Dr. Lewis Andreas

MEMORIAL DAY, 1937

In 1932, he was a founding member of Chicago's first medical center: group practice and low fees. Sympathetic to labor, he found himself involved. . . .

THE WAGNER ACT had become the law—the right of labor to picket, to organize. Professionals, social workers, theological students—all kinds of people got into the thing. Some of the workers didn't like this. They must have wondered what we were doing there. But they didn't mind me, because I was a doctor and trouble was brewing.

A few days before Memorial Day, 1937, some steel workers picketed Republic Steel on the Far South Side. I received a call: "We've got a very nasty situation here. There're probably going to be some injuries. There's not a hospital for miles around, not even a drugstore. Would you come and get a few first aid stations started?"

There was a tavern called Sam's Place. I took a few supplies and got a first aid station started. The men who picketed that day got clobbered. There were a few split skulls and a few fractures. Everybody got mad and then decided to try it again on Memorial Day.*

It was a holiday, so we had them from Indian Harbor and Gary and all kinds of places. Some were looking for trouble, but for many it was simply a family picnic sort of thing: little kids, people dressed up in their Sunday shirts. Many came just for the fun of it; they weren't expecting anything.

The police were standing in line in front of Republic Steel, quite a distance from the others. It was a hell of a hot day, about ninety. They had their winter uniforms on. The sun was strong, and all I could see were their stars glittering.

The people began wandering out. A long line. This was a mixed bunch. Some of them may have been planning to use the sticks they were holding the signs on for other purposes, for clobbering somebody. Nobody was armed. But the police got the idea these people were armed. At least, they were told so by Captain Mooney and Lieutenant Kilroy, who were managing this thing. Mayor Kelly was out of town.

I stayed behind. All of a sudden, I heard some popping going on and a blue haze began rising. I said: My God, tear gas. What do you do for that? I couldn't remember what the medical books said. I ran back to Sam's

* The circumstances of the Republic Steel Massacre were recreated by Meyer Levin in *Citizens*, a novel in which Dr. Andreas is the principal character.

Place. About three minutes later, they started bringing in the wounded, shot. There were about fifty shot. Ten of them died. One little boy was shot in the heel. I took care of him. One woman was shot in the arm. They were lying there, bleeding bullet wounds in the belly, in the leg and all over. All sorts of fractures, lacerations. . . . I had absolutely no preparation at all for this. I was there alone, except for one guy sent by the Party. He tried to take over.

The Communists didn't like the idea. I seemed to be doing what they wanted to be doing. I had no sympathy with them, I couldn't get along with them. I couldn't tolerate their dogmatism, their lack of tolerance and worst of all, their lack of humor. They were so grim. I couldn't understand this blind business of apologizing for everything—for all the Russian business. That I couldn't swallow.

We all wanted a better society, but I didn't want to deal with these boys, and they kind of resented my intrusion into their business. One of them helped me a little bit, but I was practically alone.

I jumped on a chair and said: Get all the gun shots out of here right away to the nearest hospital. I can't handle them. Some of them had been taken to Bridewell and to other hospitals by the police.

Were many shot in the back?

I made charts of these gun shots. A great majority of them were shot from behind. Mel Coughlin, the assistant state's attorney, asked me, "Can you define the back?" In the courtroom, I just got up and turned around and said, "What you're looking at now—that's the back."

What happened was this: There were a few rocks thrown at the police when the shooting started. Or even before. They all turned and ran. I said in my testimony before the La Follette Committee: like the shutters of a Venetian blind. As they were running, the police shot into them.

The police weren't all bad. Some of them quit the force because of the incident. They couldn't stand what happened. I know this as a fact because some of the guys came up here as patients and told me.

There was a break in the trial at the Criminal Court. I had been testifying. I went out for a smoke. There were about sixty cops in the corridor, and I was nervous. Some big guy comes up to me and I thought: Oh-oh, here it comes. I prepare myself for the blow. He came up very close and said, "Every day I get a pain up here in my stomach. What do you think it is, Doc?" (Laughs.) I wasn't hostile to all these guys. They committed a brutal act. They were told to do this thing. They were told these people were armed. They were scared, they were trembling and they were shooting, at whom they didn't know.

Mayor Kelly tried to get me, when he heard about this. I had an excited call from Wesley Hospital: There are people going all over your records. What's the matter? I said, "They're trying to find out how many abortions

I did during the last few years." I wasn't scared. A friend of Kelly's told him to lay off, he'd be disappointed. I had a pretty clean record. He quit.

The misrepresentation in the newspapers was so great. There was a picture in the back page of the *Tribune,* for instance: a little old guy lying on the prairie in his white shirt, blood streaming down his face and Lieutenant Kilroy beating the hell out of him with his club. The caption said: "Striker Beats Up Police At Republic Steel Riot." A few of us said this will be called a historical fact some day unless we do something about it. So we decided to have a mass meeting at the Civic Opera House.

Paul Douglas was the chairman. Robert Morss Lovett* and Carl Sandburg and A. Philip Randolph came. I described the wounds and an organ was playing and almost everyone in the place was crying. Lovett got up and said, "Captain Mooney is a killer." Carl Sandburg got mesmerized by A. Philip Randolph and started chanting the words: "The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters." He didn't say a thing; he got caught up in the rhythm.†

It's the tableau I remember: people walking out on the prairie and the police shooting them down.

He recounts the struggles of his group; editorials in the AMA Journal labeling them subversive, un-American; the denial of hospital facilities. "All through the Thirties, it was difficult. We had no way of calling peoples' attention to our work, because we were opposed to advertising as much as the AMA."

In medicine, people were having a hell of a hard time. Doctors themselves were pressed, particularly the younger ones. Doctors coming out now are almost sure to find a place. The kids coming up in medicine now have absolutely no conception. You talk Depression to these boys, nonsense. They're met on all sides with delightful offers. Their biggest job is to find which piece of French pastry to choose.

In the bad days of the Depression, there was really almost nothing. Competition with the older generation was terrific. One found oneself with a lot of training, knowledge, skills, ready to spring forth on the world—no customers. They weren't going to doctors because they couldn't afford it.

The poor got some care, could go to free dispensaries. The rich got good care because they could afford it. There was this big middle class

* A professor at the University of Chicago. He was an outspoken dissenter on many issues of the day.

† I sat in the gallery that evening. During Sandburg's incantation, in which he seemed to be improvising a poem, a few of my neighbors, among whom were steel workers, became impatient: "Get goin', get goin', for Chrissake!" They were shushed by others, in shocked stage whispers: "That's Carl Sandburg. Quiet, please!" Came the response, low and hurt: "I don't give a fuck who it is, he's holdin' up the works."

that was not getting any care. The middle class got very much in the position of the poor people. . . .

The poor people would not hesitate to go to free clinics, there was no loss of self-respect for them. They were used to this business. But the middle class couldn't drag itself to that point.

People fairly well-off suddenly found themselves without funds. Insull-destroyed teachers, they were in a heck of a fix. A lot of teachers had been actively assaulted by the Insull sales force and lost all their savings. Particularly older teachers who were soon to retire. We had many teachers among our patients.

They couldn't afford to get medical care, and they couldn't bring themselves to sitting in a dispensary. They put off care until things got real bad. They probably lost their lives.

The spirit of the free hospital and the spirit of the free clinic was the spirit of the alms house. I was working at the Northwestern dispensary in '30, '31. We noticed a lady coming to us rather frequently. She'd come in a Cadillac, park three blocks away and walk over. She belonged to a class I used to call the well-dressed destitute. She had the clothes, she had the Cadillac, but she didn't have any money. She'd come over and get her care for nothing. If she had come up in the Cadillac, and the social worker saw her, she would have been excluded. People of that status would find it very difficult to accept charity.

"These simple things we stood for—group medicine and prepayment—have been achieved. I read some of the arguments for Medicare. They were almost verbatim the arguments we used thirty years ago, the same damn thing. With an innocent air of discovery they're just finding out about this stuff. This has been the habit of the AMA. They sing the praises today of what they condemned yesterday."

All of a sudden, I find myself taking care of an ex-president of a university. And there was a widow of the curator of an art museum, well-dressed, white hair, genteel. We were surprised. The kind of people we expected to find were the dispensary-goers. . . . It was a mixture of people, with one common denominator: difficulty in paying their medical bills.

And people starved on the street and on streetcars. I knew a resident at People's Hospital. Every day, he told me, somebody would faint on a streetcar. They'd bring him in, and they wouldn't ask any questions. They'd look the patient over briefly. The picture was familiar, they knew what it was. Hunger. When he regained consciousness, they'd give him something to eat. People were flopping on the streets from hunger.

They would just sit there. This was a kind of incoherent, senseless structure we were facing. Some of us figured it was collapsing. We decided

we were gonna reconstruct the thing. This was sort of unique medical care in the new society. We were kidding around, really. Chewing the rag.

But there *was* a feeling of creativeness. We belonged to a thing called New America. Our outlook was socialism. The leadership was mostly from the Union Theological Seminary. It was up to us to create a substitute for the society that was disappearing. (Laughs.) We were arrogant, perhaps, but this was the feeling. Splendid ideas about what we could accomplish.

There was a feeling of perplexity. Unless something like the New Deal happened, people might have become violent. I remember an ominous march down Michigan Avenue one day. It was about '34. A very silent, scraggly march of the unemployed. Nobody said anything. Just a mass of people flowing down that street. In their minds, I think a point was reached: We're not gonna take it any more. I remember it particularly because of the silence. No waving of banners, no enthusiasm. An undercurrent of desperation.

It was the hopeful voice of F.D.R. that got this thing out of the swamps. He didn't have much to offer, but it was enough. He was a guy flexible enough to understand the need for experiments, for not being rigid and for making people feel there was somebody who gave a damn about them.

In the late Thirties, I'd say our society was saved again. By Hitler. Because the stopgap wasn't working, and things were sliding back. The war, in a sense, ended the Depression. It's like an incurable disease in which there is a remission. Like Hodgkin's disease. Everybody is happy, the gland gets smaller. And then the guy dies. The war stopped the second slide, which might have gone as far as violent upheaval. You see, people now undergo improvement with leukemia. They feel good, but they all die.

But there is something important about this treatment, about stopgaps: the hope that if the patient keeps on living, somebody will come up with something new. We saw this with pernicious anemia. A doctor friend had it. We kept him going for months and months with transfusions. His daughter said: Why do you guys keep this poor man living and suffering? I said: Because there's always a chance somebody will come up with something. This man died. But three months later, Murphy and Minot came out with Vitamin B_{12}. If this fellow had been kept alive with transfusions, he would probably be alive today. I'm in favor of stopgaps for a man or for a society.

Those were terrible days, remarkable days. We had achieved goals. We wanted to promote the interests of labor. Outsiders like myself and Bob Lovett and the rest felt their interests were along with ours. The Social Security Laws, Unemployment Compensation, all that was connected with the labor movement. Some of these goals—largely achieved. Today, I

think, it is much more terrible. This terrible sense of wondering how we're going to get out of things. Then, we got out. And we felt good.

My habit of life has been changed by the Depression. I'm sitting here in this office . . . these wounds are permanent. My father was a doctor, and his life's savings were in one piece of property. It was foreclosed on him by the University of Chicago, and he lost every cent he had. They simply took it away because they had the legal right to take it away. And he taught at Rush Medical College* for twelve years for nothing. (Laughs.) So there was no help from Papa any more. I had planned research work, but the Depression got me into this—I don't have too many regrets. I would have been a nice rich guy probably, with a practice . . . I would have been one of many other fellows. As it is, I'm myself, unique, as they say. (Smiles.) I have no regrets. . . .

* An adjunct of the University of Chicago at the time.