

Pastor

after further research

Old Deal

English XII

Jochen Meyer

Somehow the features of his face seemed familiar to me; yet I could not quite recollect where I had seen them before. He was one of three men picketing a car barn of the PTC. To me striking workers always have a dejected, sorrowful expression ⁱⁿ their faces. But this man was more than dejected; his appearance was one of hopeless misery.

He was a rather tall man, awkward and unheeled. The dark blue cap of his uniform covered what was probably very little hair. A jacket, much too large for him, hung on his sloping shoulders. It was dirty and patched, and was ~~only~~ hardly reminiscent of such glorious days as might have been when it was new. Some of the buttons were gone; one of the sleeves was ripped. The other sleeve ^{had} featured a patch whose shade ^{was} ~~had~~ nothing whatever in common with the rest of the jacket. Trousers and shoes repeated the same story, and they as well as the socks had

long since passed the usual age of retirement.

~~His appearance~~ He carried one of these large sign strikers usually carry. No emotion penetrated the lines of his face.

I stood back to watch, hoping that I might still remember when I had first met him. Evidently he was the oldest of the three. His back was slightly arched, but his head was held high, forcefully held up; he seemed to murder the limits of his strength to hold it there. The three walked slowly, almost painfully, twenty paces up and twenty paces down, to and fro, like cogs in a machine, to and fro.

The sun was shining, but its beams did not penetrate the shadows of his melancholy expression. Work and time had left their seal on his eyes with a cruel, indelible mark, and the acid of injustice had etched his face into deep relief. There was a far-away look in his eyes, a look which transcends this world and reaches out to some citadel of hope, a mirage beckoning from the horizon. He knew that he

would ^{never} reach that mirage; somehow he could not reconcile himself to the fact that mirages are ~~unobtainable~~ unattainable. He was defeated, and he knew it; but he would not admit it. He plodded on as in a sad, bitter futile dream.

And then I remembered. It was as vivid as ever, that day on which we were together. It was just after the last war in one of the offices of the PRT. We were both looking for a job. He was sitting next to me in one of those uncomfortably straight chairs in which people applying for jobs usually have to wait. It was a dreary place. The walls were darkened with the soot of innumerable years. The windows were much too small to admit much light, even if they had been clean. The only decoration was a portrait of Theodore Roosevelt. The familiar scowl only added to the general sullenness. We had sat for a long time waiting, and he had told me much about himself, so much, that I remembered him vividly even after twenty-seven years. The optimism of youth shone in his eyes as he told me of his ambitions.

"Just came back from France," he began. "Pretty tough going over there. Two years in a hole like that would be enough for just about any guy. Myself, I'm not fond of killing other people, but I figured it's worthwhile to go out an' risk your life for the kind of future we're going to have. Little people like you and me, we're the people who'll get a new deal now. The right to live and ^{let} live, to earn enough money to make a decent living, that's what I've been sticking my neck out in front of cannons for. That's why I volunteered. I just got married a couple of weeks ago. My kids will grow up in a better world. Listen, bud, let me tell you, the old days is just about over."

He must have noticed the scepticism in my face, because he had been using stronger and stronger language all the time. He had said a lot more, but I've forgotten most of it. It didn't make much impression on me. I thought it was just a lot of hot air, the kind of thing politicians shout about. Since then I've changed my mind, but well, that's beside the point.

After a while the door had opened, and a man called us in. He looked as though he had mislaid both soap and razor for the last week. With such instruments as combs and ~~hair~~ hairbrushes, he seemed to have ^{made} no acquaintance at all. The man was cock-sure of himself. He must have been the boss, for he seemed to think ~~that he was the boss~~ he was sitting on top of the world and that it belonged to him anyway. He leaned back in his swivel chair, all the two hundred fifty pounds of him, and stuck his feet on the table. I didn't like his looks at all, and didn't pay too much attention to what he said. My friend must have been somewhat taken in; he seemed to like all this talk about good working conditions. (I thought it was just a lot of sales talk.) Wages ^{was} \$20 a week, not too bad for those days, but not too good either. The man said a lot more about wages being increased after a while, but honestly, I didn't believe a word of it. My friend took the job — I didn't want it. We walked out of the door together. The ~~sunlight~~ ^{light} was in sharp contrast to the dingy office.

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I took a deep breath. I was glad to be out again. We shook hands, and wished each other luck. I had never seen him since.

I must have been standing there for at least five minutes. The pickets were still walking up and down, to and fro, and the expression of the oldest was still the same one of sorrow, sadness, and despair. Yes, I was sure that was the man I had seen in the stuffy office so many years ago.

Then for the first time I noticed the sign he was carrying. A life of misery was compressed into fourteen words. It said

I worked here for 25 years.

I get \$17 a week.

Is that fair?

"... to risk your life for the kind of future we're going to have. Little people, like you and me, we're going to get a new deal. To earn enough money to make a decent living, that's what I've fought for."