

AROUND THE MAY-POLE

By MICHAEL GOLD

1. ELECTRIC CHAIR

Not a hole opens to sun or sky in this room; there are no windows here. This room is queer as a damp, ratty cellar in a deserted farm-house. One from outside stifles here. Yes, there is a smell here; it is the smell of murder. A square room; iron room; murder room; coffin room. It is the room of the Electric Chair.

Under a fierce tungsten lamp two men are polishing the chair; one man is fat and the other thin.

They converse in low simple casual voices—electricians with union cards in their hip pockets.

"That left side fuse is almost wore out," said the fat man.

"Yop, I'll get to it later. Gimme a chew of your plug," said the thin man.

They are scientific valets to the Electric Chair, they are flunkies to King Murder, head of the Republic. Every week they must go over the chair, to see that it is in good working trim; it must be inspected every week, says the Law.

It must be ever perfect, it must be ready, it must be bright and flawless as an angel's sword, says the Law.

This Chair is the most important object in the Republic. It is the cornerstone of democracy. It defends private property and the home. Rent, interest and profit are its children. Without it John D. Rockefeller could not peacefully play golf every day, nor Mr. Morgan labor in his office conquering the mortgage-ridden world. Don't you see, there would be no State were it not for this chair? And how would club ladies work for feminism and ride in limousines and drink tea at the Ritz but for this chair? God needs this chair in His business; God and the churches, Tammany Hall needs it; it insures the freeman's ballot. Bishop Manning has blessed it; it is as sacred as a dollar bill. The school houses could not hoist the American flag and teach children of Washington but for the Chair. There would be no blushing young virgins but for the Chair.

I need it, you need it, all of us need it. Can't you understand this is the bulwark of the rich against the poor? Rich men never die in this chair. Polish and wire it well, fat man and thin man. It is needed.

Where is the next victim? The crime is not yet committed; he is to die six months from now, but the Chair must be ready.

He is roaming the streets now with his pals, the young workingman. He is singing, and full of beer and rough-house fun, the wild young workingman. He shouts lusty smut at taxi drivers, he leers comically at the pretty girls who pass. Ah, he breathes into his deep lungs the sharp sweet night air! It's good to be hot and young as a dog. One of the gang plays a harmonica, and he jigs for joy on the sidewalks—the young workingman.

This is his slum among the comets; here he was fashioned for joy and pas-

sion and murder and poverty; the lights, the traffic, the grime and roar, the huge grand purple sky overhead, this is his city! To hell with the cops, it's Saturday night, young workingman!

But it is he who will sit one day among the buckles, straps, wires of the sacred Electric Chair. Fat man and thin man will valet him scientifically, according to the union rules. Blue needle flames will scream in his ears, and he will scream and writhe in his last nightmare, young workingman.

"Them switches need a little oiling," said the thin man simply, as he shifted his chew of tobacco, and spat in the cuspidor.

"Yop, and I wonder whether the dinner bell's rung; I'm starved," said the fat man.

No, no, rich men are not allowed to die in the Electric Chair: it is meant for young workingmen.

2. SPIRIT OF MAY DAY

As those morbid Hamlets, the Cops, pound their melancholy beats day after day, they meditate upon the problems of Life and Eternity.

Once one of them saw the sky open, and heard a divine voice bellow, "Let there be no more May Days! That will solve the labor problem!"

And so then we were forbidden our May Days. Now we must not parade in New York with red flags be-

tween the skyscrapers, on the first of May. We may wear buttons with Lenin's face, and red neckties and blouses; we may hold meetings in stuffy smoky halls, and present red concert and theatre programs; we may write gay violent poetry, and sing subversive songs in our hall bedrooms; we may even walk with our sweethearts on Brooklyn Bridge, and orate of hope and revolution between kisses, but we must not assemble in masses and parade on the first of May.

This is the decree of the Cops.

This is the wisdom of the Cops.

Cops, O blundering mournful Cops, but you really have not found a solution for the labor problem in America! This is not the answer, no, no!

Can you prohibit the warmth that comes into the air on the first of May? The grass and trees in Union Square park feel it, and surge with rebellion; the robins and sparrows chirp impudently, and cockroaches come out in every East Side kitchen, beating their chests joyfully and waving red banners.

And what can you do?

Nothing, O Cops!

Flat dwellers feel the urge of pastoral Abraham in their thin veins, and migrate from Harlem to the Bronx with flocks, phonographs, babies and beds, changing a bad flat for a worse.

Taxi drivers race their cabs reck-

lessly and honk their horns; they are wild on this day of days.

Clerks in the upper floors of the Woolworth building look out to sea and hearing red propaganda, they sabotage in their book-keeping.

But you cannot stop them, Cops.

Messenger boys walk slowly, and dream of the wild west, and Indian fighting.

In the sugar factories on the Hudson the Polacks hum strange minor love songs as they watch the great machines, and the foreman curses their languor.

Ferry-boat pilots drowse. Bootblacks give most dull and inadequate shines, thinking of Italy. Countermen in the one-arm lunches yell "coffee-and" not so fiercely; they are mad tigers softened by May Day.

The bootleggers suddenly become unbalanced, and drink their own hooch. Chorus girls spend the day reading the poems of Shelley. On the lawns of Riverside Drive fat Jewish clothing bosses play marbles with their wives. They give their diamond earrings and solitaires to passing nursemaids, forgetting these are Irish goys, and not good Zionists. But what does it matter on May Day?

Firemen discuss the theories of free love. Wall street brokers climb the flag-poles of the skyscrapers, and shout

(Continued on page 26)



DRAWING BY WILLIAM GROPPER

C O P S