

## 5. THE TAKE OVER

–If we stay out, the company is going to have to shut down.

–It’s already shutting us down.

–But just look at the books. There’s no way that they can keep both plants open with the kind of sales that they’ve had in the last year.

–Now, you’re asking us to be sympathetic with management. As if they listened to us over the years on how to maintain market share.

–The whole game is rigged.

Midwest Truck Parts has served a thriving regional market. With its plant on Chicago Avenue in Chicago, Illinois, it has been a dominant player in sales. A weak economy is cited as the reason why the Chicago factory is being closed. The Milwaukee operation is going to remain open. Management has worked out a deal with the city of Milwaukee for some tax breaks. It isn’t as if Chicago wasn’t as forthcoming. The company just pitted the two city governments against each other with the eventual detriment to the Chicago plant. Milwaukee has always been paying a little less on the pretext of a smaller cost of living in that city so this has also been cited as a motivating factor.

The workers have decided to occupy the plant. They have been denied severance pay. Some of them want more. They want to find a way to keep the plant open. They also feel that they are making a stand for all workers. This is the basis of their appeal.

After the occupation occurs. CEO Rice Brennan feels that he is getting a bum rap in the press. So he shows up to talk to the workers.

–The market value of work has gone down. And you’re still expecting these exorbitant salaries. You can’t stand in the way of history!

–It’s not as if history is a real entity. It’s how we describe things in the past. And all that can change in the present.

–You’re not going to be able to alter the value of work.

–Your so-called value of work only makes the bosses richer, and the workers poorer. It’s time to put a stop to it.

–This isn’t going to change a thing. We are going to close the plant anyway.

–We take that attitude up and down the line, this is going to keep happening the same way.

–You can’t stand in the way of progress.

–That isn’t what you said when we demanded modernization of the plant. Or when we pressed for the expansion of markets.

–What are you trying to tell me?

–That you’re only interested in keeping control over the workers. Keeping us all desperate and at each other’s throats.

–I didn’t make the rules.

–You just make them worse.

–The union would have you sent you all home already. They would have negotiated an agreement.

–Based on what. You haven’t budged an inch. You’re just afraid that this is going to

spread to you other plant.

–You're over your head. A real labor organizer would be more realistic.

–We are living the reality everyday.

–That's not the same thing. Your demands need some kind of evidence to support you claims.

–Costs have gone up. And wages here never kept pace.

–Either have sales. Your price analysis is also inaccurate. If you track a more realistic basket of good, prices have gone down. There's Wal-Mart and Target. Even Trader Joe's if you're a bit a freak. All these places where you can find some bargains. A little belt-tightening during tough times is good for personal discipline.

–You're the one who's closing this plant.

–It's our only choice with the present market.

–We should have some input on the decision.

–We just need you to do your jobs. We have to keep track of the money.

–The organized theft.

–We take the risk. We raise the capital. We skimp and save just so we can make this a reality.

–But it's our toil that keeps the plant in operation day in and day out.

–And you've been paid well for your work. It's not our fault if you can't save for a rainy day.

–You can't save if you don't have enough for basic necessities.

–Big screen TV's and new SUV's.

–Food and rent. All costs that are going up.

–You can't eat at nice restaurants and expect to save any money.

–That's a total exaggeration.

–Compromise is of the essence of the American system. It is a way that people with different points of view can share their opinion.

–You're not looking for any consensus. You've already decided to shut down the company.

–So what can you do about it now?

–We can make this an example. We can do the only courageous thing left us.

–So what.

–You're the one who is asking for compromise. For you that only means one thing. We stop our protest. We leave here.

–We can't economically support two plants making the same thing.

–That isn't what you said when you offered us jobs.

–The market was different.

–The market changed because people like you were playing with our future. That's all that you've done. You found a way to make money at our expense. You banked it all. Now we're a liability.

–It was my money in the first place.

–But it was our time. There was no compromise here. You never nurtured the market.

–We made truck parts.

–And part aren't needed anymore? That's bull shit. You used our work as a platform so that you could cut another deal.

–That isn't what happened.

–If it wasn't for us, you would have never been a part of any market. Your investment would have been worth what it was when it started. You stole value from us. Then you found a convenient way to skim that money and close the plant.

–I'm facing competition that I never did before.

–Now you're ready to enact smart business practices. It's not as if you didn't see this coming. You could have invested your money better. But you took it as a profit. And now you're ready to take us.

–Whine away.

–It's not whining. We have the facts behind us. Whining is crying without any real content to support your complaint. That is your tactic.

–I had the plant built. I helped expand the market for our products. And I am taking the hit in the market.

–You are simply setting things up to make loads of money at our expense in the future. Reduce the amount that you pay all of us, and then come roaring back all at your benefit in the future. We are assuming the cost. And you are getting off scot-free.

–That's not how the accounting works at all. In a lean period, I take on all the losses.

–All you businesses conspire together to create lean times. It a trick so that you never have to pay us what we deserve.

–I can only pay you a percentage of sales. And sales are down.

–Because you've rigged the market to maximize profits.

–I can't create sales where there are none.

–But that's what you've done all along to make money. Only now you need to find some way to lessen the amount that we're earning. You have the perfect method. You're riding the wave the same way that your friends ride the wave.

–Don't you have something more pressing to occupy your time. Like looking for new jobs. I never promised that this would be forever.

–And you got into the business to intentionally lose money.

–I'm just hanging on.

–You're still the leader in selling truck parts. And you're acting as if that's going to go away.

–It just might.

–The hauling records are brimming. If sales in general are down as you maintain, then there is going to be a need to keep the present fleet of trucks on the road. More reason that our product is in demand. Our work is still needed. For you, you just want to find some way that you don't have to pay us.

–I can't give you money if you're not working.

–You're not letting us work.

–We've been putting too much product on the market. We have to cut back to realistic levels.

–We don't believe you.

–I can show you the numbers.

–Numbers that you've manipulated to create the present situation.

–We're in the midst of a recession.

–Because investors have been milking companies of their real values.

–Our real value is what we produce.

–It always has been. But you've been selling off bits and pieces of that to make yourself more money. Your wealth is way beyond the value that you've created with this business. Because you've taken the earnings to further enrich yourself. You may feign hurt with one portion of your empire. But you've been smart in this game. But we're on to you.

–I've given back everything that I needed to make this business go.

–Since we're no longer the profit-making arm of your empire, you can let us go.

–I have to use professional accounting methods to make my decision.

–Go for it! You've discovered a host of ways to skim off money from this operation.

You've cornered us into a position of limited earnings. And now this.

–I'm doing what's best for all of you. I'm offering you the opportunity to go elsewhere.

We're never going to approach the sales figures of the past.

–We don't know that for sure. In fact, you have every reason to return this portion of the company to profitability with us gone. If things are as you say they are, you could have seen this coming. You could have made decisions with our interest at heart. But you rammed through your vision of things so that you could put the most money in your pocket.

–You were always paid a competitive wage.

–We were always paid next to nothing. You built this company on exploitation.

–Words, words. I gave you guys jobs when there were none. For some of you, this was your only opportunity.

–The only person that you are convincing is yourself.

–I have been prudent with my money. I have worked to balance the books. I always limited my personal compensation. I have put most of the money back in the business. I haven't been extravagant.

–Not as far as you're concerned. But you're not hurting.

–I may have to completely close the company. I'm doing what I can to save the remaining jobs.

–That's your way of seeing it.

–You've all benefitted during the good times. But the good times have come to an end.

–Said like a true fox.

Brennan has been doing everything that he can to save face. Even his visit to the factory is part of a public relations ploy. He knows that he can bide his time. The problem can just go away. And the plant can be finally closed to meet his desires. Everyone can identify with the predicament of the workers. But it's harder to follow the intricate details of accounting that have benefitted Brennan in the long run. And it is more difficult to enlighten the public about these kinds of operations. In the present state of the economy, many companies are failing. Brennan needs to cast his lot with these unfortunate souls. On the other hand, there are many whose billions remain untouched. They hedge their bets in weak economy by using the conditions to drive down wages. They spread the misery until the breaking point. This only increases the

value of their investments. Brennan is still a small time player. But he has been good at playing his money even if it jeopardizes his initial investment. Loss is all part of the game. He has learned how to milk every asset to his benefit.

Brennan's basic argument seem unimpeachable. Labor has been reduced to a value. And it can be traded like anything on the market. In real terms, he still needs the workers at his Milwaukee plant. So there is a tangible basis for his reasoning. The Chicago plant also see this as his breaking point. He relies on keeping the workers opposed to each other. But Milwaukee will one day suffer the same fate as Chicago. He will find a cheaper labor market. And all the concessions by the workers in Milwaukee will have been for nought.

Through it all, it will appear as if work is less and less part of the equation. As if the Brennans of the world are the ones creating the value. If the public accepts this version of things, maybe it too can become part of the ascending spiral. After all, who wants to end up like the workers of the Chicago plant.

–A lot of good we're going to do now.

–We still have our dignity.

–You can't take that to the bank.

–Brennan still hasn't made an offer.

–And he won't. He's waiting for us to go home.

–His argument convinced nobody.

–He's going to close the plant no matter what.

–And he'll always find someone to work for less.

–But it's not as if work is really losing its value. We're just getting a smaller and smaller cut of the pie. The pie's still pretty big. And we're the ones who are really putting it together.

–Workers of the world unite and all that crap. That's just idealistic nonsense. It's every plant for itself.

–And every worker for himself? We're taking a stand that goes way beyond Chicago Avenue.

–Said like a true socialist.

–I'm not arguing about abstract politics. That's for the universities to worry about. I'm just trying to put two and two together. He's made his money off of our labor. And now he's giving us the shaft.

–We need to be smart about this. He has. He's leveraged this market against us. He's used his profits to insulate himself. He's not going to suffer when he closes this plant. In a few years, he'll make more money off the industry. And in the meantime, he's put all his money in some other business. We don't have that same option. He's pretending that we're on an equal playing field. Just helpless investors like him. Every year we have less and less money to meet our living expenses.

–All those ideas are great. But it won't help us one bit.

–It's not going to help us to give up on the struggle.

–No one's giving up. I'm just advising you all to be realistic.

–Brennan's realism got us in this predicament in the first place.

–We're all just pawns on this chess board.

–We work together, and he can't match our strength.

- We?
- Has anyone contacted the Milwaukee plant.
- My cousin works there. She said that they’re behind us. But they don’t want to lose their jobs.
- There has even been some talk about closing both plants.
- His transportation costs are pretty low. He can do rail with a lot of his big orders. He’s not going to ship the operation out of the country.
- It’s a lot harder with this kind of regional operation to do that. And his clientele is limited to the region. Let’s say that he expanded out West. All that could be more economical. But he’s not yet in a position to expand.
- He will be after all this is over.
- That is how he’s trying to position himself.
- So all his talk about a dwindling market share is malarkey.
- He’s always had his competition on the run. He’s a crafty son of bitch. He always seems as if he’s under siege.
- The center-piece to his strategy is closing this plant. Then he’ll intimidate Milwaukee into taking a wage cut. Once that is done, he’ll have the blue print to expand.
- Or he can just take the money and run. The company will still be undervalued. He can wait it out and sell it all for a huge profit, and invest all his money. It will be brilliant.
- For him.
- Here we are locked in this shit hole.
- A good thing that he doesn’t call the cops.
- I don’t think the police want to get involved in this one.
- They’re having more fun busting kids these days.
- Everyone laughs.
- He’s had all the bad press that he can deal with.
- If he calls in the cops, he will have a sympathy strike in Milwaukee. Until that point, they are acting overly cautious.
- There isn’t a union in Milwaukee any more than here.
- No, but they see our example.
- If we had a union, they’d probably do what he said they would. They’d tell us to shut it down so they could stay in power in Milwaukee.
- But we’ve done the right thing here. We’re working together. And it’s the kind of demonstration that Milwaukee needs.
- Maybe it would be better if the police were called. It would radicalize them in Milwaukee.
- They can’t just be reactionary. They have to plan their response. Brennan plans every move.
- If we leave, that will be the end of the issue.
- It depends how long that we hold on.
- How much is severance going to cost him? He takes the loss, he closes the plant, and we’re forgotten about. The heros of the moment.
- So we’re fighting for something more than ourselves.

- That’s one way of putting it.
- So we have to stand tall.
- Ha, ha!
- What are we fighting for?
- Recognition of our plight. The realization that the working person has been turned into the enemy. And we’re not going to take it anymore.
- More idealism.
- Everyone is afraid these days.
- Fear can’t lead to inaction.
- What are we doing?
- If every plant too this initiative, it could be the beginning.
- Of what? More closings.
- This is the spark. And there is much to be done. We have to make it mean something so that others can do the same.
- It’s collective action.
- This is going to make a difference at a Wal-Mart.
- Maybe not there. Or not there yet. There are other companies like ours. And the workers are starting to open their eyes.
- Our eyes have been open for quite some time. We’re just not sure what we should be doing!
- We have to see that it’s just not one plant or one company or one industry. We are all vulnerable.
- They can’t deal with mass action.
- There are loads of unemployed workers. Someone will do our job if we don’t.
- We have the skills. Training is going to slow them down. They can’t replace all of us.
- That is our strength. Our knowledge.
- But what if they just make our plant obsolete.
- Like a buggy factory!
- That has always been their strategy. To turn us into cogs so that we only fit one part of their machine. And when that part goes down for good, we’re sunk. They can use our specialization against us.
- So this is part of a whole new way of looking at work.
- Of course! Brennan has realized that all along.
- And the more that we can do, the harder it is to replace is. We become more active in the struggle. We rise up from being a part in the machine to being what controls the machine.
- More science fiction.
- These are the facts of the new world. Understanding computers. Learning about advanced forms of automation. It makes us more valuable. And it also throws a wrench into the maniacal plans of the Brennans of the world.
- All that is easier said than done.
- But it also tells us why Brennan thinks that he is the position of strength. He has done everything that he can to put us down. This is where we push back.
- He has tried to make us obsolete before the process began.

- The more educated that we are, the less that we are subject to fear.
- Brennan is going to continue to make his end run. But this only adds to our power.
- Is that why he’s resisted modernization?
- In time, he will modernize. Up until this point, he’s realized that our limitation are his strength. He’s sacrificed market share for just this reason. And when he is the position to move ahead, he will.
- This is why all the arguments about workers being made obsolete by innovation are nonsense. Sure, there is the pressure to take advantage of new techniques of production. But everything is worked out on a timetable that benefits management.
- That is where Detroit screwed up. Everything has been about breaking the unions.
- And the UAW has just played along. It bargained away its position of strength long ago so that it could get in bed with management.
- It was only inevitable that Detroit was going to lose market share, but it didn’t adapt fast enough as this would have threatened the power of management.
- And it would have made the workers more insightful in their struggle.
- So they all got led astray.
- Then it appears that they are bargaining from a position of weakness. Lower sales and less money to go around.
- Whoa! Run that by me again.
- Look at Microsoft. It has put out a shoddy product because such a strategy has always been more amenable to cornering the market. Monopoly works that way.
- The ipod could have never come from Microsoft. It never crafted a truly interactive product. It just followed the lead of other companies. And it whittled the product down to a marketable form.
- That’s not to say that Apple didn’t have its own culture of domination.
- The ipod appears to be the ideal consumer product. It has no evident working parts so it almost seems to operate by telepathy. It is the total opposite of the Detroit-made automobile where you could see all the parts. In the fifties, the average guy could practically assemble the engine in his back yard.
- You’re joking.
- You get my point!
- The revolt is no longer from the inside of the machine.
- You open up an ipod, and you can see how it all holds together.
- Integrated circuitry. A map to nowhere.
- And the worker is only snapping things in place. Or operating a machine to make it all fit.
- Our new-found weakness is also a strength.
- Except this new language often seems incomprehensible.
- And the chip-maker never sees the person who puts together the mother-board.
- And the designer of the chip seems more remote. He is the wizard for this massive deception.
- The design of the wheel conforms to the hand. The hand simply moving in empty space.
- This is too mystical for me. We make truck parts. Parts for the trucks to take the ipods



to the store.

- It's all about the parts. The part and the part of the parts.
- But we can't be ignorant about the overall process. This helps link all of us together.
- Pulling the mask off of the machine.
- That's getting harder and harder. They don't want you to pull open the hood.
- Or change your own oil.
- Or do your repairs.
- It's broken and can't be fixed.
- You can just get rid of us!

-The gall of Brennan is incredible. He begrudges us having a new car or a nice television. He has a yacht, a second home. He sends his kids to private schools and colleges. We're working. And if we buy something, it's because we've worked for it. It's the meager reward. Most of the time we're paying our kid's dental bills, or school supplies, or clothes. Just basic stuff to make ends meet.

- He paints us as greedy. Our only access to anything more is overtime.
- Maybe he's expecting us to get another job.
- It's not as if we don't do enough here.
- And every time that we compromise we Brennan, we end up losing out. We're giving up on what we gained yesterday. And he's moving forward on what he's gaining tomorrow.
- He is a crafty motherfucker.
- You have to watch how he does the numbers.
- All his arguments appear rational because he cooks the books.
- Or he sacrifices the company to save his investment.
- And it's been going up for him over the year. He holds on to all the assets.
- So why don't we start our own company.
- I don't think it's likely that we're going to get a loan.
- I can barely save as it is.
- We never get enough to get ahead.
- We shouldn't be so greedy.
- That's a joke.
- I wish that we had have wised up years ago.
- Sometimes you only learn in the trenches.
- It's one thing to learn. But who will carry on after these doors close.
- People will read about our story.
- A week from now this will be yesterday's news.
- And the same thing is happening elsewhere around the country. Workers are becoming remaindered.
- They end up as statistics.
- No one pays attention to the stars of yesteryear.
- That's why we have to do a little more right now.
- We just didn't prepare ourselves for what's happening.
- We still haven't figured out the full picture.
- Every kid has to know what we are doing. This is real education. Not the stuff that they

teach them in school.

- In Brennan's world, we cease to be part of the story.
- His kids are at private schools that extol the captains of industry.
- That make Bill Gates seem like some kind of hero.
- It's not the machines. It's the operators.
- Everyone is taught to look the other way.
- Some people see us a dinosaurs because we are too wedded to our jobs.
- They want us to give them our souls. We do. They ask for more. And then we get

devoured by the process.

- That's why we won't give in.
- Our days are numbered.
- As soon as the reporters leave, we don't have a story.
- We can't trust the reporters to tell our story.
- I feel as if we're going around in a circle.
- That's how he wants us to feel. We're freaking him out.
- And he is looking like a monster in the press.
- We'll run him out of our city on a rail.
- It's our last gasp.

Behind the scenes there is an effort to settle. Brennan is willing to pay just so that this will all go away. Milwaukee has already caught the virus. Workers are talking. But it may be too late. Brennan is going ahead with his plans to move the plant elsewhere, out of the country. And he also has buyers interested in his operations. If he can get something going in Mexico, then his investment might pay off a hundred fold. It's not as if he can move outside of his targeted market. However, he has always been a regional player. He's seeing national and international markets. He has to make sure the his investment is not damaged.

- Did you hear about how those workers took over that plant on Chicago Avenue?
- A lot of good that's going to do. He's already closed the factory.
- Those guys are a joke.
- They should quit complaining. They're lucky to have a job.
- They don't have jobs.
- That's not what I mean.
- Thank heaven, it doesn't affect us.
- We make money off of losers like that.
- We win when they lose.
- It's not so cruel. There's loads of opportunity in this city.
- And a lot of unemployment.
- We have a lot more to worry about ourselves.
- Those guys never even went to college. We live in a modern world. Things are

changing all the time.

-Hell, I lost half of the value of my portfolio. You don't see me protesting on State Street.

- I need a drink.
- It's three in the afternoon.

- What a better time to start happy hour.
- Didn't we just bail out types like that.
- It's our taxes that pay for their complaining.
- We gave them the President that they wanted. What more do they want?
- They're like everyone on TV. They want something for nothing.
- It sounds like a reality show. You lock all these guys in a factory.
- And the one who stays in there the longest gets a million dollars.
- Now that's severance pay.
- If it's going to play on TV, you want some models in there.
- If you have models, the guys got to look good as well.
- No hot girl is going to date one of those factory guys.
- It's like a basic equation.
- That's why guys like us work so hard.
- We have something to prove. We know what to do with our money.
- We invest it.
- And lose it on a bear market.
- That's not that funny.
- The market is going to roar back. We just need to get rid of rebellious types like these guys at that factory.
- They're all going to get replaced by robots in few years.
- Hey, we're going to get robots fighting wars.
- And robot police forces.
- Yes, sir!