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## Peter Fireman, winner of F. Engels' "Prize Essay Competition"

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## Peter Fireman, winner of F. Engels' “Prize Essay Competition”

Author: *ALCOUFFE Alain*

### *Preliminary version*

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As Stigler stated ironically in his paper “Ricardo and 93% labor theory of value”<sup>1</sup>, Ricardo knew that the labor theory of value cannot hold literally and precisely. The proportionality of market price to labor content is impossible, if the commodities require different amounts of capital to produce. Marx, too, was aware of the difficulty. If two commodities require the same total amount of labor to produce but different proportions of direct "live" labor and indirect labor (labor embodied in capital instruments), they cannot conform to the law of value. Marx had also to clear up an apparent internal contradiction of his theory. He claimed in Volume I that the "rate of surplus value" or "rate of exploitation" (i. e. the ratio of "surplus value" to "variable capital" that is to direct labor) tended to be the same in all industries, while in reality the rate of profit tends to be the same for total capital irrespective of its "organic composition" (proportion of fixed and variable capital, in other words "live" and "embodied" labor). The solution of these

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<sup>1</sup> American Economic Review, Jun58, Vol. 48 Issue 3, p357

“puzzles”<sup>2</sup> was promised for later volumes of "Das Kapital". Volume II, which appeared in 1885, two years after Marx' death, did not contain the answer. But Engels, in his preface, promised it for the third volume and challenged Marx' critics to use their wits to guess what the solution would be. A veritable “prize essay competition” as E. von Böhm-Bawerk called it in his celebrated essay "Karl Marx and the Close of his System"<sup>3</sup> on the "average rate of profit" and "the law of value" developed during the ten years between the appearance of the second and third volumes.

The publication of Howard and King's two-volume history of Marxian economics in 1989 has highlighted many early debates on the theory of value, especially those writings submitted as entries to “Prize Essay Competition” launched by Engels in his preface to Capital, volume II (1884). Engels wrote in his preface (finished on “Marx's birthday, May 5, 1885”)

Hence those economists who claim to have discovered in Rodbertus the secret source and a superior predecessor of Marx have now an opportunity to demonstrate what the economics of a Rodbertus can accomplish. If they can show in which way an equal average rate of profit can and must come about, not only without a violation of the law of value, but on the very basis of it, I am willing to discuss the matter further with them<sup>4</sup>.

Twenty years after the publication of Howard and King's first volume dealing with the period between the publication of volume II and III, much more details are known on some of the participants to this competition, W. Lexis, C. Schmidt, P. Fireman, J. Wolf, A. Loria, J. Lehr. Nevertheless the “winner”, Peter Fireman<sup>5</sup> who was credited to have arrived very close to the Marxian solution is still largely unknown.

#### I) Fireman's solution along with Engels's presentation

After Schmidt P. Fireman tackled the problem (*Conrads Jahrbücher*, dritte Folge, III, S. 793). I shall not go into his remarks on other aspects of the Marxian analysis. They rest upon the false assumption that Marx wishes to define where he only investigates, and that in general one might expect fixed, cut-

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<sup>2</sup> G. Haberler, Marxian economics in retrospect and prospect, Journal of Economics, Springer Wien, Volume 26, Numbers 1-3 / mars 1966

<sup>3</sup> Zum Abschluss des Marxschen Systems 1896, English translation, Karl Marx and the Close of his System, 1898, new edition, 1949, P. Sweezy, Dir., New York, Kelly.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1885-c2/ch00.htm>

<sup>5</sup> FIREMAN, Peter. *Kritik der Marx'schen Werttheorie*. In *Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik*, Dritte Folge, Bd. III, Jena 1892, 793-808

to-measure, once and for all applicable definitions in Marx's works. It is self-evident that where things and their interrelations are conceived, not as fixed, but as changing, their mental images, the ideas, are likewise subject to change and transformation; and they are not encapsulated in rigid definitions, but are developed in their historical or logical process of formation. This makes clear, of course, why in the beginning of his first book Marx proceeds from the simple production of commodities as the historical premise, ultimately to arrive from this basis to capital — why he proceeds from the simple commodity instead of a logically and historically secondary form — from an already capitalistically modified commodity. To be sure, Fireman positively fails to see this. These and other side-issues, which could give rise to still other diverse objections, are better left by the wayside, while we go on forthwith to the gist of the matter. While theory teaches Fireman that at a given rate of surplus-value the latter is proportional to the labour-power employed, he learns from experience that at a given average rate of profit, profit is proportional to the total capital employed. He explains this by saying that profit is merely a conventional phenomenon (which means in his language that it belongs to a definite social formation with which it stands and falls). Its existence is simply tied up with the capital. The latter, provided it is strong enough to secure a profit for itself, is compelled by competition also to secure for itself a rate of profit equal for all sums of capital. Capitalist production is simply impossible without an equal rate of profit. Given this mode of production, the quantity of profit for the individual capitalist can, at a certain rate of profit, depend only on the magnitude of his capital. On the other hand, profit consists of surplus-value, of unpaid labour. But how is surplus-value, whose magnitude hinges upon the degree of labour exploitation, transformed into profit, whose magnitude depends upon the amount of the capital employed?

"Simply by selling commodities above their value in all branches of production in which the ratio between ... constant and variable capital is the greatest; but this also implies that commodities are sold below their value in those branches of production in which the ratio between constant and variable capital =  $c:v$  is smallest, and that commodities are sold at their true value only in branches in which the ratio of  $c:v$  represents a certain mean figure.... Is this discrepancy between individual prices and their respective values a refutation of the value principle? By no means. For since the prices of some commodities rise above their value as much as the prices of others fall below it, the total sum of prices remains equal to the total sum of values ... in the end this incongruity disappears." *This incongruity is a "disturbance"; "however, in the exact sciences it is not customary to regard a predictable disturbance as a refutation of a law"*. (Excerpts from Fireman 1892)

On comparing the relevant passages in Chapter IX with the above, it will be seen that Fireman has indeed placed his finger on the salient point. But the undeservedly cool reception of his able article

shows how many interconnecting links would still be needed even after this discovery to enable Fireman to work out a full and comprehensive solution. Although many were interested in this problem, they were all still fearful of getting their fingers burnt. And this is explained not only by the incomplete form in which Fireman left his discovery, but also by the undeniable faultiness of both his conception of the Marxian analysis and of his own general critique of the latter, based as it was on his misconception.

### ***Fireman's biography***<sup>6</sup>

Peter Fireman was born in Lipovetz, Russia (nowadays Ukhrainia), Apr. 4, 1863, son of Ephim and Bella (Gorchovski) Fireman. His father was a grain merchant.



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/22263287@N00/>

Kassow, Samuel D. *Students, Professors, and the State in Tsarist Russia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, c1989 1989.

<http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft9h4nb67r/>

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<sup>6</sup> National Cyclopedia of American Biography Volume Fifty-Two, New York, James T. White & Company, 1970, pp. 272-3

After receiving his preliminary education at the Gymnasium Charkov, Odessa, he first came to the United States in 1882, with some sixty young persons, including students and skilled craftsmen, he founded a utopian agricultural community in Douglas County, Oreg., a movement aimed toward self-improvement and the reform of mankind. . He became a citizen of the United States and in politics was a Democrat. Horseback riding was his chief recreation. He was married in New York City, Dec. 17, 1929, to Frances Marie, daughter of Albert Metzger of Columbia County, Pa., a manufacturer. Peter Fireman died in Hunterdon County, N.J., Apr. 27, 1962 - buried Ewing Cemetery, Trenton, N.J.

But this long life was very eventful as we will see now.

### **From Odessa to New Odessa<sup>7</sup>**

If the Edenic myth of an American terrestrial paradise never quite gained an equivalence in the Jewish imagination, it came close to doing so in the 1880s. If ever immigrants entertained a grand vision of themselves as latter-day pilgrims destined for the promised land, the Am Olamites from Russia of the “heroic era of 1881 and 1882” certainly stood among the foremost. With the passion of the earliest Zionist pioneers who went to the malarial swamps and torrid deserts of Palestine in precisely these years, to build and to be rebuilt, as later Zionists would proclaim their mission, the Eternal People, Implicitly Jewish in impulse even as their ideology strained for the universal, came to repossess the land and to reconstitute themselves into new people, into children of the soil like their ancient ancestors. So redolent with the fever of agrarian utopianism were the 1880s that a leading pioneer predicted that half a million Jewish farmers would in time derive their livelihoods from the land.

The Am Olam reflected many aspects of the three major autoemancipatory movements. Like both territorialists and migrants, Am Olam adherents firmly believed that a secure future could not be achieved in Russia. Like the Jewish revolutionaries who eventually joined the Bund. many

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<sup>7</sup> *The Haskalah Movement in Russia*, by Jacob S. Raisin, Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1913 (on line Gutenberg project, <http://infomotions.com/etexts/gutenberg/dirs/1/5/9/2/15921/15921.htm> ). There are several accounts of New Odessa history. Ellen Eisenberg (*Jewish agricultural colonies in New Jersey*), 1882-192 and Moses Rischin (*Jews of the American West*) provide interesting synthesis in their books. Along Eisenberg the best first hand account is by Herman Rosenthal (a member of the Am Olam), originally written in Hebrew. This document, titled "A History of the Communitarian Settlement Known as 'New Odessa'" was translated into English and published in a pamphlet titled *The American Jewish Farmer* for an exhibit at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati in 1986.-another first-hand account was published in December 1885 in a magazine called the Overland Monthly (volume 6, number 39) titled "A Wedding among the Communistic Jews in Oregon," which provides a first hand (and somewhat romanticized) glimpse of the settlement. (Ellen Eisenberg, email 15/01/2008 )

members of the Am Olam saw themselves as part of an international movement advocating the ideals of socialism. Like the early Zionists, they believed that their communal, agrarian experiments would not only serve the practical purpose of ‘productivizing’ individual Jews but would also demonstrate to the world the rejuvenation of the Jewish people.

The Am Olam was founded in Odessa in the spring of 1881, and the specific circumstances of that region had the greatest influence on its development. As a new and expanding city in a new area of Jewish settlement. Odessa emerged as one of the leading cities of the Haskalah<sup>8</sup> movement in the mid-nineteenth century. Because Jews could participate both economically and politically in Odessan life, the Odessan Jewish community development was like that of its western European counterparts. Thus Odessan Jewish leaders placed much emphasis on the tenets of the Haskalah, such as the belief that practical, secular education would enable Jews to gain acceptance in the larger, non-Jewish society.

After the pogroms of 1881/2, the Odessan Jews began to turn away from western models of emancipation and toward more revolutionary ideals. Their disillusionment peaked after the 1881—82 pogroms, which centered in the South Pale and which directly triggered the formation of the Am Olam. Although relatively few early Am Olam members were directly involved in Russian revolutionary movements, such as populism,<sup>9</sup> the influence of such radical ideologies on intellectual Jews in general, and on the Am Olam leadership in particular, is clear. As the Jewish intelligentsia moved away from faith in western—style emancipation, radical ideologies, such as Russian populism and western socialism and communism, increasingly permeated their circles. Thus, although Am Olam members shared the belief in the normalization of Jewish economic life, they believed that such normalization required Jews to engage in agriculture exclusively, exhibiting a reverence for agriculture common among Russian populists, but not shared by the Haskalah movement. These beliefs had resonance in the South Pale<sup>9</sup>, where Jewish students had been active in the populist movement and where there was some history of Jewish agricultural colonization. Similarly, the belief of many Am Olam members that “mere colonization was not sufficient and that the root of the evil lay in the system of private property” went well beyond the

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<sup>8</sup> Jewish Enlightenment,

<sup>9</sup> The Pale of Settlement was the term given to a region of Imperial Russia, along its western border, in which permanent residence of Jews was allowed, and beyond which Jewish residence was generally prohibited. It extended from the pale or demarcation line to the Russian border with Germany and Austria-Hungary.

scope of the Haskalah, which aimed at making the Jews a productive element of the economic system.

Several accounts of the Am Olam clearly demonstrate both the Russian and the western roots of the radical ideologies that joined with the faith in productivization to create the Am Olam belief in productivization through agriculture and in the communal organization of society. In their memoirs, Am Olam members demonstrate a clear familiarity with both Russian and western radicals. Cofounder Sidney Baily, for example, writing of the early Am Olam in Odessa, discusses the wide variety of intellectual influences—ranging from Russian novelists and critics to leaders of the Russian and Hebrew enlightenment movement to John Stuart Mill. It is clear that the western-oriented Am Olam leadership was familiar with this tradition. He mentions Owen and Fourier, along with Tolstoy as the primary influences on the group.

Of the score of Jewish colonies founded between 1881 and 1883 from Sicily Island, Louisiana, to Bethlehem—Yehudah and Painted Woods in the Dakotas to Cotopaxi in the Rockies, New Odessa—seven thousand miles away from the Russian city to which it owed its name—was regarded as the most exemplary of their number. “Most promising of all—strong by the tried endurance and fortitude of its youthful members—is the remotest of the Russian colonies, New Odessa,” rejoiced Michael Heilprin, forty-eight, abolitionist, and the colonists’ most stalwart friend from the community’s founding early in 1883. Not only did New Odessa’s leaders plan to build steamships on the Pacific shore so that they might liberate Russian exiles in Siberia, but they cherished a vision of a colony ultimately of two thousand strong, one that would make a genuine impact on the world. “This was the only attempt of the members of the Jewish intelligentsia to establish a colony through their own means,” wrote an admiring contemporary. “the only group which maintained its identity” from its founding in Brody in 1882, as the so-called Odessa commune, until its final dissolution a decade later.”

Of all the immigrants who came to America with the aim of building a new society on the land, the youth of New Odessa comprised a self-constituted elite. After they arrive in America, feeling “that they needed people who were experienced communitarians who could guide the future teachers of humanity as to how to achieve their goals.” the Am Olamites persuaded Vladimir Konstantinovich Heins, better known by his adopted new libertarian American name, to join



them.” The selection of a non-Jewish leader is a further indication of the colonists’ self-image as internationalists<sup>10</sup>.

Frey<sup>11</sup> was Russian by birth. Besides serving in the Finnish Regiment, he had passed through two Military Academies the Artillery and the General Staff. From boyhood he had shown extraordinary ability. He was an excellent mathematician, and possessed wide scientific knowledge. Moved by moral impulses he abandoned the brilliant career opening before him, and in 1868 emigrated to the United States, where he founded an agricultural communal Colony, which fell to pieces a few years later, as such things generally do. He then betook himself to the Kansas Colony founded by N. Tchaykóvsky, and there reluctantly consented to exchange manual labour for educational work, and proved to be an admirable science lecturer. Tchaykóvsky's colony came to grief in its turn, already narrated, and after working in the United States as a common labourer, Frey migrated to England. Flaring gone to America a Communist-Socialist, he returned a Positivist-Comtist of the strictest type.

Under Frey’s guidance, the colonists were passionately dedicated to mutual assistance in perfecting” and developing the ‘physical. mental, and moral capacities,” as they put it, of their members and to becoming new people.

There are narratives describing the life of the colonists ;

We work from six o’clock in the morning till half-past eight in the morning then we have breakfast. Work is resumed at ten o’clock and continued to four o’clock in the afternoon. Next is dinner, followed by a rest period and intellectual activity Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday are devoted to the study of mathematics, English, and to Frey’s lecture on the philosophy of positivism. On Wednesday, current matters are discussed and on Saturday, the problems of the ‘commune’. On Sunday we rise . . . and immediately a lively discussion begins on the subject of equal rights for women. . . . After breakfast, one member goes to survey the farm, another reads a newspaper or a book, the rest sing, shout and dance. Later dinner is served. Two men wash the dishes, the choir sings, the organ plays. . . . Then begins a session of mutual criticism then the work for the week is assigned.”

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<sup>10</sup> [http://ajcarchives.org/AJC\\_DATA/Files/1904\\_1905\\_4\\_Biographies.pdf](http://ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/1904_1905_4_Biographies.pdf) (American Jewish Year Book Vol. 6 (1904-1905) / Biographical Sketches, American Jewish Committee)

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *The Life of Tolstoy Later Years*, Aylmer Maude London, Constable, 1910.

The structured life that emerged at New Odessa was noted by visitors. Many visitors praised the colony's cleanliness and discipline. Even critics praised these aspects of colony life. For example, Herman Rosenthal, an outspoken critic who referred to Frey as "this narrow-minded man," wrote, "The settlement 'New Odessa' became an agricultural model to its neighboring farmers. Their work was organized and regimented."

Despite their praise for the colony's achievements, such critics, as well as a growing group of colonists, were troubled by Frey's philosophy and dominance of the settlement. Not surprisingly, Rabbi Wechsler was concerned that "they do not observe the Sabbath. They desecrate the Holidays and they told me directly that they are completely disinterested definitely in Judaism." Wechsler's observations were accurate—Frey himself reported that although the colonists "are proud of their nationality," they had abandoned Judaism as a religion.

Disinterest in Judaism was hardly unique to the New Odessa colony. Am Olam as a movement had little Jewish content and none of the earlier colonies had instituted any religious ritual. Yet even secularists were concerned that Frey's "Religion of Humanity" was having a detrimental effect on the colonists. Thus, Herman Rosenthal—the leader of the two nonreligious colonies of Sicily Island and Cremieux—expressed concern that Frey's teachings were resulting in Jewish self-hatred. According to Rosenthal, Frey taught that 'the Jew is narrow-minded and self-centered,' and that "no faith is able to exist without Jews believing in it." Rosenthal claimed that Frey's teachings led his followers to regard themselves "as the twelve disciples of Jesus."

As Frey's followers became increasingly devoted to him "with a zeal and fervor approaching hero worship," a rift developed between them and a second group of colonists, led by Paul Kaplan. According to Rosenthal, Frey and his followers began to impose his philosophy on the groups "His sermons, which were as fresh dew to his disciples, were a source of derision for those who did not accept this faith; others paid no attention at all to his talks. All of this angered Frey and his disciples, and they would attack and bitterly criticize their opponents."

Other factors could also play a part in the demise of New Odessa : along A. Cahan<sup>12</sup> tensions were increased by resentments about inequities in labor performed by different members, lack of privacy, rural isolation, and sexual jealousies. These tensions were increased because the colonists, as victims of a capitalist system, had to work too hard. Frustrations grew according to

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<sup>12</sup> <http://findingaids.cjh.org/?pID=426471#a2> (cf. for a biography of Cahan)

Cahan, because some “insisted that communism required literal togetherness, eating from the same bowl, sleeping in the same bedrooms.” None of these difficulties resulted in outward clashes until the opening of the fissure between Frey and Kaplan provided the opportunity to vent frustrations openly. The mutual criticism sessions became a forum for such conflicts.”

Whether these ideological clashes were an inherent problem of a communal experiment within a capitalist system, as Cahan believed, or incidental to this specific project, as Cahan’s friend, Kaplan, argued,” they succeeded in tearing New Odessa apart. Frey and his followers left the settlement in an emotional departure, apparently without enmity on either side. Shortly afterward, a fire destroyed the community building and library—the heart of the settlement—hastening the departure of the remaining colonists.

It is worthwhile to notice that despite his youth Fireman was president of the Odessa Society of Ploughmen, as they called themselves and acted as trustee to represent the colony in various settlements (esp. the liquidation). It is easy to infer that he has gained a special experience about distribution and justice in society.

### **Student in Europe and after**

When the New Odessa venture was eventually abandoned, Fireman returned to Europe. He studied successively at the University of Königsberg, Germany, the University of Zurich, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, and the University of Berne, and was graduated Ph.D. in 1893 at the last-named institution.

In Zurich

Vorlesungsmenu von Peter Fireman

WS 90/91

204 H. Abeljanz: "Organische Chemie"

201 H. Abeljanz: "Arbeiten im chemischen Laboratorium"

215 A. Dodel: "Allgemeine Botanik"

216 Dodel: "Mikroskopische Demonstrationen und praktische Übungen zu Allg. Botanik"

223 A. Lang: "Allgemeine Zoologie"

118 L. Stein: "Geschichte der neueren Philosophie bis auf Kant"<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ludwig Stein: Rabbi, Professor, Publicist, and Philosopher of Evolutionary Optimism Jacob Haberman, *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 86, No. 1/2 (Jul. - Oct., 1995), pp. 91-125

122 Stein: "Philosophisch-pädagogisches Kränzchen"

SS 1891

229 Lang & K. Fiedler: "Allgemeine Zoologie II"

130 Stein: "Philosophisch-pädagogisches Kränzchen"

122 Stein: "Die Philosophie der Neuzeit seit Kant"

199 V. Merz & Abeljanz: "Arbeiten im chemischen Laboratorium für Vorgerücktere"

WS 91/92

207 Merz & Abeljanz: "Arbeiten im chemischen Laboratorium für Vorgerücktere"

-- [zwei nichtidentifizierbare Vorlesungen bei Privatdozent G. Schmidt, Nationalökonom]

217 A. Kenngott: "Mineralogie"

Ernestine Weitz immatrikulierte sich im Sommersemester 1891 unter der Nummer 9201 an der Philosophischen Fakultät (die Phil. Fakultät hatte damals zwei Abteilungen: Abt. I = Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften, Abt. II = Naturwissenschaften; es ist anzunehmen, dass sie bereits jetzt Naturwissenschaften studierte). \* (= geboren) 1868. w = weiblich. Wersetz/Werschetz = Heimatort (Herkunft), im (damaligen!) Ungarn. Sie legte ein Zeugnis des Lehrerseminars Freiburg (vermutlich Freiburg in der Schweiz und nicht Freiburg im Breisgau/Deutschland) vor und meldete sich am 2. November 1892 ab und erhielt eine Studienbescheinigung (= Zgn., Zeugnis). E = Eltern, sie gab die Namen ihrer Eltern nicht an, weil sie majorenn (=erwachsen) war.

Frau Fireman" heisst, oo = verheiratet, Heiratsdatum: 1. Oktober 1891, mit Peter Fireman, der unter der Nummer 9100 in Zürich immatrikuliert war.

Conrad Schmidt best man

Unter der Nummer 12543 immatrikulierte sie sich nochmals, und zwar ausdrücklich in der II. Abteilung, Chemie, im Sommersemester 1899, als Herkunft gibt sie jetzt Washington an, sie legte ein Zeugnis "Master of Art" von Washington vor, sie ging mit einer Studienbescheinigung am 29. Juli 1899 (also noch im gleichen Semester!) wieder weg.

In 1893 he again came to the United--States and was appointed an assistant in chemistry at Columbian University (later George Washington University), where he advanced to instructor in

1895 and assistant professor in 1898. He left the university in 1901 to go to the Missouri School of Mines, Rolla, Mo., as professor of chemistry, a position he held for a year.

Back in the US to teach chemistry, he only published a paper which was vaguely related to political economy, actually a defense of German social democracy in 1894

Review: [untitled] Author(s): P. Fireman Reviewed work(s): Grundzuge einer Socialpadagogik und Socialpolitik. by Karl Fischer Source: *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Mar., 1894), pp. 165-167

The chief aim of Professor Fischer in this work is not so much of a theoretical as of a practical nature, namely, to show how we can emerge from the present state of social war into the state of social peace. The "war" is that between the Social Democrats and the rest of the German people. Naturally, for the author, the "enemy" is the Social-Democratic Party. [...]

From a rapid survey of the writings of the leading Social Democrats Karl Fisher gathers that they have declared war on the monarchic state, on society and on the church, and that they teach republicanism, socialism and atheism. [...]

Having succeeded to his satisfaction in proving the error of the Social Democrats, he nevertheless admits that they are justified in their discontent with existing conditions. how this deplorable Such are the author's sapient suggestions as to the social training and the social policy which are successfully to combat social- democracy in Germany, and lead the country on to a normal state

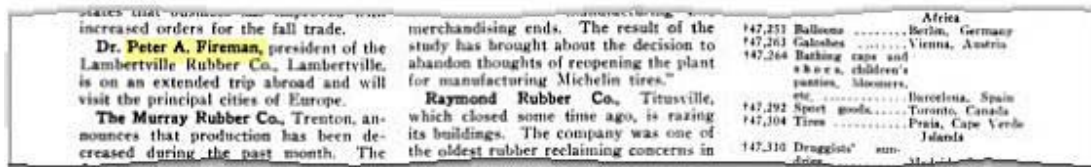
## **The industrialist**

He then entered the field of industrial chemistry and with a former pupil founded a research laboratory in Alexandria, Va., where there was perfected a process for the manufacture of precipitated black oxide of iron. This work led to the formation of the Magnetic Pigment Co. in 1911. The enterprise was moved to Baltimore, Md., and in 1914 to Trenton, N.J. Fireman was president of the concern until his retirement in 1942. After moving to Trenton, the company widened its research and gradually developed an extensive industry, embracing the production of a large number of colors produced from ferrous iron salts by precipitation with an alkali or alkali earth, followed by oxidation of the unstable precipitate by exposure to air. Fireman discovered an almost limitless number of shades and colors. Much of his skill was evidenced in his ability to control the operations so as to secure standard shades. The most important colors manufactured

were blacks, reds, yellows, and browns, the last-named including rotogravure browns that were popular for use as newspaper inks in the 1930s and 1940s.

The major reason for choosing Trenton as a manufacturing site by Fireman involved the knowledge that the John A. Roebling's Sons Co. was located in that city. The Roebling firm, a manufacturer of wire and cable, was unique in this country in that it used hydrochloric acid for cleaning wire, a process that produced ferrous chloride as a waste liquor. That by-product made it possible for Fireman to make a much larger variety of colors than other chemicals would allow. As the business grew and the Roebling waste liquors became insufficient, Fireman developed an electrolytic process for the simultaneous production of ferrous chloride and sodium hydroxide by electrolyzing sodium chloride and using metallic iron as a soluble anode. Besides the work he did on his own processes, Fireman contributed much toward the development of a process invented by William B. D. Penniman and Norman M. Zoph for the manufacture of yellow iron oxides. The new process achieved the conversion of iron scrap into yellow pigment by feeding the scrap into a tank of ferrous sulfate and blowing air through it.

In 1929 Fireman acquired the Lambertville (N.J.) Rubber Co., which he headed for some years. He received many patents for his processes.



*Rubber world*, Volume 83, 1930 John Robertson Dunlap, Henry Clemens Pearson

## The chemist

June, 1925, *Industrial and engineering chemistry*, 603

“The versatility of ferrous hydroxide”.

Suppose you have before you a tub holding, say, 6000 gallons and that you fill it to three-fifths of its capacity with a solution of ferrous chloride and then add a ton of slaked lime while passing air through the whole mass. Having done this, you may begin to make up your mind whether the product shall be black or yellow. If you decide that you want a black pigment, you turn on steam full blast and continue the oxidation and boiling heat until you get the right color. If you desire a yellow you operate for a while at a low temperature but finally increase the heat to boiling, in either case you obtain a valuable, readily marketable color.

In using soda ash as the precipitating agent the conditions are analogous. With an equal proportion of sodium carbonate you will obtain either a black or a yellow according as you use a high or low temperature while blowing in the air. Only when using lime you operate with an excess of ferrous chloride, but when using soda ash you operate with a considerable excess of alkali carbonate. If you diminish the excess of soda ash and carry on the oxidation at an elevated temperature you produce a brown. A further decrease of the excess of soda enables you to obtain a red.

In all the reactions enumerated the first step is the precipitation of ferrous hydroxide, whose eagerness to take up oxygen is the cause of the formation of the various pigments. The remarkable feature of the reactions under consideration, however, is not so much the avidity of ferrous hydroxide for oxygen as its tendency to form a large number of substances varying in shade of color. *This tendency to produce strikingly different colors in response to slight changes in the conditions of the mother liquor may fittingly be characterized as the versatility of ferrous hydroxide.* To restrain this tendency to react in many different ways and bring it under control has been the problem in the utilization of the reaction in question. The task is an attractive one. You start out with very common, cheap raw materials. You obtain pigments of fine structure, desirable shades, of great tinctorial power, and permanent in color. A gratifying feature in the production of these pigments is that you may utilize a waste liquor - namely, the spent acid obtained in cleaning iron wire or plates. It may be noted that during the last two decades there has been developed in this country a new industry based on the manufacture of precipitated iron oxides.

### **The activist**

In the resume he or his relatives gave to the Cyclopaedia of National biographies, he is described "in politics as a democrat", but we could refer to Moses Rischin's view and consider that "Fireman never shook off the vision of the perfect society inseparable from the New Odessa of his youth" and fight for it. We found a lot of evidence to support this vision of him as an activist. George Abdill, who wrote extensively on New Odessa states in his handwritten notes that Peter Fireman became a "brilliant chemist" who owned valuable patent rights for his discoveries; and that he returned to Russia after the revolution to help build the society, and invested \$1 million dollars to build a pencil factory due to his dedication to education. E. Eisenberg wrote that there is no indication of the source of this information.

Besides my inquiry about Peter Fireman attracted an answer by one I B Remsen who wrote “My grandfather worked for Dr. Fireman and had an autographed copy [of Justice in Plato’s Republic]. He lived past 1957 there was a family story that he outlived his life insurance and was given a settlement. There was another family story about Dr. Fireman going back to Russia and fighting in the White Army. I have the rifle he was supposedly issued. I B Remsen”<sup>14</sup>

I tried to contact I B Remsen without any result.

If this story could confirm that Fireman could have returned sometime in Russia, it is quite possible that he fought ... It is dubious that he fought in the White Army as there is evidence that he kept some links with the Communist Party. He gave money in 1924 to the Committee for International Workers Aid (November 1924). He appears in a list published in the Monthly Workers which was published by the Communist Party of America.

Towards the end of the 1920’s he was reasonably rich and could finance a journal, "The New Freeman". Along Robert Vernon Hudson “Too pro-Soviet for 1930”, however, the New Freeman was discontinued after 14 months<sup>15</sup>.

Curiously his name is also to be found in a petition signed by 1,028 economists against the Smoot-Hawley Tariff of 1930 which “significantly raised import restrictions, reduced trade and prosperity, provoked protectionist retaliation by foreign governments, and damaged the spirit of peace, cooperation, and goodwill”. Economists mustered a remarkable protest to the bill. The chief author seems to have been Paul H. Douglas. In his memoirs, *In the Fullness of Time* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972, 71), Douglas wrote:

The six months at Swarthmore were crowded with activity. With Clair Wilcox I drafted an appeal to President Herbert Hoover urging him to veto the Smoot-Hawley tariff, which raised duties to their highest levels. In this we pointed out how the increase in duties on imports decreased the ability of other countries to buy goods from us. Also, it would provoke them to retaliatory tariffs. No fewer than 1,028 economists signed the appeal, and I think poor Hoover wanted to take our advice. His party was so strongly committed to protection, however, that he felt compelled to sign the bill, with the result that all our predictions came true. The Depression deepened and the Western democracies fell apart. Our letter did make it somewhat easier for Congress later to pass

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<sup>14</sup> post clayranger at provide.net on - <http://lists.econ.utah.edu/mailman/listinfo/marxism>

<sup>15</sup> *Mass media: a chronological encyclopedia of television, radio, motion picture* . 1987 -.. - Page 174



Cordell Hull's reciprocal-trade bill, and thus helped to lead the way to a reversal of our trade policy."<sup>16</sup>

Among the signatures (recorded in Congressional Record-Senate, of May 5, 1930, pp. 8327-8330) we found.

*New Jersey*

Walter H. Steinhauser, Edmund W. Foote, Augustus Smith, Franklin W. Ryan, Charles W. Lum, A. J. Duncan, Robert L. Smitley, Peter Fireman, Robert F. Foerster.

Princeton University: Frank A. Fetter, Frank Dixon, James J. Smith, Richard A. Lester, Vernon A. Mund, Denzol C. Cline, James M. Garrett, Stanley E. Howard, Donald L. Kemmerer, Frank W. Fetter, J. Douglas Brown, George F. Luthringer, Howard S. Piquet, George W. Modlin, J. W. Blum.

Rutgers University: E. E. Agger, Harry D. Gideons, Thomas W. Holland, E. L. Fisher.

Fireman was a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Philosophical Society, American Chemical Society, the Cosmos Club of Washington, D.C., and the Chemists Club of New York City, and possibly of the AEA.

## The essayist

In addition to his manufacturing interests and numerous publications of papers on organic, inorganic, and physical chemistry, he translated Russian researches on soils.

Science 5 March 1909:

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Russian Research in Metabolism

Francis G. Benedict

The activity of Russian investigators in problems of animal nutrition and metabolism in general has been but imperfectly noted by the large majority of workers in metabolism. This is in large part due to the fact that in spite of increasing interest in international cooperation in scientific research in all branches, the Russian language remains, and probably will continue to remain, a distinctly unintelligible vehicle for conveying scientific communications to the world at large. More recently at least one Russian journal is issuing simultaneously an edition in French.

<sup>16</sup> the account of the episode by Frank W. Fetter has published in the American Economic Review 32(2), June 1942, pp. 355-356, ([www.econjournalwatch.org/.../SmootHawleyCharacterIssuesSeptember2007.pdf](http://www.econjournalwatch.org/.../SmootHawleyCharacterIssuesSeptember2007.pdf))

Recognizing the great importance of many of the earlier Russian researches, the Office of Experiment Stations of the U. S. Department of Agriculture has from time to time had translated and published abstracts of much of the Russian research in that particular branch of science dealing with metabolism. These abstracts were translated in large part by Professor Peter Fireman, formerly of the George Washington University, and the admirable digest of metabolism experiments by Atwater and Langworthy contains many of them.

A dissertation entitled "Production of Heat by Healthy Man in the Condition of Comparative Rest," by A. Likhachev, is especially valuable as giving a complete description and tests of the Pashutin respiration calorimeter. This was translated at the instance of the Office of Experiment Stations,

U. S. Department of Agriculture, by Dr. Fireman. Copies of the translation are on file at the Nutrition Laboratory and also at the Office of Experiment Stations, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Fireman was not only the publisher of the *New Freeman* for a short time as we saw but he was also the author of several books or essays.

He wrote a book of verse, *Christianity, a Tale and Moral* (1931) which is a very curious charge against revealed religions. Clearly the author had a good acquaintance with the Holy Books but he concludes unsurprisingly :

Once more, my friends: away with superstitions,

Away with prejudices, dead hand traditions!

Nothing accept as true without good proof,

Without authentic facts in its behoof.

What all enlightened men can not accept as true,

Be sure, has very little with truth to do.

"Sound Thinking" (1947),

Author(s): H. T. C. Reviewed work(s): How Our Minds Work by C. E. M. Joad Sound Thinking by Peter Fireman Source: The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Feb. 12, 1948), p. 109

“Fireman’s book is no good. Its presentation of a little formal logic, followed by some quotations from the great epistemologists, might be of some value to the beginner if the author were not so naively confused and self-confident in his criticisms.”

"Perceptualistic Theory of Knowledge" (1954),

In the very brief sections of this book which touch upon logical topics the author affirms his liking for the Aristotelian syllogism and his dislike for mathematical logic. He offers no arguments worthy of mention in support either of his own opinions or of his objection to Russell's derivation of parts of mathematics from logic. CHARLES A. BAYLIS

Review: [untitled] Author(s): Charles A. Baylis Reviewed work(s): Perceptualistic Theory of Knowledge by Peter Fireman Source: The Journal of Symbolic Logic, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Mar., 1960), p. 76

Review: [untitled] Author(s): James Deese Reviewed work(s): Perceptualistic Theory of Knowledge. by Peter Fireman Source: The Quarterly Review of Biology, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Jun., 1955), p. 199 Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Of the making of books there is no end, but I am hard put to know why the publishers saw fit to make this particular book. It is not scholarly, nor does it contain any new notions. Such ideas as are stated clearly enough to be understood are merely naive and inconsequential versions of old ones. It is impossible to recommend the book to any group of readers, specialized or otherwise.

James Deese

But

Soil Science:

November 1954 - Volume 78 - Issue 5 - ppg 407

For the man who want to know what thinking is and would like an opportunity to test his own thinking process, this book is admirably designed. The author is a chemist, as is quite apparent from his illustrative material. Starting with perception, percepts, and re-percepts, he leads the reader through the process of thinking as applied to external things and internal qualities, and then generalizes on the process. His purpose is to rid us of the “superstitions, prejudices,

prepossessions, and inferior sentiments which one acquires at home from unenlightened parents, and further cultivates in school by association with ill brought-up schoolmates.”

Eventually he published "Justice in Plato's Republic" (1957) in which he came back to his 1893 concern with Marxian labor theory of value.

### ***"Justice in Plato's Republic" (1957)***

The booklet is distributed along 4 very unequal parts. The first and longest one bears the same title as the book “Justice in Plato's Republic” while the other ones present some consideration on Ethics, Sociology, Culture.

For Fireman, “It is remarkable that Plato's views on JUSTICE, as clearly and convincingly expressed in chapters two, three and four of his Republic, seem to have fallen into undeserved oblivion”. He asserts that “these chapters constitute a complete and excellent exposition of JUSTICE”.

After a summary of Plato’s views presented through several excerpts, he intends to compare them with Marx and discuss his own contribution to the “prize essays competition”. He wrote In the foreword of this volume [Engels], at last, also refers to the controversy mentioned saying that I was the only one who solved it properly, though not in sufficient detail”.

“It may not be out of place to make a statement here of the essential features of the controversy in which Plato and Karl Marx stand, as it were, on the same side.

Let us first take up the modern view. Society consists of two great classes: 1. The owners of the means of production who possess the factories, the implements, the machines, the materials and fabrics to work with to supply our needs of shelter, clothing, consumption and so forth; and 2. The workers who by their labor produce all the commodities of consumption.

The first class, the capitalists who possess all the means of production, embraced by the name capital, employ the workers to manufacture the commodities of subsistence, paying them wages for their labor. The capitalists are supposed to get back all the capital advanced for the manufacturing operations, plus a certain gain as profit, over and above their expenditures.

For the purpose of discussing our problem, the controversy, it is convenient to distinguish between the capital spent on all materials, fabrics, buildings, machines and so forth-as constant capital, and the wages paid to the workers, as variable capital: it changes with the amount of profit the employer sets for himself.

In what follows the term surplus-value is also used to indicate that its source is the wages -man's labor”

After quoting the presentation Engels gave of his essays, he adds:

This digression about Karl Marx shows that I entirely comprehended his view that in the production of all commodities of consumption, in all wares it is labor that endows them with new value, counted by the number of hours of work expended on them.

Eventually he concludes abruptly

But that is also Plato's view.

A few remarks tried to prove this assertion :

It is interesting, however, to note that Plato who was the first great thinker to earnestly take up the question of the exchange of commodities and services between cultured men, saw that the question of so-called justice was involved therein. And twenty-two centuries later Karl Marx worked ardently on the same problem sensing that grave injustice was being done by the capitalists to the laborers of his day.