

Drawings by Elizabeth Tazelaar for *Survey Midmonthly*

# Beer and Cards

## A Story

CHARLES ANSELL

Paul Keane set his signature to the last of the hundreds of invitations and sat back in his chair. He was tired, yet the ferment of excitement which had been growing in him during the past weeks surged more strongly than ever.

Through the office window he saw and heard the lumbering traffic as it crawled along Erie Street over the crooked ruts and loosened bricks which told of years of heavy traffic and neglect. Listlessness, decay, and indifference—that was Erie Street, thought Paul. And for forty-eight years the Garfield Institute, led by Paul's predecessors, had fought the Erie Street disease.

For almost half a century, generations of eager-faced, timid immigrants had crowded into the four stories of the brick building to learn the art and science of American citizenship. Mothers learned new ways of home-making, cooking, shopping, child-rearing. Evening discussion groups, forums, lectures, and study circles drew workmen who, in speech thick with accent and slow with hesitation, examined and reexamined war and peace, labor and industry, politics and social problems.

Scores of eager children invaded the dignified building every afternoon, shrieking their way down the long

halls and through the club rooms, where they played games and learned arts, crafts, music, dramatics.

Power-seeking politicians, bent on exploiting immigrant insecurity, had always had Garfield Institute to fight. Silas Moore, the first of the institute's directors, had stormed the City Council in 1903; Philip Sangamon had shouted in the courts until he was jailed for contempt; even Paul's immediate predecessor had led an Erie Street picket line during the devastating days of WPA.

Yet progress had been discouragingly slow. His pulse quickening, Paul thought that what these men had lacked, he would now correct. Their weakness was in making Erie Street their personal fight. Paul would not bring the fight to the people; he would bring the people to the fight. The way was clear. From now on it was to be "Operation Democracy."

As he looked at the pile of invitations on his desk, Paul thought of the past weeks which he had spent wandering among the activities of the house program, listening to discussions—listening for clues. He had strained to learn the accents in the speech of these men and had warmed at the sounds of Czechs, Italians, Poles, and Negroes in earnest talk together.

Again and again, he had found him-

self listening to a square-set man with crinkling green eyes and a full moustache. The men called him Steve, and Paul learned that his name was Stefan Janosek, a mixture of Czech and Hungarian stock. When Janosek spoke, his hand stroked the air, his eyes squinted mystically beneath bushy, graying brows, his chin jutted forward and when he finally struck the word he searched for, there was a complete flourish of hands, eyes, and moustache and a smile of relief. Then he proceeded forward in his discourse, struggling until thought and speech were at one in him.

Paul liked this man's earnest struggle with thought and language. Erie Street was Janosek, he thought—strong, slow, deeply and natively intelligent. The Janoseks needed to band together, to pool their resources, and to struggle through together.

Paul was certain that his plan would pave the way for the first step. The invitations which lay on his desk would bring all the men registered in the Garfield Institute to hear his plan of developing a democratic method of tackling Erie Street's problems.

Promptly at the time set, on the following Wednesday evening, Paul stepped to the front of the hall and called the meeting to order. All but three of those who had been invited

were present, and as they turned eagerly to him, Paul felt a moment's uneasiness at the authority his voice commanded.

"It is a great pleasure for me to meet you men," he began. His words lost the ceremonious significance he intended. The men turned to each other with broad smiles and slow nods of their heads. They congratulated each other silently for being so accepted by the new director.

"I know your loyalty and your friendship for our Garfield Institute." Again his audience responded with solemn head-shaking. Their pantomime communication, clear and without guile, shook Paul. They seemed to seize each word, probing its literal meaning; each phrase was a thought of immediate and personal concern to them. The fluency which he had prepared now left him and he stood uncertain before his audience.

"I said *our* Garfield Institute," he went on slowly, "and I mean exactly that. . . Yours and mine. . . I have not come here to control Garfield Institute, I have come here to work with you, to help build the kind of neighborhood center you and I want and need. I can not do it alone, I will need your help."

The men were plainly impressed with this frank and generous statement. They pushed forward in their chairs and listened attentively. Then Paul unfolded his plan. He called for the organization of a Garfield Council, to be composed of these men. They were to form an organization, with a constitution and by-laws, with elected officers and committees. They were to discuss problems, problems of the community, the city and the nation, as the Garfield Council, so that when decisions were reached, they carried the authority within themselves to express their decisions to whatever source they chose.

"It is not enough to talk," he concluded, "we shall have to move and to act. No progress was ever made by talk alone. Talk first and action later. . . Of course I shall be here to work with you at any point. Feel free to come to me whenever you feel you need help."

A tentative uncertainty hung over his audience for a moment, then Stefan Janosek, rose to his feet slowly, his two hands clutching the back of the chair in front of him.

"Mister Keane," he began. He pronounced the name as though he were

calling Paul to judgment. "You mean you give us . . ." and here he swept his hand in a half circle over the heads of the men, "the right to form an organization to decide how we spend our time at the Garfield Institute . . ."

Paul interrupted triumphantly. "A correction, Mr. Janosek. I do not *give* you the right. . . You *have* the right. . . Now, please, proceed . . ."

Janosek lowered his head in solemn approval. His hand remained frozen in front of him in the gesture of the half circle. "This is a fine, fine idea," he spluttered. "I, myself, am happy to hear this. I know all my friends here will try to prove they can be a Garfield Council. You will see!" He looked appealingly at the men about him and seated himself amidst a burst of enthusiastic applause.

"Good! Very good!" Paul exclaimed. "Whenever you are ready, come into my office and tell me what you have done!"

In his office again, Paul felt too excited to handle the paper work on his desk. He turned in his swivel chair in a slow, dreamy rhythm. His dream seemed to emerge out of the mists of fantasy. Plans for a strong, fighting Garfield Council raced through his mind: an independent, community newspaper, a cultural movement, a social action body. At long last the little people would rise up and in their own ways of learning and understanding they would set Erie Street to rights.

The days now passed with impatient slowness. Even as he worked with his staff to develop consumers information services for the women shoppers of Erie Street, and even as he labored over the development of advanced methods of meeting the problems of the youth on Erie Street, his mind was glued to his men and the Garfield Council.

Then, he learned from his office that a committee headed by Janosek had arranged for the use of Judson Lounge for three consecutive evenings for discussion meetings.

The librarian mentioned that the same committee drew books on parliamentary procedures. He pushed away from his mind any hints of personal regret that the committee had not looked in on him for a question or suggestion. If the men chose to struggle through this alone, that was all to the good.

On Friday evening of the week fol-

lowing his meeting with the men, Paul's secretary announced that a committee of three men waited to see him. Paul asked that they be sent in immediately. Stefan Janosek was the first to open the door. The other men followed him into the office. Paul rose from his desk and welcomed them with genuine warmth.

"Well," Paul said, "I'm very glad to see you gentlemen . . ." He was not sure that he knew what else to say. He smiled at his visitors, swinging idly in his swivel chair.

"Mister Keane," Janosek said solemnly, "Mister Leone and Mister Kowal and myself are the organization committee." His accent was crisp and he bore himself with ceremony.

Paul nodded at the two men, still smiling. Mr. Leone and Mr. Kowal moved uncomfortably in their chairs, but Janosek smacked his lips loudly and continued. "First we want to make special evenings for Garfield Council. We like to meet by Garfield Institute three nights — Monday, Wednesday and Friday."

"Good!" Paul muttered inaudibly.

"On Monday night," Janosek said, "we hold Garfield Forum. We will have speakers, maybe, to tell us about politics in America, in Europe, and many other subjects. . . Same time we learn to speak better English and learn to speak in front of people."

Mr. Leone and Mr. Kowal smiled at each other and nodded to each other graciously. Paul was terribly pleased. He swung his chair to the front of his desk and anchored his elbows on the glass top. He studied Janosek with quiet pride and felt himself warmed with emotion.

"On Wednesday night," Janosek said, "we have good idea. In Garfield Council is men from many nations—Czechs, Hungarians, Italians, Poles, sometimes Irish and even American. We talk many times about our different nations and have good times saying our Czech, our Hungarian music is prettier, more lively than Polish or even Italian. So on Wednesday nights we have nationality concerts. . . One night we have all Czech music, next week we have Italian music, and so on."

Paul was delighted. This was indeed a dream come true. America . . . and the word struck him as it had never done before. . . A land of many nations, yet a land of one nation. His mounting pleasure at Janosek's words

found him sitting at the edge of his chair.

"Then on Friday night," Janosek said, "we just want to have good time, to sit in Judson Lounge like we are in a club and just drink beer and play little cards and spend nice evening together. . . ."

Beer and cards. The words carried an obscene ring. Beer and cards in the Judson Lounge of the Garfield Institute. Beer and cards beneath the oil portrait of Mark Judson, a founder and patron of the Garfield Institute. The joy and pride which Paul had felt now seemed to drain from him. He lifted his elbows off the desk and fell back in his swivel chair in defeat and disappointment.

"Is all right?" Janosek was jubilant.

Paul pursed his lips sternly and folded his hands.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "it's all right to have a social hour. Certainly it's all right to have fellowship on Friday nights. . . . But, beer and cards! Right here in the Garfield Institute! This is hardly the place for that sort of thing, is it?"

The committee was perplexed. "Is something wrong?" Janosek asked. With a sudden, understanding smile, he raised his hand in a gesture of reassurance, "Oh, Ho! You think maybe we drink too much? We get maybe drunk, or maybe we gamble money?"

Oh, no!" Janosek cried. "Is nothing! Sunday afternoons we visit in coffee houses and play little cards. We have fun, we enjoy ourselves. . . . We do same here, we play for fun and we buy our own beer. . . . We keep lounge clean. . . . Is nothing!"

Paul wetted his parched lips and thought for a moment. This was plainly a matter for tact, and yet a matter that required directness and courage. It was a small matter to them, Paul reflected, but for him it was an issue of great import. They would be brought to understanding.

"What you men do away from the Garfield Institute is something I do not have the right to criticize. You are grown men and you have a right to do what you enjoy." Paul was calm and conceding. "But you must understand that Garfield Institute is not a coffee house! It is a place for all the people of this neighborhood . . . women and children. You can see it would not look right to drink beer and play cards in such a place, would it?"

"But only men come in evening," Janosek corrected, "and we stay only in Judson Lounge. All the men in Garfield Council say is OK, is good, fine idea. Beer and cards on Friday night for Garfield Council members in Judson Lounge. . . ." Janosek blinked his eyes and shook his head to drive away a dizziness. "Garfield Institute is,

like you say, our place, we like to make it our place. . . ." His voice grew soft and pleading. "Mister Keane, we have respect for Garfield Institute, we do not hurt Garfield with a little beer and cards on Friday night. You think so, Mister Keane?"

Paul surged with brittle impatience. It would be futile to argue policy . . . tradition . . . house atmosphere, if not downright good taste with these men. They were simply bent on forcing old and crude habits on the house. Paul would have to correct these habits. He would have to divert their need for fellowship into more wholesome channels. Meantime, he looked at the men and said.

"Think it over, gentlemen. Tell the council what I have said. I am completely happy over your plans for the forum on Monday nights and the concerts on Wednesday nights. But I must withhold my decision about your plans for Friday nights because this is a neighborhood house where women and children come during the week . . . and this is hardly the place for coffee house recreation . . ." Paul tapered off abruptly.

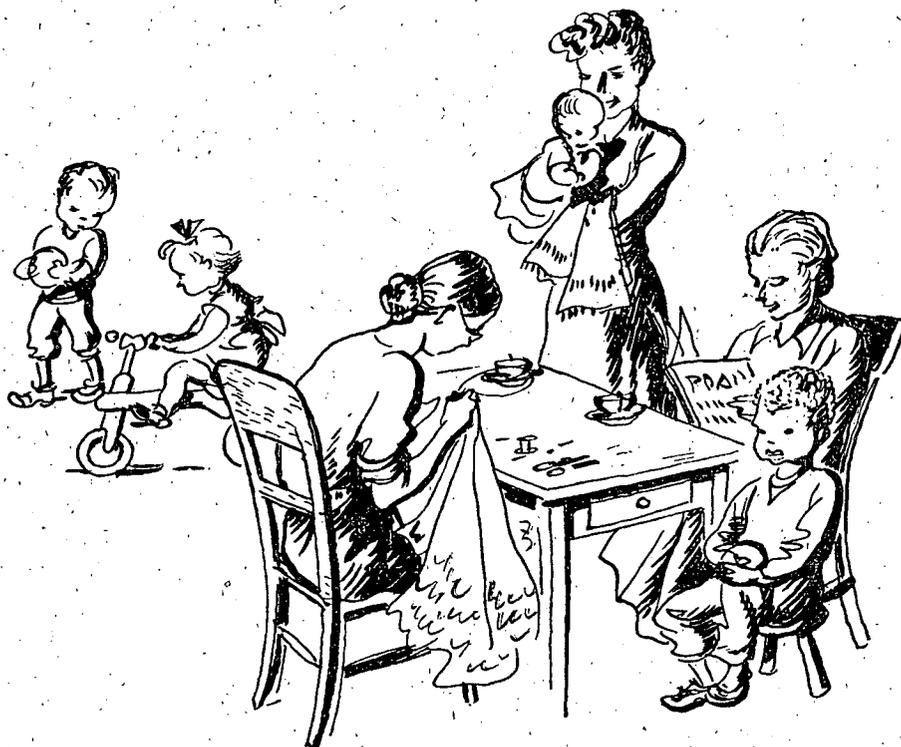
The men rose slowly and looked at each other in bewilderment. Janosek studied Paul, his face lined with distress and confusion. "You mean we cannot have Friday night for beer and cards?" he asked.

"I simply mean for you to think it over. It isn't that I object to beer and cards, it's just that I feel that Garfield Institute is not the place for it, that's all."

Janosek shrugged his shoulders and threw up his hands in a gesture of futility. "OK, Mister Keane. We tell the other men what you say, maybe we think of other idea for Friday night. . . . Maybe not . . ."

After the men left, Paul sighed and ran his fingers across his forehead. These good men had yet to learn about limits even in a democracy. Liberty, yes, but not license, Paul told himself. In the days that followed he comforted himself with visions of the committee returning to him, grinning sheepishly, explaining in halting, embarrassed phrases how they had reconsidered his views and understood now in a new light.

Again he left the men to their own deliberations, for he wanted them to think in an atmosphere free of pressures and the symbols of authority. With freedom came understanding, Paul re-



"Here mothers learned new ways of homemaking and child-rearing"

flected, and he wanted the men to understand.

Uneasily he bore the weight of impatience while the interminable period of eight evenings passed. Then Janosek and his two committee colleagues stood again in the outer office seeking to see "Mister Keane." A wave of vague apprehension swept over Paul after his secretary announced them. He felt unprepared for them.

This time Janosek held the door for his two colleagues to enter the room. When they were seated, Janosek smacked his lips, cleared his throat, and nervously smoothed the hair of his moustache with the sides of his fingers. Paul looked at Janosek, waiting expectantly.

"We tell our men what you say, Mr. Keane," Janosek began. His head shook slowly in an attitude of deep, personal regret. "But they do not agree." He looked directly at Paul and said, "First we think maybe we wrong. Beer and cards is maybe like gambling and drinking, same like sports do in tavern on River Street, but we know we not River Street drinkers and gamblers.

But we even go talk to ministers and priests to ask if is all right for workingmen to drink little beer sometimes and to play cards sometimes, but no gambling! All ministers and priests, they say drinking and gambling is bad, but if honest workingmen want maybe a little beer and play little cards, is nothing wrong, Mister Keane!" Janosek was shaking his head in violent emphasis. His upraised hand slapped his knee vigorously as he shouted the word "wrong!"

Paul was hurt. First, that these men sought corroboration from their local clergymen, as though it were completely a moral question, and also, because they had not worked it out among themselves.

"Gentlemen," he began, "let's understand one another. I appreciate your trouble in wanting, honestly, to understand my point of view, but you fail to understand, I think, that my objection is not to beer and cards as such. No, gentlemen, I do not object to that recreation. But I do say that there is such a thing as the place where that form of recreation is either proper or improper. It is just not proper at the Garfield Institute!"

The committee men now leaned over toward each other and whispered among themselves. Mr. Kowal leaned

back in his chair now and pointed his finger at Janosek. "Steve, you tell him."

Janosek rubbed his knees gently and looked at Paul helplessly.

"Mister Keane, we talk also to Judge Griswold." "Judge" Griswold, the Erie Street shyster, ward heeler for the Erie Street Political Club! The name fell as a personal attack upon



Janosek

Paul. Griswold was one of the key leeches sucking the blood out of Erie Street, a figure Paul would have to reckon with again and again. To the Garfield Institute, Griswold and Erie Street were inseparable twins, much like crime and poverty, delinquency and disease.

"Judge Griswold, he old friend to many of us, and he educated man!" Janosek wanted to sound persuasive and reasonable. "We tell him about Garfield Council, about our Monday lectures, our Wednesday concerts and our Friday beer and cards. We ask him is all right to drink little beer and play little cards. . . ."

Paul froze. Griswold was bad, always and reliably bad. He knew already what that politician would answer.

"He agree with you, Mister Keane," Janosek said earnestly. "He say you right. Garfield Institute is nice place for women and little children; Garfield Institute do fine work for children and women, but for workingmen, is not the place for workingmen. . . ."

"That's not so!" Paul broke in.

"Is so," Janosek answered gravely. "Judge Griswold, he say to our committee that Erie Street Political Club got nice, big hall with little rooms for private meeting. We can use hall or

rooms anytime, he says, beer and cards too . . ."

"You can't mean that the Garfield Council would meet there, at least not in the name of Garfield Council!"

"Oh, no!" Janosek said, "Judge Griswold he say we meet there on Friday night, free, but to call ourselves Erie Street Social Club . . ."

Paul sat erect in his chair. Surely the men would not fall into such an open, crude trap. He studied the three men, his desperation burning in his eyes.

"Of course you wouldn't do that, would you?" Paul asked.

"Sure!" Janosek said. "Judge Griswold is helping us and is helping you. Why not?"

"Helping me?"

Janosek was puzzled. "But Mister Keane, you yourself say no beer and cards in Garfield Institute. Judge Griswold he agree and he offer his place for Friday nights. He say we should meet in his hall one Monday in month. He give us lecture and discussion too . . ."

Janosek rose now. He looked at Paul Keane for approval.

"Well, we handle council all right, no? Maybe you come over to Erie Street Club this Friday; you have, you beer, yes?" Janosek chuckled in ingratiating friendship.

Paul looked at Janosek, looking for lurking evil, for ugly, sinister design, but finally turned away. Janosek was smiling in happy triumph. He had pleased Mister Keane and wanted his approval.

When the men were gone, Paul stared blankly at his desk, then slowly turned in his swivel chair and faced the windows looking out on Erie Street. The heavy Erie Street traffic was crawling slowly past the Garfield Institute. A truck overloaded with bulging, cardboard cartons bounced its baggage dangerously over the broken ruts in the street. The Erie Street trolley clanged its way slowly up the street with three young boys crouched on the outside apron of the car, hitching rides out of view of the motorman.

Across the street, women and children strolled, gazing in the window of the secondhand shop and at the limp fruit on a peddler's push cart at the curb. A drunk rested against the darkened window of the undertaker parlor, while another wove his way unsteadily through the sidewalk traffic, among the window-shopping women and the playing children.

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# THE COMMON WELFARE



## **Housing for Whom?**

With President Truman's recent decision that the housing program must be adjusted to the government's adopted policy of relaxing controls, Wilson W. Wyatt's resignation as National Housing Administrator and Expediter was inevitable, as was the subsequent adoption of the new national housing policy which the President announced on December 14. Forthwith, the President appointed Federal Housing Administrator Raymond M. Foley as Administrator of the National Housing Agency and Frank R. Creedon NHA Expediter. Mr. Foley now functions in a dual capacity.

Under new national policy, most of the previous government controls on building are swept aside and the responsibility for providing homes goes back to private enterprise unhampered by government regulations. Specifically, price ceilings on new homes for purchase, priorities and allocations of materials (with minor exceptions) and veterans' priority in home building for personal occupancy are removed. The flat \$80-a-month rental ceiling on new housing is relaxed to the extent that the builder is permitted to rent his units in a project at prices which average that amount, and finally the limit on nonresidential construction is to be materially increased.

As expected, the new program is receiving the enthusiastic approval of real estate and building interests, which had consistently assailed the previous policy as stymying building. On the other hand, opponents of the new policy are equally vocal, maintaining that while it will accelerate the building program, the new housing provided will meet only the needs of the higher income groups and leave untouched the needs of the vast majority of veterans and other American families—for whom even the previous \$80 rental and \$10,000 purchase price were too high. Private interests themselves predict high prices, offering as a substitute the so-called "filtering down" process. A spurious expedient, at best, its critics reply, and one that cannot work at all under present conditions of the housing market.

That emphasis is to be placed on the building of rental housing as opposed to housing for sale is hailed in many quarters. But desirable as that is, the cost factor still remains.

All of which in the opinion of these critics leads to one deduction. The Wagner-Ellender-Taft housing bill must be passed by the 80th Congress if the needs of the lower income groups are to be met. Although the President gave it only passing notice in this reorganization, it still has bipartisan support, since Senator Robert A. Taft has promised to reintroduce it. Only the American Legion is missing to date from the roster of organized veterans groups backing the bill. Here is a challenge to other citizens to take an active part in the campaign now being spearheaded by the National Public Housing Conference (1015 Fifteenth Street, Washington, D. C.) to assure its passage.

## **All Is Not Well**

The serious nature of the problem of veterans and American communities is indicated by the National Social Welfare Assembly's "Trend Report on Veterans' Affairs" issued in December. Here it is noted that "veterans and their families will soon comprise close to 50 percent of our population"; that as of October 31, some 13,853,000 GI's had left the armed services; that one out of every five dollars spent by the federal government in the current fiscal year will be for veterans.

A measure of the veteran's need for help from his own community is given in the "Bill of Particulars of Community Responsibility to Veterans" which the assembly prepared for the National Conference on Veterans' Affairs, held in Washington in December. According to the bill: "In October 1946, over 70 percent of the problems raised by veterans visiting Michigan community centers were of a nature that did not permit satisfactory solution merely through the services of state or federal government agencies. . . ."

The veteran's greatest worry, according to the "Trend Report," is

over "the specter of unemployment." Half of all unemployed men are veterans, and according to the Retraining and Reemployment Administration, "the percentage of unemployed veterans in the labor force is greater than two and one half times that for other civilians."

According to the report, the current "bull market" in college training indicates mass interest in getting skills that have bargaining value in a competitive labor market. On October 31, nearly 2,000,000 veterans were actually in training—1,303,013 in educational institutions and 666,332 in job training. But although American colleges are breaking all records, "hundreds of thousands of veterans had to be turned away."

The crucial importance of the local community in aiding the veteran (see "The Veteran Returns to Dayton, Ohio," *Survey Midmonthly*, July 1945) is stressed in the "Bill of Particulars." Suggestions for the community include: organizing a general committee for the whole veterans program; maintaining "a community advisory or service center . . . to act as the focal point for all local efforts."

## **For the Homeless**

After eleven months of sharp debate and a last bitter conflict on the Assembly floor, the United Nations finally agreed late on December 15, to create the International Refugee Organization. The action came none too soon, for UNRRA's life term, originally scheduled to run out December 31, had been extended for a slim ninety days in the last hours of the sixth session of the UNRRA Council on December 14. The extension will make possible the delivery of \$626,000,000 worth of relief goods held up in our ports by strikes. In the meantime, 1,000,000 refugees wait in Europe, in need of food and help with repatriation or resettlement. It will be the function of the new IRO to meet these needs. Their agenda's first important matter, however, will be to open the doors of the countries which are willing and able to give homeless people a home once more.