

Thoughts About Forty Cents

By Moishe Nadir

With the fish course, my wife also served me a bit of news about a town called Roosevelt, where they had shot into a crowd of strikers without any rhyme or reason. I felt my blood begin to boil, seethe, spill over. Picking carefully at the bones of my carp, I chewed the delicious fish and talked to myself.

"Those vile capitalists! We ought to twist their heads off! Such swinish cannibals! Such cannibalistic swine!"

When my wife handed me the plate of soup, and I saw amidst the noodles the kind of marrow bone I love to chew on, my wrath cooled down somewhat, and blowing on the tasty soup I murmured to myself:

"Who knows, after all, which side is guilty? It's impossible that they would just go and shoot innocent people for nothing. For instance—has anyone shot at you lately?" (I said this to myself.)

This logical argument pleased me immensely and I considered myself a thoughtful individual, a wise man, a radical thinker, and so on.

When my wife brought the meat to the table and I saw the two chicken wings and a sweet chicken-liver and a splendid chicken-leg—I began to see the situation in a completely new light. Munching on the white wing and washing it down with a glass of good wine, I began to see that the whole thing was not so terrible as it had appeared during the fish course, and that you have to give the other side a chance to tell its story, too.

"Who knows!" I asked myself as I chewed on the chicken leg. "Who knows whether these strikers aren't



really dangerous? And why (I thought further) should poor people strike anyway? Who asked them to? If the Law (I said) ordered them to strike, well, that would be a different story. But as long as the Law allows you to live on a dollar-and-sixty-cents a day, and doesn't bother you—then why should you go out and strike for a lousy 40 pennies a day? Really! It's ridiculous!"

When my wife brought me the wonderful apple compote and a piece of fresh strudel, I took another look at the piece of news about the shooting of the strikers in the town of Roosevelt, and sipping the last of my Turkish demitasse, I said to myself (and I could feel my blood starting to boil again):

"What the hell is matter with those strikers, anyway! What are they making such a fuss about! They must have exactly \$2 a day? In the first place, how do they know the bosses can afford \$2 a day? Maybe they don't have it. Maybe they don't want to. Maybe they don't have any time to bother with the whole thing.

"And in the second place, if they **do** go out on strike—why **not** shoot them? If (I said to myself as I cleaned my teeth with a toothpick) if in Europe they are shooting thousands of people who are **not** striking, then why shouldn't we here be allowed to shoot a couple dozen foolish workers who are striking for a lousy 40 cents a day? It's ridiculous, that's what it is!"

And only at this point, (when I lit up my fine Havana cigar and made myself comfortable on my soft easy-chair), did I see with brilliant clarity how silly, how trivial those workers are. For a measly 40 cents a day, to make all that commotion and even risk their necks!

I couldn't help laughing, really I couldn't. ♦

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track. He told me that this experience put an end to his Zionist convictions.

Next night Nissan was on duty in an ambush against Palestinian peasants who returned to their former plots to pick their vegetables. It was full moon and he saw an old peasant picking vegetables. His Haganah commander ordered him to shoot the peasant but he refused, saying: "I don't shoot old people." He was court-martialled and expelled from the Haganah. This also meant excommunication by his family and friends. He

could not stay in Nahalal, where he was treated as a pariah. He left Nahalal and moved to Tel Aviv, where he joined the Palestine Communist Party (which was an illegal organization). Shortly afterward, World War Two broke out and he joined the British Army.

After the war he returned to Palestine. He studied painting in the school of Avni and in the early 1950s emigrated to Paris, where he first worked as a builder and studied painting. Soon he succeeded in selling his paintings. He developed a unique technique of tearing up painted sheets to create collages. The result was neither naturalistic nor abstract, but it had an emo-

tionally coherent effect.

Nissan remained active in supporting the Palestinian struggle for independence and during the first Intifada (1987-1992) he staged an art exhibit entitled "Stones," in support of stone-throwing Palestinian peasant women.

He was a simple man, with the hands and soul of an honest, hard-working peasant. He had a strong sense of morality and the courage not to bend under pressure of majority, friends, and family, even if this cost him dearly. There are not many such people around.

Missing Nissan,
Aki Orr