

produce the same amount of goods per year as it, they or he produced during the Basic Year, no more and no less. The year to be known as the Basic or Yardstick Year is to be the year ending on the date of this directive. Over or under production shall be fined, such fines to be determined by the Unification Board.

"Point Six. Every person of any age, sex, class or income, shall henceforth spend the same amount of money on the purchase of goods per year as he or she spent during the Basic Year, no more and no less. Over or under purchasing shall be fined, such fines to be determined by the Unification Board.

"Point Seven. All wages, prices, salaries, dividends, profits, interest rates and forms of income of any nature whatsoever, shall be frozen at their present figures, as of the date of this directive.

"Point Eight. All cases arising from and rules not specifically provided for in this directive, shall be settled and determined by the Unification Board, whose decisions will be final."

There was, even within the four men who had listened, a remnant of human dignity, which made them sit still and feel sick for the length of one minute.

James Taggart spoke first. His voice was low, but it had the trembling intensity of an involuntary scream: "Well, why not? Why should they have it, if we don't? Why should they stand above us? If we are to perish, let's make sure that we all perish together. Let's make sure that we leave them no chance to survive!"

"That's a damn funny thing to say about a very practical plan that will benefit everybody," said Orren Boyle shrilly, looking at Taggart in frightened astonishment.

Dr. Ferris chuckled.

Taggart's eyes seemed to focus, and he said, his voice louder, "Yes, of course. It's a very practical plan. It's necessary, practical and just. It will solve everybody's problems. It will give everybody a chance to feel safe. A chance to rest."

"It will give security to the people," said Eugene Lawson, his mouth slithering into a smile. "Security—that's what the people want. If they want it, why shouldn't they have it? Just because a handful of rich will object?"

"It's not the rich who'll object," said Dr. Ferris lazily. "The rich drool for security more than any other sort of animal—haven't you discovered that yet?"

"Well, who'll object?" snapped Lawson.

Dr. Ferris smiled pointedly, and did not answer.

Lawson looked away. "To hell with them! Why should we worry about *them*? We've got to run the world for the sake of the little people. It's intelligence that's caused all the troubles of humanity. Man's mind is the root of all evil. This is the day of the heart. It's the weak, the meek, the sick and the humble that must be the only objects of our concern." His lower lip was twisting in soft, lecherous motions. "Those who're big are here to serve those who aren't. If they refuse to do their moral duty, we've got to force them. There once was an Age of Reason, but we've progressed beyond it. This is the Age of Love."

"Shut up!" screamed James Taggart.

They all stared at him. "For Christ's sake, Jim, what's the matter?" said Orren Boyle, shaking.

"Nothing," said Taggart, "nothing . . . Wesley, keep him still, will you?"

Mouch said uncomfortably, "But I fail to see—"

"Just keep him still. We don't have to listen to him, do we?"

"Why, no, but—"

"Then let's go on."

"What is this?" demanded Lawson. "I resent it I most emphatically—" But he saw no support in the faces around him and stopped, his mouth sagging into an expression of pouting hatred.

"Let's go on," said Taggart feverishly.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Orren Boyle, trying not to know what was the matter with himself and why he felt frightened.

"Genius is a superstition, Jim," said Dr. Ferris slowly, with an odd kind of emphasis, as if knowing that he was naming the unnamed in all their minds. "There's no such thing as the intellect. A man's brain is a social product. A sum of influences that he's picked up from those around him. Nobody invents anything, he merely reflects what's floating in the social atmosphere. A genius is an intellectual scavenger and a greedy hoarder of the ideas which rightfully belong to society, from which he stole them. All thought is theft. If we do away with private fortunes, we'll have a fairer distribution of wealth. If we do away with genius, we'll have a fairer distribution of ideas."

"Are we here to talk business or are we here to kid one another?" asked Fred Kinnan.

They turned to him. He was a muscular man with large features, but his face had the astonishing property of finely drawn lines that raised the corners of his mouth into the permanent hint of a wise, sardonic grin. He sat on the arm of the chair, hands in pockets, looking at Mouch with the smiling glance of a hardened policeman at a shoplifter.

"All I've got to say is that you'd better stuff that Unification Board with my men," he said. "Better make sure of it, brother—or I'll blast your Point One to hell."

"I intend, of course, to have a representative of labor on that Board," said Mouch dryly, "as well as a representative of industry, of the professions and of every cross-section of—"

"No cross-sections," said Fred Kinnan evenly. "Just representatives of labor. Period."

"What the hell!" yelled Orren Boyle. "That's stacking the cards, isn't it?"

"Sure," said Fred Kinnan.

"But that will give you a stranglehold on every business in the country!"

"What do you think I'm after?"

"That's unfair!" yelled Boyle. "I won't stand for it! You have no right! You—"

"Right?" said Kinnan innocently. "Are we talking about rights?"

"But, I mean, after all, there are certain fundamental property rights which—"

"Listen, pal, you want Point Three, don't you?"

"Well, I—"

"Then you'd better keep your trap shut about property rights from now on. Keep it shut tight."

"Mr. Kinnan," said Dr. Ferris, "you must not make the old-fashioned mistake of drawing wide generalizations. Our policy has to be flexible. There are no absolute principles which—"

"Save it for Jim Taggart, Doc," said Fred Kinnan. "I know what I'm talking about. That's because I never went to college."

"I object," said Boyle, "to your dictatorial method of—"

Kinnan turned his back on him and said, "Listen, Wesley, my boys won't like Point One. If I get to run things, I'll make them swallow it. If not, not. Just make up your mind."

"Well—" said Mouch, and stopped.

"For Christ's sake, Wesley, what about us?" yelled Taggart.

"You'll come to me," said Kinnan, "when you'll need a deal to fix the Board. But I'll run that Board. Me and Wesley."

"Do you think the country will stand for it?" yelled Taggart.

"Stop kidding yourself," said Kinnan. "The country? If there aren't any principles any more—and I guess the doc is right, because there sure aren't if there aren't any rules to this game and it's only a question of who robs whom—then I've got more votes than the bunch of you, there are more workers than employers, and don't you forget it, boys!"

"That's a funny attitude to take," said Taggart haughtily, "about a measure which, after all, is not designed for the selfish benefit of workers or employers, but for the general welfare of the public."

"Okay," said Kinnan amiably, "let's talk your lingo. Who is the public? If you go by quality—then it ain't you, Jim, and it ain't Orrie Boyle. If you go by quantity—then it sure is *me*, because quantity is what I've got behind me." His smile disappeared, and with a sudden, bitter look of weariness he added, "Only I'm not going to say that I'm working for the welfare of my public, because I know I'm not. I know that I'm delivering the poor bastards into slavery, and that's all there is to it. And they know it, too. But they know that I'll have to throw them a crumb once in a while, if I want to keep my racket, while with the rest of you they wouldn't have a chance in hell. So that's why, if they've got to be under a whip, they'd rather I held it, not you—you drooling, tear-jerking, mealy-mouthed bastards of the public welfare! Do you think that outside of your college-bred pansies there's one village idiot whom you're fooling? I'm a racketeer—but I know it and my boys know it, and they know that I'll pay off. Not out of the kindness of my heart, either, and not a cent more than I can get away with, but at least they can count on that much. Sure, it makes me sick sometimes, it makes me sick right now, but it's not me who's built this kind of world—you did—so I'm playing the game as you've set it up and I'm going to play it for as long as it lasts—which isn't going to be long for any of us!"