

# What Lets Sammy Walk?

*In these unquiet days of commodity shortages, ration books and all the host of irksome, irritating, aggravating and vexatious admonitions, prohibitions, inhibitions, exhibitions, bum predictions and plain fictions inextricably associated with the economic affliction known as war, has human nature <sup>economic</sup> <sup>determining</sup> changed, or does man still seek to gratify his desires with the least exertion?*

*The answer is that it hasn't and he does. GEORGE B. BRINGMANN, assistant editor of THE FREEMAN, who is responsible for this tale, asks that he who thinks otherwise harken to the saga of rubber-legged Sammy—let him learn for himself what lets Sammy walk.*

\* Sammy is a milkman. For twenty years he has been crawling out of bed at two A.M., rain, shine or snow, so that people leading a less nocturnal and more normal existence could reach, sleepy-eyed, outside their doors to take in fresh milk for breakfast. For twenty years, day after day, he has been climbing two hundred flights of stairs on his city route—and almost at a dead run, to give the timely service his customers demanded—and to keep his job. When he was younger, and his legs didn't protest, Sammy didn't mind it too much. But twenty years of running, on schedule, like a limited train—with his legs growing more rubbery with the years—made Sammy rebellious. He didn't want to run. He never had wanted to run, not even to please the numbers of anxious mothers with infants who couldn't wait for Sammy or drink good milk from the previous day. He ran because his competitors would run and get the business if he didn't.

Of course, Sammy had developed customer goodwill and a personal following. These folks liked Sammy just as much at ten in the morning as at six. They knew he was getting old and worn. But there were always some customers on Sammy's book, new ones mostly, who couldn't be pleased entirely. Sammy ran to please them, served them first and out of turn, and kept his job. But that's over now. To save gas and rubber, the ODT decreed that all customers be served in rotation regardless of their personal convenience. Sammy lost some of his headaches to chain store trade. He breathed more easily. Still, some people demanded service "on time"—enough to make Sammy run.

How to avoid running and still satisfy the customers was the problem. Sammy solved it. On a cold, wet morning he started his rounds at six A.M., instead of three. With a sixteen-ounce package in his pocket—in place of the flashlight for which he no longer could obtain batteries anyway, Sammy began serving his route

—at a walk, as if he had a world of time. And Sammy was right. He did have the time to take his ease and walk.

When he came into Tom's Diner he was grinning. Emil, the counterman, looked at the clock over the door and then at Sammy and grinned back. "Late, ain't you? And what's the joke?"

Said Sammy: "It's a riot. Here I'm three hours late, to begin with, and gettin' later because I walk, not run. Every time somebody opens a door and looks as if they were gonna give me a sarcastic, 'Good afternoon, you're late and you'll have to do better or I quit,' I just smile at 'em. Then I put my finger to my lips and do a little whisperin'. Then I put my hand in my pocket and hand 'em four ounces of the sixteen I got cached. It works like a charm. All of a sudden like they're full of understanding for my rubber legs. They even pour me a drink. I get done at eleven instead of seven and I betcha I could have just as well got done at four this afternoon. Even Mrs. Papasrosenkelly, who has a new baby every year or so that tells her it wants the milkman to deliver milk at four-thirty, offers me eggs and coffee. Coffee, mind you!

"And all because I got a pound of butter in my pocket and spread it like salve at fifteen cents a quarter pound."

Emil grunted. "What about the customers who've been givin' you a break all along?"

"Oh, them? They get it without opening doors and askin'. I give service, brother. Service with a capital 'S'."

"IF you GOT butter. But what're you gonna do when suppose you ain't got none any more or suppose there's plenty to be got?"

"Start runnin' again. Yeh. Start runnin' again. Gimme some wheat cakes and less conversation. You make me unhappy, you and your supposin'."

*"Our high tariff policy reached out to virtually every corner of the earth and brought poverty and despair to innumerable communities. Many foreign countries which had not recovered from the shock of our tariff increases in 1921 and 1922 and which were tottering on the brink of economic and financial collapse, were pushed in by the Tariff Act of 1930."*

—SUMNER WELLES, Under-Secretary of State, U.S.A., in "The Times," London, 1-11-41.