

the naked, twisted, mindless figure of the human Incompetent. This is the new ideal, the goal to aim at, the purpose to live for, and all men are to be rewarded according to how close they approach it. This is the age of the common man, they tell us—a title which any man may claim to the extent of such distinction as he has managed not to achieve. He will rise to a rank of nobility by means of the effort he has failed to make, he will be honored for such virtue as he has not displayed, and he will be paid for the goods which he did not produce. But we—we, who must atone for the guilt of ability—we will work to support him as he orders, with his pleasure as our only reward. Since we have the most to contribute, we will have the least to say. Since we have the better capacity to think, we will not be permitted a thought of our own. Since we have the judgment to act, we will not be permitted an action of our choice. We will work under directives and controls, issued by those who are incapable of working. They will dispose of our energy, because they have none to offer, and of our product, because they can't produce. Do you say that this is impossible, that it cannot be made to work? They know it, but it is you who don't—and they are counting on you not to know it. They are counting on you to go on, to work to the limit of the inhuman and to feed them while you last—and when you collapse, there will be another victim starting out and feeding them, while struggling to survive—and the span of each succeeding victim will be shorter, and while you'll die to leave them a railroad, your last descendant-in-spirit will die to leave them a loaf of bread. This does not worry the looters of the moment. Their plan—like all the plans of all the royal looters of the past—is only that the loot shall last their lifetime. It has always lasted before, because in one generation they could not run out of victims. But this time—*it will not last*. The victims are on strike. We are on strike against martyrdom—and against the moral code that demands it. We are on strike against those who believe that one man must exist for the sake of another. We are on strike against the morality of cannibals, be it practiced in body or in spirit. We will not deal with men on any terms but ours—and our terms are a moral code which holds that man is an end in himself and not the means to any end of others. We do not seek to force our code upon them. They are free to believe what they please. But, for once, they will have to believe it and to exist—without our help. And, once and for all, they will learn the meaning of their creed. That creed has lasted for centuries solely by the sanction of the victims—by means of the victims' acceptance of punishment for breaking a code impossible to practice. But that code was intended to be broken. It is a code that thrives not on those who observe it, but on those who don't, a morality kept in existence not by virtue of its saints, but by the grace of its sinners. We have decided not to be sinners any longer. We have ceased breaking that moral code. We shall blast it out of existence forever by the one method that it can't withstand: by obeying it. We are obeying it. We are complying. In dealing with our fellow men, we are observing their code of values to the letter and sparing them all the evils they denounce. The mind is evil? We have withdrawn the works of our

minds from society, and not a single idea of ours is to be known or used by men. Ability is a selfish evil that leaves no chance to those who are less able? We have withdrawn from the competition and left all chances open to incompetents. The pursuit of wealth is greed, the root of all evil? We do not seek to make fortunes any longer. It is evil to earn more than one's bare sustenance? We take nothing but the lowliest jobs and we produce, by the effort of our muscles, no more than we consume for our immediate needs—with not a penny nor an inventive thought left over to harm the world. It is evil to succeed, since success is made by the strong at the expense of the weak? We have ceased burdening the weak with our ambition and have left them free to prosper without us. It is evil to be an employer? We have no employment to offer. It is evil to own property? We own nothing. It is evil to enjoy one's existence in this world? There is no form of enjoyment that we seek from their world, and—this was hardest for us to attain—what we now feel for their world is that emotion which they preach as an ideal: Indifference—the blank—the zero—the mark of death. . . . We are giving men everything they've professed to want and to seek as virtue for centuries. Now let them see whether they want it."

"It was you who started this strike?" she asked.

"I did."

He got up, he stood, hands in pockets, his face in the light—and she saw him smile with the easy, effortless, implacable amusement of certainty.

"We've heard so much about strikes," he said, "and about the dependence of the uncommon man upon the common. We've heard it shouted that the industrialist is a parasite, that his workers support him, create his wealth, make his luxury possible—and what would happen to him if they walked out? Very well I propose to show to the world who depends on whom, who supports whom, who is the source of wealth, who makes whose livelihood possible and what happens to whom when who walks out."

The windows were now sheets of darkness, reflecting the dots of lighted cigarettes. He picked a cigarette from a table beside him, and in the flare of a match she saw the brief sparkle of gold, the dollar sign, between his fingers.

"I quit and joined him and went on strike," said Hugh Akston, "because I could not share my profession with men who claim that qualification of an intellectual consists of denying the existence of the intellect. People would not employ a plumber who'd attempt to prove his professional excellence by asserting that there's no such thing as plumbing—but, apparently, the same standards of caution are not considered necessary in regard to philosophers. I learned from my own pupil, however, that it was I who made this possible. When thinkers accept those who deny the existence of thinking, as fellow thinkers of a different school of thought—it is they who achieve the destruction of the mind. They grant the enemy's basic premise, thus granting the sanction of reason to formal dementia. A basic premise is an absolute that permits no co-operation with its antithesis and tolerates no tolerance. In the same manner and for