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10.9.1981.

Dear Ken,

How come a Welsh Chapel background gives you the right to spell Yiddish better than me? How come you even KNOW the REAL meaning of Mensh - entirely different from Mensch. As, no doubt, you also know blast you!

Yes, he's a real Mensh, is our Mindel. Lovely man. Unfortunately a twittering wife, whom he finally threw out of the room. Nicely, of course. After all, I'd come "to work". But she'd discovered who I was... "Not THE Carek Meyer?..." The twittering teetered until she didn't seem to know whether to heave everything quickly or gemufleest. Or both.

After which she proceeded to the pity stage of "But someone LIKE YOU... how dreadful... how can YOU be out of work?..."

To which the only answer was a brutal one. "Why not? There's three million of us, so I'm in good company." Poor Mindel sat there, not knowing what to do...

I think perhaps that was partially why I didn't immediately realise the enormity of your news when Mindel and I phoned you from his kitchen. Do forgive me! I'm Teutonically slow. BUT thorough. (As if the one makes up for t'other. It don't.)

Mindel immediately told his twittering wife about your No. One Starbon, but irony of irony, STILL bemused by the "honour" of having me in her home, this overshadowed everything we said to her. Silly cow.

Mindel lent me some fascinating books about "our period" including his precious Recker copy for me to photo-copy for myself. AND rang the next morning. Must have sat up late, going over his figures again and again. To tell me we 'd have to amend them cos. he was worried. Not sufficiently accurate.

If you wouldn't mind - let me ask a favour. Where are three men now to whom a personally inscribed copy of your book, when published, would be an enormously lovely gesture. Mindel is one, our bomb hole the second, and the Science Museum hole the third. Would be a lovely thank you for them.

And apropos thank you - what a marvellous surprise, that "plug" for me in the Authors Guild Bulletin. Bless You. A lot.

And bear with me if I'm unbearable. I'm having an emotional tangle to untable. At MY time of life? My Life! Nu!

Have a good time in the States,

Love

Carek

P.S. You won't believe this. Got a copy of the Recker book. 15 quid but in very good nick. Who told me where to get it? A Russian-speaking art book expert at Sotherby! Which is another story...

P.P.S. So a photo-copier I don't buy? You're right, of course. As usual!

P.P.P.S. Bill to come - said she darkly threatening....

Line 17 - "Jewish tailors, just off the boat and desperate for any work..." INCORRECT.

The 1911 Immigration Act VIRTUALLY stopped the influx of poor Jews of this type. HOWEVER Jewish tailors in London's East End, desperate for work and quite ready to undercut, let alone throat-cut each other to exist, were as numerous as ever in 1914. So only the reference to "pouring off the boat" needs to be omitted.

Wages

Minimum wages for workers in the men's clothing trade were introduced in 1913 for the first time, but although legally applicable and operative from 1913, hardly anybody obeyed that law. Everybody pretty well ignored it.

The following figures were culled by our friend Mick Mindel from a mass he got hold of for you, and he picked what he considers a reasonable average. There ARE no precise figures for the above reasons. Mindel thinks his examples as good as can be got in the circumstances, and he's a most responsible, meticulous and conscientious man who's spent a life time in the garment-union industry, in London's East End. Even so, his reservations about absolute accuracy make him advise you "Stick to the principle rather than quote figures."

Figures

- 1) A West End tailor in 1914 would have paid an East End Jewish tailoring sub-contractor nine old shillings for supplying him with a dozen pairs of bespeke trousers.
- 2) The East End Jewish tailoring sub-contractor would, in turn, have paid a girl machinist five old shillings for making a dozen pairs of trousers.
- 3) The girl machinist, aged 18 or over, would be paid three pence farthing an hour for a 50 hour week. It would take her one hour to make one pair of trousers, and she had to supply HER OWN sewing thread.
- 4) The girl machinist would NOT be doing such operations as cutting, pressing, or sewing on buttons. This would be done by others.
- 5) These others would also have to be paid by the East End Jewish tailoring sub-contractor, whose nine old shillings for a dozen pair of trousers, had already shrunk to four old shillings after paying his girl machinist five shillings.
- 6) It is not possible, says Mick Mindel, to be absolutely definite about the amount paid by the East End Jewish sub-contractor to the workers doing the cutting, pressing and sewing on of buttons - But Mindel thinks it safe to assume the East End Jewish sub-contractor made A CLEAR PROFIT of between one shilling six old pence and one shilling nine old pence, for a dozen pairs of trousers supplied to the West End tailor.
- 7) Mindel thinks it's too fiddly, boring and technical for you, to go into details of flies, waistbands, pockets. etc.

AND SO SAY ALL OF US! A M E N

Caren Meyer:

1. The Immigration Act of 1911 stopped Jewish immigration.
2. In 1913 laws governing wages in the men's clothing trade.
3. Girl machinists over 18 did a 50-hourweek for 3d-farthing per hour.
4. It took 30 minutes to machine a pair of trousers. That does not include pressing, cutting and sewing on of buttons
The West End tailor would be giving the Jewish tailor 9s per dozen pairs trousers. The Jewish tailor would be paying the machinist 6s6d per dozen. Leaving the Jewish tailor 2s6d, out of which he must pay for cutting, kpressing and sewing on of buttons. Assume a clear profit to the tailor of 1s6d to 1s9d per dozen.

Page 165 - first line. The word SHRAPNEL is more a Second War Language Term than a 1914 one. In 1914 a shrapnel was a spherical lead bullet from a shrapnel shell. "He'd be better off saying 'a shell or bomb fragment.' That would be more correct." (He's a scientific mole, I'm afraid, not a literary one).

Page 166 - last line first par and par five Meyer comment. Told you I can't verify bottles being returnable. My mole says he thinks it's all right. Over to you, as you seem so keen on that one.

Page 166 - last line but one Both my mole and I looked at "Thirteen large green bottles" and were a bit unhappy. Why? Not quite sure. Hackneyed? Melodramatic? Too reminiscent of that awful song? Anyway, some could have been brown....Still, this is pure impertinence. ^You're in the driving seat!

Page 167 - second line After "Bridget's kitchen bowl". MINOR POINT AND ONLY IF IT HAPPENS TO INTEREST YOU. Mole says as the two acids are mixed together, the liquid becomes warm, then hot, almost to scalding point, if touched. "A housewife would be able to bear the heat, a man wouldn't¹/₂ that hot." Unimportant, chemical-wise to mention it, unless you wish to.

Page 167 - Par Eight Beginning "Occasionally..." Mole begs you to substitute for word SMOKE the word FUME. Says it's not true smoke. DID I TELL YOU HE WAS A PURIST? "Reddish-brown fumes" would make him happy.

Page 168 - Par Seven Sentence reading "To call it unstable would be an understatement." Meyer comment:- Marked sentence long before mole saw it. YOU CAN'T DO THAT, KEN, I SAID TO MYSELF, I SAID. After that fantastic build-up which has you sweating, trembling and nerve-twitching - THE BASTARD gives you a sentence that isn't even a hand-carved cliché, let alone true irony. Leave it out, for fucking's sake, or alter it, but don't insult your readers. Interestingly enough my mole had separately, but more politely, felt the same. So we agreed to tell you. (In Meyer language).

more (but more polite)

Page 194 - 5th line from bottom "He lifted the bottle and said "Nitro". My mole, the jurist, says he thinks Feliks would have used the full name "Nitro Glycerine", adding (priggishly??) "The age of abbreviation was not in use in 1914."

AT WHICH POINT I TOLD MY MOLE HE WAS TALKING NONSENSE. Firstly Feliks isn't even English, his mother tongue being Russian. Secondly the mole didn't understand a blinding thing about drama...Thirdly, they'd all have been blown up long before he'd laboriously enunciated these five syllables. Fourthly...AT WHICH POINT MY MOLE SHUT UP.

Message from Mark Price, my mole at the Chemistry Dept. of the Science Museum, "Of course that's OK, and tell your Ken I saw his Eye of the Needle promoted all over Canada, where I've just been on holiday. Didn't realise he was that famous when I worked out those bottle prices for him...."

Page 258 - second line Shoulder-holster. Please don't, says my mole. They DID exist, but were very rare, particularly in Europe at that time. He's very unhappy at the use of that word in 1914 in London. What the police special branch had issued to them at the time was a small revolver, probably a Webley R.I.C., small but heavy, and you could say something like a small revolver "strapped under his arm." Seems fair comment to me....

General Mole comments:- Reads well! But our anarchist knows a little about bomb making but not nearly as much as he thinks. If he is to appear in any further books, he must take lessons. He is not a good risk at present. He is not being as careful as he thinks he is.

- 1) He should have cooled his acids down after mixing them for the first time.
- 2) He should have washed his Nitro Glycerine much more carefully.
- 3) He should have taken care when filling his bomb bottle to see that no Nitro Glycerine was on the bottle neck between the stopper and the bottle.

"The author does not mention how very carefully and thoroughly it is necessary to wash Nitro Glycerine, but this is all right as poorly washed Nitro Glycerine is even more unstable - just what he needs.

"The second - vase - bomb is certainly not good practice (Might not necessarily have worked) BUT it could have functioned as described, so I suggest it be left as it is."

ends Bomb Mole advice and comments