

his desk were uncertain whether the presence of fear in the room was their own emotion or whether the hunched figure behind the desk generated the panic of a cornered rat.

Wesley Mouch had a long, square face and a flat-topped skull, made more so by a brush haircut. His lower lip was a petulant bulb and the pale, brownish pupils of his eyes looked like the yolks of eggs smeared under the not fully translucent whites. His facial muscles moved abruptly, and the movement vanished, having conveyed no expression. No one had ever seen him smile.

Wesley Mouch came from a family that had known neither poverty nor wealth nor distinction for many generations; it had clung, however, to a tradition of its own: that of being college-bred and, therefore, of despising men who were in business. The family's diplomas had always hung on the wall in the manner of a reproach to the world, because the diplomas had not automatically produced the material equivalents of their attested spiritual value. Among the family's numerous relatives, there was one rich uncle. He had married his money and, in his widowed old age, he had picked Wesley as his favorite from among his many nephews and nieces, because Wesley was the least distinguished of the lot and therefore, thought Uncle Julius, the safest. Uncle Julius did not care for people who were brilliant. He did not care for the trouble of managing his money, either; so he turned the job over to Wesley. By the time Wesley graduated from college, there was no money to manage. Uncle Julius blamed it on Wesley's cunning and cried that Wesley was an unscrupulous schemer. But there had been no scheme about it; Wesley could not have said just where the money had gone. In high school, Wesley Mouch had been one of the worst students and had passionately envied those who were the best. College taught him that he did not have to envy them at all. After graduation, he took a job in the advertising department of a company that manufactured a bogus corn-cure. The cure sold well and he rose to be the head of his department. He left it to take charge of the advertising of a hair-restorer, then of a patented brassiere, then of a new soap, then of a soft drink—and then he became advertising vice president of an automobile concern. He tried to sell automobiles as if they were a bogus corn-cure. They did not sell. He blamed it on the insufficiency of his advertising budget. It was the president of the automobile concern who recommended him to Rearden. It was Rearden who introduced him to Washington—Rearden, who knew no standard by which to judge the activities of his Washington man. It was James Taggart who gave him a start in the Bureau of Economic Planning and National Resources—in exchange for double-crossing Rearden in order to help Orren Boyle in exchange for destroying Dan Conway. From then on, people helped Wesley Mouch to advance, for the same reason as that which had prompted Uncle Julius: they were people who believed that mediocrity was safe. The men who now sat in front of his desk had been taught that the law of causality was a superstition and that one had to deal with the situation of the moment without considering its cause. By the situation of the moment, they had concluded that Wesley Mouch was a man of superla-

tive skill and cunning, since millions aspired to power, but he was the one who had achieved it. It was not within their method of thinking to know that Wesley Mouch was the zero at the meeting point of forces unleashed in destruction against one another.

"This is just a rough draft of Directive Number 10-289," said Wesley Mouch, "which Gene, Clem and I have dashed off just to give you the general idea. We want to hear your opinions, suggestions and so forth—you being the representatives of labor, industry, transportation and the professions."

Fred Kinnan got off the window sill and sat down on the arm of a chair. Orren Boyle spit out the butt of his cigar. James Taggart looked down at his own hands. Dr. Ferris was the only one who seemed to be at ease.

"In the name of the general welfare," read Wesley Mouch, "to protect the people's security, to achieve full equality and total stability, it is decreed for the duration of the national emergency that—

"Point One. All workers, wage earners and employees of any kind whatsoever shall henceforth be attached to their jobs and shall not leave nor be dismissed nor change employment, under penalty of a term in jail. The penalty shall be determined by the Unification Board, such Board to be appointed by the Bureau of Economic Planning and National Resources. All persons reaching the age of twenty-one shall report to the Unification Board, which shall assign them to where, in its opinion, their services will best serve the interests of the nation.

"Point Two. All industrial, commercial, manufacturing and business establishments of any nature whatsoever shall henceforth remain in operation, and the owners of such establishments shall not quit nor leave nor retire, nor close, sell or transfer their business, under penalty of the nationalization of their establishment and of any and all of their property.

"Point Three. All patents and copyrights, pertaining to any devices, inventions, formulas, processes and works of any nature whatsoever, shall be turned over to the nation as a patriotic emergency gift by means of Gift Certificates to be signed voluntarily by the owners of all such patents and copyrights. The Unification Board shall then license the use of such patents and copyrights to all applicants, equally and without discrimination, for the purpose of eliminating monopolistic practices, discarding obsolete products and making the best available to the whole nation. No trademarks, brand names or copyrighted titles shall be used. Every formerly patented product shall be known by a new name and sold by all manufacturers under the same name, such name to be selected by the Unification Board. All private trademarks and brand names are hereby abolished.

"Point Four. No new devices, inventions, products, or goods of any nature whatsoever, not now on the market, shall be produced, invented, manufactured or sold after the date of this directive. The Office of Patents and Copyrights is hereby suspended.

"Point Five. Every establishment, concern, corporation or person engaged in production of any nature whatsoever shall henceforth