Nobody objected or picked it up; they looked as if Lawson had merely made it harder to continue the discussion. But a small man who sat unobtrusively in the best armchair of the room, apart from the others, content to be ignored and fully aware that none of them could be unconscious of his presence, glanced at Lawson, then at Mouch, and said with brisk cheerfulness, "That's the line, Wesley. Tone it down and dress it up and get your press boys to chant it—and you won't have to worry."

"Yes, Mr. Thompson," said Mouch glumly.

Mr. Thompson, the Head of the State, was a man who possessed the quality of never being noticed. In any group of three, his person became indistinguishable, and when seen alone it seemed to evoke a group of its own, composed of the countless persons he resembled. The country had no clear image of what he looked like: his photographs had appeared on the covers of magazines as frequently as those of his predecessors in office, but people could never be quite certain which photographs were his and which were pictures of "*a* mail clerk" or "*a* white-collar worker," accompanying articles about the daily life of the undifferentiated—except that Mr. Thompson's collars were usually wilted. He had broad shoulders and a slight body. He had stringy hair, a wide mouth and an elastic age range that made him look like a harassed forty or an unusually vigorous sixty. Holding enormous official powers, he schemed ceaselessly to expand them, because it was expected of him by those who had pushed him into office. He had the cunning of the unintelligent and the frantic energy of the lazy. The sole secret of his rise in life was the fact that he was a product of chance and knew it and aspired to nothing else.

"It's obvious that measures have to be taken. Drastic measures," said James Taggart, speaking, not to Mr. Thompson, but to Wesley Mouch. "We can't let things go the way they're going much longer." His voice was belligerent and shaky.

"Take it easy, Jim," said Orren Boyle.

"Something's got to be done and done fast!"

"Don't look at *me*," snapped Wesley Mouch. "I can't help it. I can't help it if people refuse to co-operate. I'm tied. I need wider powers."

Mouch had summoned them all to Washington, as his friends and personal advisers, for a private, unofficial conference on the national crisis. But, watching him, they were unable to decide whether his manner was overbearing or whining, whether he was threatening them or pleading for their help.

"Fact is," said Mr. Weatherby primly, in a statistical tone of voice, "that in the twelve-month period ending on the first of this year, the rate of business failures has doubled, as compared with the preceding twelve-month period. Since the first of this year, it has trebled."

"Be sure they think it's their own fault," said Dr. Ferris casually.

"Huh?" said Wesley Mouch, his eyes darting to Ferris.

"Whatever you do, don't apologize," said Dr. Ferris. "Make them feel guilty."

"I'm not apologizing!" snapped Mouch. "I'm not to blame. I need wider powers."

"But it *is* their own fault," said Eugene Lawson, turning aggressively to Dr. Ferris. "It's their lack of social spirit. They refuse to recognize that production is not a private choice, but a public duty. They have no right to fail, no matter what conditions happen to come up. They've *got* to go on producing. It's a social imperative. A man's work is not a personal matter, it's a social matter. There's no such thing as a personal matter—or a personal life. *That's* what we've got to force them to learn."

"Gene Lawson knows what I'm talking about," said Dr. Ferris, with a slight smile, "even though he hasn't the faintest idea that he does."

"What do you think you mean?" asked Lawson, his voice rising.

"Skip it," ordered Wesley Mouch.

"I don't care what you decide to do, Wesley," said Mr. Thompson, "and I don't care if the businessmen squawk about it. Just be sure you've got the press with you. Be damn sure about that."

"I've got 'em," said Mouch.

"One editor who'd open his trap at the wrong time could do us more harm than ten disgruntled millionaires."

"That's true, Mr. Thompson," said Dr. Ferris. "But can you name one editor who knows it?"

"Guess not," said Thompson; he sounded pleased.

"Whatever type of men we're counting on and planning for," said Dr. Ferris, "there's a certain old-fashioned quotation which we may safely forget: the one about counting on the wise and the honest. We don't have to consider them. They're out of date."

James Taggart glanced at the window. There were patches of blue in the sky above the spacious streets of Washington, the faint blue of mid-April, and a few beams breaking through the clouds. A monument stood shining in the distance, hit by a ray of sun: it was a tall, white obelisk, erected to the memory of the man Dr. Ferris was quoting, the man in whose honor this city had been named. James Taggart looked away.

"I don't like the professor's remarks," said Lawson loudly and sullenly.

"Keep still," said Wesley Mouch. "Dr. Ferris is not talking theory, but practice."

"Well, if you want to talk practice," said Fred Kinnan, "then let me tell you that we can't worry about businessmen at a time like this. What we've got to think about is jobs. More jobs for the people. In my unions, every man who's working is feeding five who aren't, not counting his own pack of starving relatives. If you want my advice—oh, I know you won't go for it, but it's just a thought—issue a directive making it compulsory to add, say, one-third more men to every payroll in the country."

"Good God!" yelled Taggart. "Are you crazy? We can barely meet our payrolls as it is! There's not enough work for the men we've got now! One-third more? We wouldn't have any use for them whatever!"