

THE OLD POWER

The old power is still here: pulling into work one morning
to find the access road to the company parking lot
jammed with men and vehicles, more cars
piling up behind, spilling out onto the main street
and down adjacent lanes, everybody arriving
from different directions to stand together
at the gate of the almost-empty lot
(just a few foremen's cars and the night shift of painters)
where five men from the company's sales and service division
on strike for more than a month now
stand with their picket signs.

Early morning dark, and a cold rain.
Five men with sheets of cardboard looped around their necks
changing feet to keep warm, drinking coffee
from the small white cups somebody brought them:
five men in a line, occasionally talking to someone else
but mostly just standing at the very edge of company property
and then a little space
and then all four hundred of us, mixed in
with our lunchpails and boots and the cars that brought us here.

Like an old myth that suddenly works: a marvelous event in a forest
that happens to you personally so that again
you can believe in what you once had clung to
and then abandoned: five sheepish men
in the rain at the end of a road
hold back our hundreds. And this is something
both of us make: they carrying the symbol out in front of us
and we agreeing. So whatever happens here
is ours.

After half an hour in the drizzle, the sky getting lighter,
not a supervisor or foreman in sight,
some of us wander off to the Lougheed Hotel for coffee.
Then, I drive home. And all the while the five men stand there
like pillars of the old power, an idea made flesh,
an idea that works. So that today, Thursday,
no one has to build a single truck

and we can take all the rest of this day in the rain for ourselves.

Published in Money and Rain: Tom Wayman Live (1975)