

[It's pretty hard to get a job these days]

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"It's pretty hard to get a job these days," says Mr. Coburn, who has been unemployed for several months. "Of course you can go to work if you want to work for nothin'. I had a chance for a job the other day ---twenty five cents an hour, seventy hours a week. By Jeez I'd rather not work. I ain't afraid of work, but I like to get paid for it. Ten years ago they wouldn't have had the nerve to offer a man a job like that.

"But I think we're goin' to see a good year this year. I think things are goin' to boom. If this re-armament program passes, it's goin' to help out around this section. The Brass Mills will be workin' overtime. Then I think next year there's goin' to be a slump again. Presidential year. That's always bad.

"I'd like to get a crack at sellin' cars again. I made out pretty good there for a while, until business got bad. Then I went back to the store. But I couldn't get along with the manager. He's a tough guy to work for.

"I'd take another store job if I could get it, but I'd have to get more than twenty five cents an hour. You know I was manager up here once. I was one of the youngest managers they had, at the time. The district manager came in to me one day and he says, 'How'd you like to take charge of this joint?' That was just after Fenton left. I thought he was kiddin' me, but I says Okay. 'Okay,' he says, 'you're the new manager.'

"Well everything went along fine for a while, then the big slump came, and a lot of people went on relief and they began to 2 issue that scrip. We weren't allowed to take it and the other stores were, and so we began to lose business.

"He come around one day, and he started to give me hell, he says business was fallin' off every day. I says 'Listen Mister,' I says, 'You know the reason just as well as I do. Leave us take scrip and cash checks and we'll do the business again.' Well, he commenced to jaw some more about this and that.

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"I just took off my coat and apron and laid it down. I says 'Okay,' I says, 'You can have the place from now on.' He looked at me to see if I meant it, and when he see I was serious he says, 'Now wait a minute, don't get excited, let's talk this over.' So he talked me into stayin'.

"Well everything was fine for a few months more, but business didn't pick up any, things were still tough, understand, and one day he came around and started givin' me the same song and dance all over again. I didn't say a goddamn thing. I just took off the coat and apron and laid 'em on the counter and walked out. He had to put them on himself and finish out the day. The next time -----"

Mr. Coburn's monologue is interrupted by the appearance at the front door of a breathless young man who wants to know if there's "a fire extinguisher in the place."

"My car," he says, "Out in front. It's on fire."

Mr. Coburn dashes to the rear, comes back struggling manfully with a huge extinguisher, and goes out the front door, the car owner and I in his wake.

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"It's in the muffler," says the young man. He has driven his car, a large sedan, up on the sidewalk in front of the Fire House. It is giving off clouds of smoke, and little tongues of flame are licking at the underside. Mr. Coburn expertly inverts the extinguisher, applies the chemical to the blaze. It is over in a few minutes, though in the meantime a crowd has gathered.

Mr. MacCurrie, returning from his walk, hastens towards us as he scents something out of the ordinary. "What's goin' on?" he demands.

While I explain he gazes critically at Mr. Coburn and the car-owner, who are engaged in pulling burlap wrappings from around the muffler.

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“That's a silly arrangement,” says Mr. MacCurrie. After the young man has driven away, Mr. Coburn explains that the tube had been wrapped with asbestos, with the cloth added as covering.

“Even so, it's a foolish thing to do, put cloth on a pipe like that,” says Mr. MacCurrie. “Well, it's all over, we might as well go inside.”

We find that one of the members who has stopped in on his way home from work has taken possession of the afternoon paper. This is a grave disappointment to Mr. MacCurrie, but he bears up well. There is nothing for it but to look out of the windows. Mr. Coburn is re-filling the extinguisher.

“I see they pinched Red Alberg this afternoon,” says Mr. MacCurrie. “Same old thing, drunk and disturbin' the peace. I 4 wonder what it is makes some fellas act that way. I was walkin' up the Ward here a few weeks ago, and I see Alberg and that Russian fella he used to pal around with just ahead of me, roarin' drunk. Pretty soon, they stopped and both coats come off and they went at each other for all they was worth. Just then that lad that lives over beyond Darcy's come runnin' oot of the house with a camera, goin' to take a picture of it. I couldn't help laughin'. But before he could get the picture snapped they both rolled doon the bank and oot of sight.

“Well I suppose they'll give him thirty days this time. The last time they had him in for beatin' up his father; his boss paid his fine. They say he's a pretty good worker. When they were takin' him away in the car that time, the old mon followed him half way doon to the jailhouse. He was hollerin' ‘My boy, my boy, let him go, let him go.’ Human nature is a very peculiar thing.

“What do you think of them callin' in the Mayor of Hartford on that McKesson and Robbins case. Do you suppose they've got anything on him? Then goddom politicians. I see they've

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in-dickted some lad up in Burlington, tax collector or somethin' o' that kind, for a shortage of sixteen thousand dollars...”

Mr. MacCurrie casts a wistful glance in the direction of the newspaper. The member, Mr. Norton, is holding it so that the front page faces us, but to Mr. MacCurrie, without his glasses, the glaring headlines are a meaningless blur. He sighs and turns again to the window.

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“Look at that kid. She couldn't go around that puddle now. She had to splash right through it, and get wet up to the knees. Well, it's the happiest time of their life, goddom it, let them go to it.

“I see Baldwin wants to do away with the automobile inspections. Do you think they do any good? It's my belief its just a goddom big what they call racket to give their friends jobs. You know the more jobs they can give oot, the more votes they can get. Has it cut doon the accidents any? I don't think it has.

“Why don't they make a study of what causes accidents, if they want to do some real good? Find oot what percentage of them is caused by mechanical defects. I think they'll find oot most of them is caused by booze. What good are automobile inspections for that?”

Mr. Norton has laid down the paper at last, and Mr. MacCurrie heads for it with alacrity. “Let's see what's doin' today,” he says, with a backward glance. He retires to his favorite corner with the paper, where he will remain, absolutely incommunicado, in a manner of speaking, until supper time.