

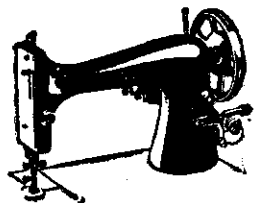
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## FOR DRAMATIC EFFECT ONLY!

G. B. Shaw Leaves Us In The Cart  
Over Money



FIRST we have this letter of complaint from Opotiki:

### "A CIVILISED WAGE"

Sir.—You deleted from my letter on "A Civilised Wage" a reference to an error made by G.B.S. stating that the national income of Britain if equally divided would amount to 4/- per week. To my mind this was the most important point in my letter. According to figures based on Britain's contribution to UNRRA the national income, if equally divided, would amount to £4 per week. If my figures are not accurate, I can be corrected; but if I am correct then the possibility of a more equal division of wealth is much nearer than G.B.S. would have us believe.—J. T. ROE (Opotiki).

\* \* \*

WELL, our correspondent has a legitimate complaint. We did delete a sentence which, if true, was the most important in his letter, but we could not, at the time, believe that it was true. There did not seem to be one chance in a hundred that he was right and G. B. Shaw was wrong, and we thought we would be exposing him to ridicule if we printed his correction of Shaw's figures. But we were wrong. The mail that brought our correspondent's letter of complaint brought a further number of the "Observer" with this amazing admission by Shaw himself:

### MORE ABOUT BASIC INCOME

(By Bernard Shaw)

MY recent article on this subject has brought on me a spate of statistics, at which I laugh, as when a cricketer bowls a wide, or an archer transfixes somebody's pet Pekinese instead of the target. I suppose I should not laugh: but I do.

Nobody knows what the national income is. I dramatised it at four shillings per head per week. This figure, picked up from one of the publications of an Equality Society (there is such a body), has no arithmetical validity: I used it because it is dramatically right. It represents an income at which fine art, classical literature, philosophy, law, learning, mathematics and world politics are inconceivable, and machinery and organised trade and business impossible. In short, civilisation costs more than four shillings a week; and a civilised nation rationed on that scale would collapse into tribal barbarism, as the Britons are said to have done when Britain was evacuated by the Romans.

Such a catastrophe, which according to Flinders Petrie has occurred five or

six times to our knowledge, is averted so far only by giving the masses say, two shillings, and dividing the other two gratuitously among 10 per cent of the population ("the upper 10"), so as to give them leisure enough to cultivate arts and letters and science, money enough to save capital without feeling any privation, and with this equipment to direct the labour and control the ignorant masses. The four shillings means only a national income small enough to produce this situation: any other figure will do as well on that understanding. As the actual quota is unknown, the letter x would be better than any figure; but algebraic symbols are familiar only to mathematicians, and are not dramatically vivid enough for the mob.

\* \* \*

BUT my correspondents are mostly persuaded that the real quota, far from being unknown, is known exactly to them, and that my symbolical four shillings is wrong, because their pet figures vary from 10 times that amount to half as much again.

I applaud their statistical industry and earnestness; but neither they nor I can possibly ascertain at present what the nation is actually producing every year and what it is capable of producing if put to it. Their main source of information as to money income is the assessments for Income Tax by the Exchequer. These are hopelessly vitiated by the omission of innumerable private productive transactions and incomes that are not taxed, the repetition of values that are taxed twice over, the taxation of capital values (by, for instance, death duties, royalties and patent rights), which are for present purposes only Stock Exchange figments, and the folly, exposed by Ruskin, of taking price as a measure of social value (a nation possessing a few tons of radium could buy up a continent or two), and the lack of classification of products in the order of their necessity, Bibles and bottles of brandy being counted with complete impartiality. The estimates of the statisticians are useful for comparison as long as they are all based on the same sources and make the same omissions, repetitions and inclusions of disutilities; but, as they never quite do, they serve only as the best available indications of increases, decreases and trends generally.

\* \* \*

FOR those of my correspondents who have no doubts as to the validity and exactness of their estimates, a favourite figure for the national income is round about £4000 millions. This is a very convenient figure, because the population is always taken as round about 40 millions, which makes the arithmetic simple. Even I, the worst of mathematicians, can see at a glance that 40 goes into 4000 exactly 100 times,

(continued on next page)