

**JAMES STEELE**

# When the Snow Came

Snow!

Down it came, in soft, silent waves, settling upon the men in the Public Square in wet, chilled fragments. A man or two rose from the sparsely-occupied benches and shuffled away, but Peter Franklin merely drew his coat tighter around him, crossed his legs, and shivered. Peter would not have drawn your attention particularly, for he was an ordinary man, a worker out of work, and the hunger which the crisis had brought upon him had merely made him look like many others—it had given his naturally sharp face a lean, wolfish cast; it had made his dark eyes keen with a light which they had not known in better days. But these are so common now that they do not draw attention . . . Peter watched the men shuffle away with an indifferent gaze. Why should he get up? All he could do was to wander around the Square and look in at the gayly lighted shop windows, with their warm coats, their gleaming electrical appliances, and dear, warm bread! Or he could tramp up to Wayfarers' Lodge, where the homeless unemployed, with their dumb, hopeless faces, lined the curb. The snow was better than that. At least it was clean, and calm, and silent; yes, it even started something throbbing in his blood with its cold touch. But the faces of the men up there—they gripped Peter with fear, a kind of terror, which made him hate them. For hope was still strong within him; in them it had flickered and died months ago.

But how cold the snow was! It drifted down his neck, in his shoes—two sizes too large for him—and soon his body was taut with the cold. He wriggled about on the iron bench, vainly trying to evade the snow, but it fell relentlessly, covering him, like the crisis itself. . . . In other years it had been so different. Then he would stand by the living room window, watching the snow whirl past the street lights, watching it pile up on the streets until the sounds of men and automobiles were hushed. And he would turn away, in the strange quietness, with a sense of comfort and security and a warm glow of happiness would suffuse his spirit. He would lie down and smoke and listen to the radio and plan. . . . Or in the factory, on midnights, he could see the flakes in the reflected light of the blue mercury lamps, a dainty, unearthly hue. . . . No, two years out of work, and the snow was different. It was an enemy!

Everything, everyone, was an enemy! Once upon a time Peter had thought people could be friendly; he thought people would take care of each other; he thought no one would be allowed to go hungry if he wanted to work. He knew better now. When you have no money, when you have no job, nobody gives a damn for you. Worse, they hate you, for you are a menace, a reproach to them. . . .

This was not quite true in Peter's case, however, for his landlady in Detroit had allowed him to run up a board bill of \$50 before she said anything—and then she had done so only because her husband was laid off. It was quite impossible for her to feed her children, her husband, herself and Peter from the Welfare allowance. She had been brutal about ordering him out, to be sure, for she had hoped that Peter, seeing the situation they were in, would leave. When he didn't, her pity for him became resentment. Did he think she was going to take the bite from her children's mouths to feed him? For a week she nursed her wrath, watching for an occasion to turn him out, grumbling to herself at each mouthful of food he ate; and her anger burned the more fiercely because she felt that she was cruel and heartless in forcing him out, with no place to go and no money with which to eat. But one night he came home slightly drunk—one of his pals had stood him a drink—and within an hour he was back in the street,

his clothes bundled together in a suitcase. His other possessions he had pawned already. The next day the suitcase and clothes followed so that he might have something to eat.

That night he wandered about downtown, hungry and weary. During the day he had two cups of coffee and a bowl of soup, but when it became dark he could find no place in which to sleep. The cheap lodging-houses he avoided, for they looked dirty and the hard-boiled door-keepers frightened him. Besides, they gave you bugs, and the very thought of bed-bugs was sufficient to make Peter's flesh crawl. Once, near midnight, he went out to the City Mission, an old church out on Jefferson Avenue, quite a long walk after a day of walking about downtown. The wind was chilly, and there was a threat of rain in the sky, but when he looked inside and saw the tattered men huddled together on the hard pews he came away, despairing. He struck back through crooked, deserted streets, keeping to the shadows so that police might not see him—if they saw him he would be picked up and accused of God knows what!—and at last came to MacGregor Institute. Bad as it is, it was filled, overcrowded. The men were jammed together, young and old, diseased and clean, like chickens in a coop at market. Peter turned away with a dull pain in his head and a feeling that his body was about to go to pieces.

He went into a Greek restaurant and drank a cup of coffee. Its warmth made him drowsy, and he would have slept had not the proprietor ordered him out. So he tramped through the night, bitten by the wind, eaten by a bitterness of spirit which was new to him. . . .

Peter never forgot when his money went down. For a day and a night he fearfully worked up his courage to ask for a nickel. A man must eat, he told himself, a man must eat—but when the thought of actually begging rose before him he felt faint and shuddered at the prospect. Oh Christ, that he should have to beg! And for such a little! A bite to eat! If the people who had the money were better men than he, it would be different, perhaps. But he knew they were no better. More, he knew that many of them were not as good as he was. And yet he had to beg from them! The injustice of it! The inexplicable rottenness of it! How many times that day and night he clenched his fists and cried to God for help and poured invective on the system which forces honest, hard-working men to beg their bread!

But hunger is a hard taskmaster, and one who is not to be denied. Peter Franklin had to beg. . . .

The incident remains in his memory, burned as with an acid. It was morning, and the dark clouds piling up in the sky cast the canyons of downtown Detroit into as black a shadow as that of Detroit's jobless; and the wind which whined about them was as keen as the greed of the bankers in them. There was the Penobscot Building, the beautiful pile of stone, its fiery beacon on top, polished bronze plate across the bottom, 'Guardian Detroit Bank'. One of these plates seemed to stamp itself on Peter's mind as he slouched out from the edge of the sidewalk. 'Guardian Detroit Bank, Guardian Detroit Bank'—the words tumbled in a confused mass in his mind. The appeal which he had planned was beyond him, his throat felt dry, his lips would not move, and he felt his heart pounding, pounding. For a brief instant two eyes, grey like steel, and just as bloodless, bored into his; and then they were gone. Peter stood where he was, looking at the retreating figure, so warmly clad in a heavy overcoat, so confidently striding along. Then he saw people looking at him, and he cursed violently to prevent the tears from coursing down his cheeks. . . .

But he managed to raise enough to eat that day—two workers coming off the midnight shift at Ford's gave him a dime apiece and a young bank clerk gave him a nickel. After it was dark he in-

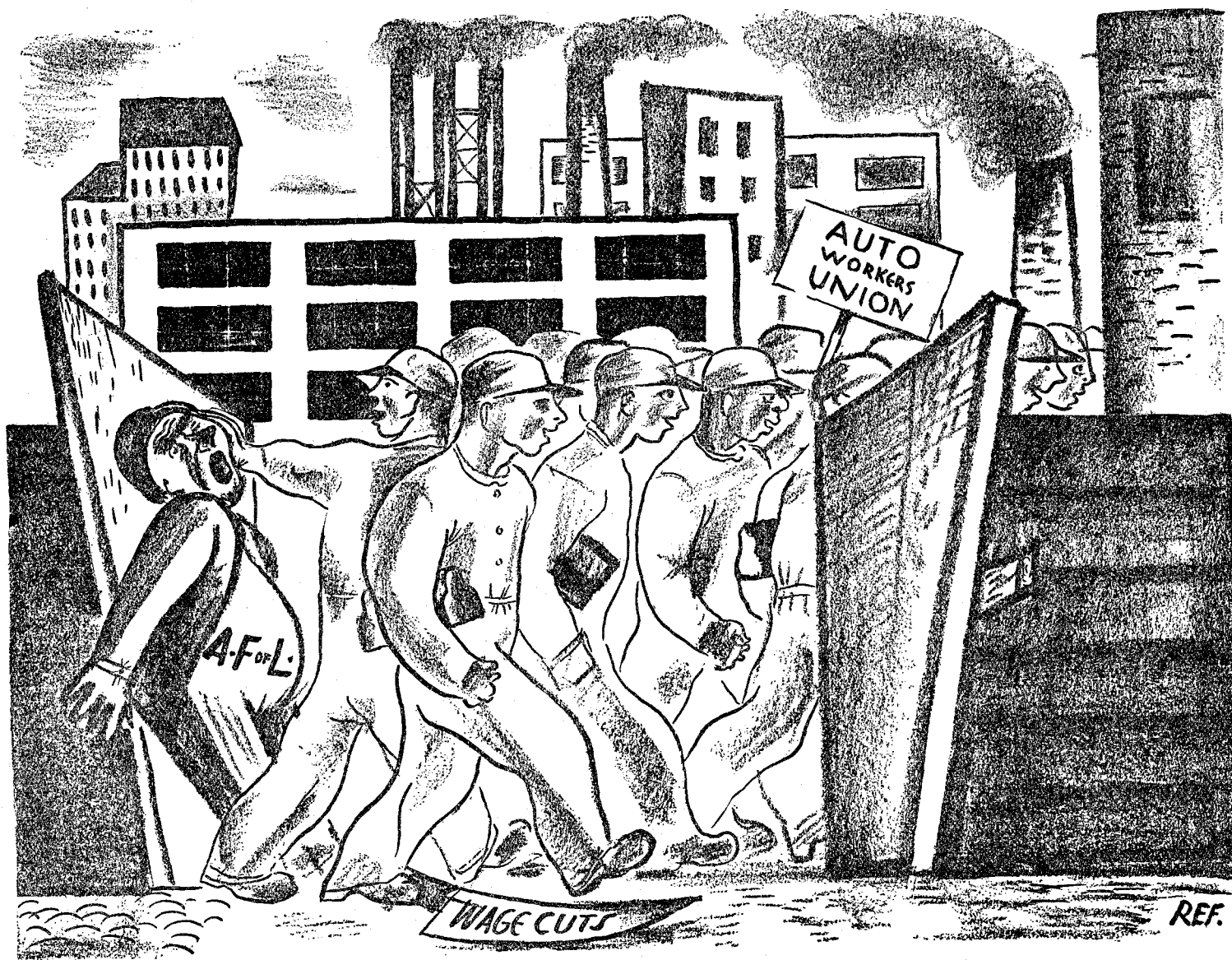
tercepted a woman who was going to work cleaning offices and he prevailed upon her to give him a quarter for a bed. So it went for a few days—and each day he raged at himself for taking money from people who were little better off than he was; each day he felt himself slipping from the world where he felt himself secure, where he was a *man*, to a world where all was insecurity and he was just a *bum*.

The Communists demonstrated. First, five hundred; then five thousand, gathered before the City Hall, demanding food and shelter for the homeless unemployed. The city yielded—an old factory was made over into a lodge for the men and the city agreed to feed them. Peter did not go to the demonstrations, for he had read that the Communists were trouble-makers; he had read they were foreigners, come over to destroy American institutions and to impose on free America the shackles of the Soviets. They were constantly stirring up trouble, and getting into fights with the police—although they themselves did not get beaten up; they left that to their followers! Such was Peter's aversion to them that when they got up to speak in Grand Circus Park he would move away. Once he did get into an argument with one of them, and the Communist, although he was far from being an accomplished Marxist, made Peter look ridiculous. . . . But when Fisher Lodge was opened after the Communists had demonstrated and dared the terror of the police in doing so, Peter

went there to stay. And when men in the lodge praised the Reds he laughed at them with a knowing smile. The mayor had promised that a lodge would be opened right along, hadn't he?

The day came when the lodge closed. It was summer, and no one cared very much. Then the city cut off its relief to the homeless unemployed, but the younger men laughed and said they could pick up something during the warm weather. The older men sighed, and allowed themselves to be sent to the county poorhouse at Eloise, to mingle with the insane and to suffer and die from decayed food. . . . But Peter did not worry much. He had developed a technique of begging—he would approach a young fellow who was out with his girl, and almost always he would get something. With what he collected this way, he ate; he slept in Grand Circus Park. Every day or so the police came along about four in the morning and took away the bodies of men—usually older men who had shrunk from the final disgrace of Eloise—who had died during the night, but that did not worry Peter. He was young, and the hope and vitality of youth were still strong in him. Things were picking up, why should he worry?

For Peter read the headlines in the newspapers, and the headlines said things were picking up. A textile mill here; a shoe factory there; a railroad shop in yet another place, were taking on men. Reports from Cleveland said that a rayon plant, a railroad shop, even an auto parts concern, were employing more men.



"SCRAM!"

Anton Refrieger



Full of hope, on a late fall morning, Peter tramped out of Detroit and before nightfall he had hitchhiked to Cleveland. . . . Had Peter been able to read charts, had he looked at the financial papers which the business men read, he would have seen that the trend of business was still downward, he would have seen that every major industry in the United States was declining to the lowest production levels in its history. But Peter read only the headlines, he believed the headlines, and he arrived in Cleveland with joy in his soul.

He did not get a job. After a week of walking he realized he couldn't get a job. If there were jobs to be gotten there would be crowds of men at the employment offices. Instead, there were only the handful of men who tramped from plant to plant because their wives made it so miserable for them at home. The newspapers lied! Oh, the callousness of it! The studied cruelty which raises men's hopes to crush them the more completely!

All the bitterness of those weary days in Detroit surged in him again—and this time there mingled with it, fury.

Fury at the remembrance of what he had gone through in Detroit. Fury at the thought of what he had to put up with in Cleveland. Sleeping at the Wayfarers' Lodge, with its icy cold showers and no nightgowns, sleeping on the bare boards while the wind made the boardings creek and came up through the cracks in the floor so that he could not sleep. Bumming nickels on the street while he kept a wary eye out for the cops. All the while hoping that he would get a job, that things were picking up! His fury shook him so that he was weak when he returned downtown, but his weakness did not shake his resolve to stay away from Wayfarers' Lodge. He would die before he returned to it, with its forced labor and its hymn singing, and the pious mouthings of its superintendents. He was through with it. To hell with their charity!

That night he found himself a room in a vacant, half-demolished old house not far from the Square, and there he stayed, supporting himself by bumming, until the snow came. . . .

The day the snow came was a bad day for him. People were not generous, and the police were unusually active. Each time he stopped at a corner a cop was upon him; no sooner would he approach a person than out of the corner of his eye he would see a blue uniform bearing down on him. Once he strayed into the Union Terminal, just to get warm, but a station cop hustled him out before the warmth touched his finger tips. With despair in his heart he flung himself onto the bench on the Square, and there he sat, alternately mourning and raging, until the snow came. . . .

A straggling procession entered the Square, and gathered around the big stone on which the speakers stood. Peter glanced at the single sign in the group. "Don't Starve—Fight!" The crowd around the speaker grew; the men on the benches got up and shuffled over. Peter got up, too. He would see if the speaker was actually going to do something for the unemployed. Everybody said they were friends of the unemployed; it was action Peter wanted. He listened rather indifferently while the speaker attacked conditions at Wayfarers' Lodge. Sure, conditions in the lodge are bad, said Peter to himself. Everybody knows that. He didn't need to be told how bad things were. What he wanted to know was what they were going to do about it! Almost before the words had shaped themselves in his mind they were out of his mouth, hot and burning, and there was silence in the crowd. Men turned to look at him, and Peter felt his face burn and his heart race away with him. As from a distance he heard the speaker, "Demonstrate . . . March . . . Demand! . . ." Words, words, thought Peter. Where was he going to sleep? How was he going to eat? Again his thoughts bespoke themselves, and this time the crowd cheered. Somewhere a voice boomed, "To the Charities!" There was another burst of cheering. The speaker smiled. "How many will go?" Five hundred hands were raised throughout the Square. . . .

Peter stood with the rest of the men outside the Charities office. He had been elected to the committee to present the demands to the officials, but he had declined, for he did not trust himself. He stood in the snow and waited, silent, paying but slight attention to the speaker on the fire hydrant. Talk is cheap, thought Peter. Anybody can talk. It's different when it comes to action. . . . From

the corner of his eye he kept watch on the mounted police, gathered together on the outskirts of the crowd. Even as he watched he could feel his heart palpitate, taking his breath away. If they should attack! The suggestion was sufficient—he could hear the hoofs clattering on the asphalt, he could feel the numbing, sickening blow of the club on the shoulder. There came to his mind the March 6 demonstration in Detroit—a man spread-eagled on the road, blood streaming from his head; a woman running, screaming, blinded with blood, pursued by a cop on horseback. . . . If the cops attacked now, he'd be caught. But he was going to stick this time. To hell with the cops! The words of the speaker drummed in on him, "Unemployed Councils. . . . Don't starve. . . . Fight!" Peter tightened his coat around the neck to keep out the snow and shot a peevish glance at the speaker. Fight! Fight! What could a bare-handed man do against the cops? "Join the Unemployed Councils! Stick together, employed and unemployed! Unite and fight!"

Out came the delegates, and there was an instant silence. One of them climbed on the fire hydrant, and there was a happy look on his face. "We won!" Shouts, clapping, whistling, drowned him out. Peter felt warm within, and he looked around to find men smiling, laughing, and there was all the happiness of human nature in their eyes. The speaker was explaining that the city would allow the homeless unemployed to occupy part of the municipal auditorium. It would be heated, and there would be no cold showers!

"But this is just a temporary victory, fellow workers," his voice called out, "If, with this small group of united workers, we can force the city to give us a place to sleep, then why can't the workers throughout the country unite and demand and get unemployment insurance at the expense of the bosses? Can we?"

"Yes." Five hundred voices roared the affirmative.

"Then let us begin. Organize into the Unemployed Councils. Unite and fight! . . ."

Peter did not hear the rest, for it seemed his head was swimming with new thoughts and his breast was filled with new feelings. He wanted to put his arms about the men beside him and shout for the joy that was in him and in them. He felt, in a queer, inarticulate way, that all the men were part of him and he part of them. . . .

"Stick together!" The speaker jumped down from the hydrant and the men fell in behind him. On to the headquarters of the Unemployed Councils! Unite and fight! With irregular step the bedraggled, ragged men, the light of hope once more gleaming in their eyes, tramped down past the Square. With them marched Peter, a new hope tugging at his heart, a new courage stirring within him.



"HERE'S TO THE NEW PRESIDENT."

Gilbert Rocke

**ASHLEY PETTIS**

# Two Worlds of Music

After a year in Europe, particularly Russia and Germany, observing music conditions in general, the conviction is forced upon me that unless a complete reorganization of the basic character of musical institutions in America is made, a realization of our musical potentialities may never be obtained. According to the latest newspaper reports, the permanent opera organizations in America are now reduced to the Metropolitan Opera of New York. One does not have to await a "post-mortem" to discover the causes of the rapidly approaching disappearance of opera from our musical life. Opera has always been a luxury in America. The large opera houses, in the days of their prosperity pathetically limited in number, have been of, by, and for, the few. Sponsored by a comparatively few rich, whose hobby they were; built around the names of a few famous stars who received prodigious salaries, with a repertoire of a few operas, opera is naturally the first of our musical institutions to succumb under the stress of economic pressure.

Opera in America, from the standpoint of works, artists and management, having in the main been imported from other countries, and retaining its "foreign" character after being transplanted, has not taken firm root in our soil, and, in spite of occasional excursions from our great metropolitan centers to Main Street, has thrived, even in prosperous times, with any degree of permanency, only in the most rarefied atmosphere. The infrequent trips of great opera organizations to the smaller cities have only served to confirm the extremely "foreign" character of opera and its lack of relation to American life.

When the Metropolitan Opera visits a typical American city of perhaps four or five hundred thousand people, probably two operas are given, *Tosca* and *Rigoletto*. *Tosca* is chosen because a famous foreign singer of great beauty is to sing the aria "Vissi d'arte," lying prone on her stomach. This extraordinary and unique feat is reported to have caused a great sensation in New York. *Rigoletto* the second choice, is sure to attract a capacity house because the most ballyhooed American singer, and the only native singer to date to make the front pages of our newspapers, is to appear. There are two facts related to our actual life in this performance of *Rigoletto*. One is that a lightning-bolt of fame has happened to strike this young American singer; the other that the ladies of the highest social set of the community are to disport their gowns and jewels during the promenade, and perhaps have a description of these published the following day in the society column of a local paper. That the majority of the selfsame ladies are witnessing *Tosca* and *Rigoletto* for the first time, has not been mentioned by those people who ascribe the tremendous growth of the popularity of opera in Russia, since the revolution, to the fact that the masses of Russia have never before had the opportunity for such cultural advantages, and are fascinated by the new bauble as a child is by a Christmas toy.

In contrast to the fact that opera in America has been reduced to the absurd, there are now more than twenty permanent opera houses operating in Soviet Russia with capacity audiences, dressed largely in working clothes; without the exploitation of "stars", the singers giving their best for the joy of work and adequate compensation, with seasons of greater length than any opera house in America has ever supported.

The performances I witnessed in Moscow, at both the Stanislavsky and Bolshoi Theatres, were of incomparable perfection and

magnificence from the standpoint of singers, ensemble, orchestra, scenic effects and costuming. The tableaux were a revelation. Incidentally, the audience arrived on time for the first curtain, gave exceptional attention, and remained for the final curtain.

The growth of the Russian Opera houses from five or six under the Czarist regime to more than twenty since the revolution affords a remarkable contrast to the story of the "rise and fall" of opera in America.

Opera in the U.S.S.R. is by no means confined to the works of Russian composers. The operatic repertoire of the leading houses is catholic and very extensive, selected from all musical epochs and countries. In addition there is opera in the various autonomous republics in the native tongues of these diverse people. This encourages the production of opera indigenous to their culture.

Radio in America is primarily an advertising medium. Consequently, the arrangement of programs, and, above all, the selection of material and performers have largely been taken out of the hands of those specially qualified to handle such important matters and have fallen to the lot of "advertising specialists." These publicity wizards are not concerned with artistic standards, but with feeling the pulse of the American public, and "giving it what it wants." Judging by the radio programs prevalent today these judges of the public taste have a very low opinion of the character of the American masses. A more charitable conclusion would be that the programs are reflective of their own tastes and mentalities, and that they judge others by themselves. However that may be, excellent artists making radio appearances are frequently required by these experts to abandon their artistic standards for the time being, and to "play down to their audiences." They are not permitted to do the thing in which they excel, but must ever lower themselves and degrade their art to meet the masses on the plane they are supposed to inhabit. It seldom seems to occur to these panderers to public taste, that such an attitude is the result of a total misconception of mass psychology, and that the history of theatrical and musical production shows that the general public rises to the occasion when artistic productions of high quality are exploited with "vim and vigor" equal to that used to "put over" the banal and the trivial.

In Soviet Russia, radio, as well as other means of education, is under state supervision and is considered of the utmost significance in the cultural development of the masses. In addition to lectures by experts on various subjects of general interest, there are musical productions of the highest character, by orchestras, choral organizations, artists of standing and by specially trained musicians from the government schools. The programs are not only devoted to the music of new Russia but to the presentation of music of all other periods and countries. The part played by the radio announcer, who receives his preliminary training in the music schools, is of the greatest importance, it being his duty to make clear the social significance of the music presented, along Marxian lines, by analyzing its relation to the epoch in which it was created. This is invariably done in non-technical language, which is the only concession made to the character of the general mind. The presentation of jazz is discouraged; it is treated as pseudo-music, of trivial character and unrelated to reality or higher aspirations.

That the masses of Russia are responding to the cultural appeal of these splendid programs is attested by the vast number of