"Who cares whether you'd have any use for them?" said Fred Kinnan. "They need jobs. That's what comes first—*need*—doesn't it?—not your profits."

"It's not a question of profits!" yelled Taggart hastily. "I haven't said anything about profits. I haven't given you any grounds to insult me. It's just a question of where in hell we'd get the money to pay your men—when half our trains are running empty and there's not enough freight to fill a trolley car." His voice slowed down suddenly to a tone of cautious thoughtfulness: "However, we do understand the plight of the working men, and—it's just a thought—we could, perhaps, take on a certain extra number, if we were permitted to double our freight rates, which—"

"Have you lost your mind?" yelled Orren Boyle. "I'm going broke on the rates you're charging now, I shudder every time a damn boxcar pulls in or out of the mills, they're bleeding me to death, I can't afford it—and you want to *double* it?"

"It is not essential whether you can afford it or not," said Taggart coldly. "You have to be prepared to make some sacrifices. The public needs railroads. Need comes first—above your profits."

"What profits?" yelled Orren Boyle. "When did I ever make any profits? Nobody can accuse me of running a profit-making business! Just look at my balance sheet—and then look at the books of a certain competitor of mine, who's got all the customers, all the raw materials, all the technical advantages and a monopoly on secret formulas—then tell me who's the profiteer! . . . But, of course, the public does need railroads, and perhaps I could manage to absorb a certain raise in rates, if I were to get—it's just a thought—if I were to get a subsidy to carry me over the next year or two, until I catch my stride and—"

"What? Again?" yelled Mr. Weatherby, losing his primness. "How many loans have you got from us and how many extensions, suspensions and moratoriums? You haven't repaid a penny—and with all of you boys going broke and the tax receipts crashing, where do you expect us to get the money to hand you a subsidy?"

"There are people who aren't broke," said Boyle slowly. "You boys have no excuse for permitting all that need and misery to spread through the country—so long as there are people who aren't broke."

"I can't help it!" yelled Wesley Mouch. "I can't do anything about it! I need wider powers!"

They could not tell what had prompted Mr. Thompson to attend this particular conference. He had said little, but had listened with interest. It seemed as if there was something which he had wanted to learn, and now he looked as if he had learned it. He stood up and smiled cheerfully.

"Go ahead, Wesley," he said. "Go ahead with Number 10-289. You won't have any trouble at all."

They had all risen to their feet, in gloomily reluctant deference. Wesley Mouch glanced down at his sheet of paper, then said in a petulant tone of voice, "If you want me to go ahead, you'll have to declare a state of total emergency."

"I'll declare it any time you're ready."

"There are certain difficulties, which—"

"I'll leave it to you. Work it out any way you wish. It's your job. Let me see the rough draft, tomorrow or next day, but don't bother me about the details. I've got a speech to make on the radio in half an hour."

"The chief difficulty is that I'm not sure whether the law actually grants us the power to put into effect certain provisions of Directive Number 10-289. I fear they might be open to challenge."

"Oh, hell, we've passed so many emergency laws that if you hunt through them, you're sure to dig up something that will cover it."

Mr. Thompson turned to the others with a smile of good fellowship. "I'll leave you boys to iron out the wrinkles," he said. "I appreciate your coming to Washington to help us out. Glad to have seen you."

They waited until the door closed after him, then resumed their seats; they did not look at one another.

They had not heard the text of Directive No. 10-289, but they knew what it would contain. They had known it for a long time, in that special manner which consisted of keeping secrets from oneself and leaving knowledge untranslated into words. And, by the same method, they now wished it were possible for them not to hear the words of the directive. It was to avoid moments such as this that all the complex twistings of their minds had been devised.

They wished the directive to go into effect. They wished it could be put into effect without words, so that they would not have to know that what they were doing was what it was. Nobody had ever announced that Directive No. 10-289 was the final goal of his efforts. Yet, for generations past, men had worked to make it possible, and for months past, every provision of it had been prepared for by countless speeches, articles, sermons, editorials—by purposeful voices that screamed with anger if anyone named their purpose.

"The picture now is this," said Wesley Mouch. "The economic condition of the country was better the year before last than it was last year, and last year it was better than it is at present. It's obvious that we would not be able to survive another year of the same progression. Therefore, our sole objective must now be to hold the line. To stand still in order to catch our stride. To achieve total stability. Freedom has been given a chance and has failed. Therefore, more stringent controls are necessary. Since men are unable and unwilling to solve their problems voluntarily, they must be forced to do it." He paused, picked up the sheet of paper, then added in a less formal tone of voice, "Hell, what it comes down to is that we can manage to exist as and where we are, but we can't afford to move! So we've got to stand still. We've got to stand still. We've got to make those bastards stand still!"

His head drawn into his shoulders, he was looking at them with the anger of a man declaring that the country's troubles were a personal affront to him. So many men seeking favors had been afraid of him that he now acted as if his anger were a solution to everything, as if his anger were omnipotent, as if all he had to do was to get angry. Yet, facing him, the men who sat in a silent semicircle before