shortages of materials, and difficulties of transportation, and other unavoidable conditions."

"The ore industry is crumbling. That's what's killing the mining equipment business," said Paul Larkin.

"It's been proved that every business depends upon every other business," said Orren Boyle. "So everybody ought to share the burdens of everybody else."

"That is, I think, true," said Wesley Mouch. But nobody ever paid any attention to Wesley Mouch.

"My purpose," said Orren Boyle, "is the preservation of a free economy. It's generally conceded that free economy is now on trial. Unless it proves its social value and assumes its social responsibilities, the people won't stand for it. If it doesn't develop a public spirit, it's done for, make no mistake about that."

Orren Boyle had appeared from nowhere, five years ago, and had since made the cover of every national news magazine. He had started out with a hundred thousand dollars of his own and a two-hundred-million-dollar loan from the government. Now he headed an enormous concern which had swallowed many smaller companies. This proved, he liked to say, that individual ability still had a chance to succeed in the world.

"The only justification of private property," said Orren Boyle, "is public service."

"That is, I think, indubitable," said Wesley Mouch.

Orren Boyle made a noise, swallowing his liquor. He was a large man with big, virile gestures; everything about his person was loudly full of life, except the small black slits of his eyes.

"Jim," he said, "Rearden Metal seems to be a colossal kind of swindle."

"Uh-huh," said Taggart.

"I hear there's not a single expert who's given a favorable report on it."

"No, not one."

"We've been improving steel rails for generations, and increasing their weight. Now, is it true that these Rearden Metal rails are to be lighter than the cheapest grade of steel?"

"That's right," said Taggart. "Lighter."

"But it's ridiculous, Jim. It's physically impossible. For your heavy-duty, high-speed, main-line track?"

"That's right."

"But you're just inviting disaster."

"My sister is."

Taggart made the stem of his glass whirl slowly between two fingers. There was a moment of silence.

"The National Council of Metal Industries," said Orren Boyle, "passed a resolution to appoint a committee to study the question of Rearden Metal, inasmuch as its use may be an actual public hazard."

"That is, in my opinion, wise," said Wesley Mouch.

"When everybody agrees," Taggart's voice suddenly went shrill, "when people are unanimous, how does one man dare to dissent? By what right? That's what I want to know—by what right?"

Boyle's eyes darted to Taggart's face, but the dim light of the room made it impossible to see faces clearly he saw only a pale, bluish smear

"When we think of the natural resources, at a time of critical shortage," Boyle said softly, "when we think of the critical raw materials that are being wasted on an irresponsible private experiment, when we think of the ore "

He did not finish He glanced at Taggart again But Taggart seemed to know that Boyle was waiting and to find the silence enjoyable

"The public has a vital stake in natural resources, Jim such as iron ore The public can't remain indifferent to reckless selfish waste by an anti-social individual After all, private property is a trusteeship held for the benefit of society as a whole "

Taggart glanced at Boyle and smiled the smile was pointed it seemed to say that something in his words was an answer to something in the words of Boyle ' The liquor they serve here is swill I suppose that s the price we have to pay for not being crowded by all kinds of rabble But I do wish they'd recognize that they're dealing with experts Since I hold the purse strings, I expect to get my money's worth and at my pleasure "

Boyle did not answer his face had become sullen ' Listen Jim ' he began heavily

Taggart smiled ' What ' I'm listening "

"Jim, you will agree, I'm sure, that there s nothing more destructive than a monopoly

'Yes," said Taggart, on the one hand On the other there s the blight of unbridled competition

"That's true That s very true The proper course is always in my opinion in the middle So it is I think, the duty of society to snip the extremes now isn't it'

'Yes " said Taggart ' it is '

"Consider the picture in the iron-ore business The national output seems to be falling at an ungodly rate It threatens the existence of the whole steel industry Steel mills are shutting down all over the country There s only one mining company that's lucky enough not to be affected by the general conditions Its output seems to be plentiful and always available on schedule But who gets the benefit of it? Nobody except its owner Would you say that that's fair'"

' No,' said Taggart it isn't fair '

"Most of us don't own iron mines How can we compete with a man who s got a corner on God s natural resources' Is it any wonder that he can always deliver steel while we have to struggle and wait and lose our customers and go out of business' Is it in the public interest to let one man destroy an entire industry'

"No " said Taggart "it isn't '

"It seems to me that the national policy ought to be aimed at the objective of giving everybody a chance at his fair share of iron ore, with a view toward the preservation of the industry as a whole Don't you think so?"

"I think so "

Boyle sighed. Then he said cautiously, "But I guess there aren't many people in Washington capable of understanding a progressive social policy"

Taggart said slowly, "There are. No, not many and not easy to approach, but there are. I might speak to them."

Boyle picked up his drink and swallowed it in one gulp, as if he had heard all he had wanted to hear.

"Speaking of progressive policies, Orren,' said Taggart, 'you might ask yourself whether at a time of transportation shortages, when so many railroads are going bankrupt and large areas are left without rail service, whether it is in the public interest to tolerate wasteful duplication of services and the destructive dog-eat-dog competition of newcomers in territories where established companies have historical priority."

'Well, now,' said Boyle pleasantly, 'that seems to be an interesting question to consider. I might discuss it with a few friends in the National Alliance of Railroads.'

'Friendships,' said Taggart in the tone of an idle abstraction, "are more valuable than gold." Unexpectedly he turned to Larkin. "Don't you think so, Paul?"

"Why... yes," said Larkin, astonished. "Yes, of course. I am counting on yours."

"Huh?"

"I am counting on your many friendships."

They all seemed to know why Larkin did not answer at once, his shoulders seemed to shrink down closer to the table. "If everybody could pull for a common purpose, then nobody would have to be hurt!" he cried suddenly, in a tone of incongruous despair. He saw Taggart watching him and added, pleading, "I wish we didn't have to hurt anybody."

"That is an anti-social attitude," drawled Taggart. "People who are afraid to sacrifice somebody have no business talking about a common purpose."

"But I'm a student of history," said Larkin hastily. "I recognize historical necessity."

"Good," said Taggart.

"I can't be expected to buck the trend of the whole world, can I?" Larkin seemed to plead, but the plea was not addressed to anyone. "Can I?"

"You can't, Mr. Larkin," said Wesley Mouch. "You and I are not to be blamed, if we..."

Larkin jerked his head away, it was almost a shudder; he could not bear to look at Mouch.

"Did you have a good time in Mexico, Orren?" asked Taggart, his voice suddenly loud and casual. All of them seemed to know that the purpose of their meeting was accomplished and whatever they had come here to understand was understood.

"Wonderful place, Mexico," Boyle answered cheerfully. "Very stimulating and thought-provoking. Their food rations are something awful, though. I got sick. But they're working mighty hard to put their country on its feet."