not tolerate the assumption of responsibility by the technicians, who are in the popular apprehension conceived to be a somewhat fantastic brotherhood of over-specialized cranks, not to be trusted out of sight except under the restraining hand of safe and sane business men. Nor are the technicians themselves in the habit of taking a greatly different view of their own case. They still feel themselves, in the nature of things, to fall into place as employees of those enterprising business men who are, in the nature of things, elected to get something for nothing. Absentee ownership is secure, just yet. In time, with sufficient provocation, this popular frame of mind may change, of course; but it is in any case a matter of an appreciable lapse of time."

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Most glass made today has the same chemical composition as glass made in the Middle Ages.

Government agents who have been eradicating current and gooseberry bushes in northeastern states, to fight white pine blister rust, found several bushes growing in trees at such height that extension ladders were required to reach them.



Spring's Uncouth Messenger

HARDIEST harbinger of spring, the skunk cabbage is at this moment probing its way up through the frozen soil, and even cracking thin ice on swamps, all over the East and throughout most of the Mississippi valley. Despised and rejected of all mankind, it does not deserve its fate. Rather we should hail it—from a distance, perhaps, if our noses are too nice—as the eldest and boldest of the children of the sun.

For this skunk cabbage is the first spring flower. When Johnny-Jump-Up and Spring Beauty and Jack-in-the-Pulpit are still shivering in their beds, hating the very notion of getting up at all, this burly little rough-neck is pushing his purple nose out into the cold pre-dawn of Spring, and offering his blossom, such as it is, before a too-fastidious world.

This great precociousness on the part of skunk cabbage is made possible by his food hoard from the preceding summer. Like most vernal-flowering plants, he has a thick and fleshy rootstock, stored with starch, which supplies the energy and material needed for the growth he makes during a season when the sun gives scanty encouragement and the frozen earth even less. This precociousness also makes it possible for the skunk cabbage to produce blossoms and have the important business of making seed well under way before other plants even started.

Worth noting is the fact that neither the flower nor the later-coming leaves will offend the nose if they are not broken or bruised—like his animal namesake, the skunk cabbage withholds his sachet for defensive purposes only.

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