## The day laborers and The new times / Hans Kirk; translated and with an introduction and notes by Marc Linder.

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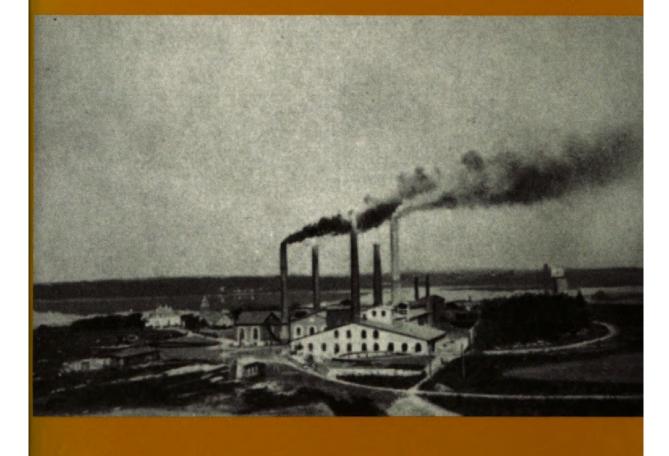
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The Day Laborers
The New Times







# THE DAY LABORERS & THE NEW TIMES

About the Translator: Marc Linder, who taught on the social science faculty at Roskilde University Centre in Denmark for three years, has translated two volumes of German fiction—Johannes Bobrowski, I Taste Bitterness (Seven Seas Publishers, 1970), and Fred Wander, *The Seventh Well* (Seven Seas Publishers, 1976)—and was certified as a simultaneous interpreter for Danish and German by the United States Department of State. After receiving a Ph.D. in political science at Princeton University, he worked at universities in Germany and Mexico. A graduate of Harvard Law School, he represented migrant farm workers in the Rio Grande Valley for seven years on behalf of Texas Rural Legal Aid before coming to the University of Iowa in 1990, where he is a professor of labor law. Among the more recent of his fifteen books are "Moments Are the Elements of Profit": Overtime and the Deregulation of Working Hours under the Fair Labor Standards Act (Fănpihuà Press, 2000); Of Cabbages and Kings County: Agriculture and the Formation of Modern Brooklyn (University of Iowa Press, 1999), which received the Theodore Saloutos Prize for the best book in agricultural history; and Void Where Prohibited: Rest Breaks and the Right to Urinate on Company Time (Cornell University Press, 1998).

About the Author of the Foreword: Elias Bredsdorff was Head of the Department of Scandinavian Studies in the University of Cambridge, where he was professor of Danish for three decades. The world's foremost expert on Hans Christian Andersen and author of numerous books in English and Danish on Danish literature, he was also a leading figure in the anti-Nazi resistance during World War II.

About the **Publisher**: Fănpìhuà Press, which accepts no revenue from its books, publishes at low prices works that increasingly profit-driven university presses refuse to consider. Fănpìhuà Press also publishes Marc Linder's translations of Hans Kirk's *The Fishermen* (ISBN 0-9673899-2-5) and *The Slave* (ISBN 0-9673899-4-1). Its books are distributed by Iowa Book & Supply: (319) 337-4188/iowabook@iowabook.com and Prairie Lights Books: (800) 295-BOOK/info@prairielights.com



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# Hans Kirk

# **The Day Laborers**

and

# **The New Times**

Translated and with an Introduction and Notes by Marc Linder

Fănpìhuà Press Iowa City 2001



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Cover illustration of "Dania" Cement Factory in Assens courtesy of Aalborg-Portland A/S.

Map of Assens courtesy of Kort and Matrikelstyrelsen.

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### **Contents**

Foreword	vii
Introduction	xiii
A Note on the Text	xxxv
Acknowledgments	xxxvii
Map of Assens	xli
Map of Mariager Fjord	xlii
Map of Denmark	xliii
Photo of Kongsdal Cement Factory in Assens	xliv
Cast of Characters	xlv
The Day Laborers	1
The New Times	267
Notes	503

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In 1928 a Danish novel entitled *Fiskerne* (*The Fishermen*) was published in a first edition of 1,000 copies. Scandinavian critics received it as a masterpiece, and it soon became a best seller, constantly reprinted, so that in 1960 it reached a ninth edition. After the novel had been televised in six installments in 1977, it reached a circulation of 370,000 copies, thus becoming the top best seller of the century, by then translated into twelve languages.

In Britain Penguin Books bought the English rights and announced that an English version would be available in 1950. But knowing the high quality of the original, Penguin found the English translation so unsatisfactory that they refused to publish it. For that reason an English version was never printed—until the year 2000 when an American professor of law, who had happened to read it, found it such a literary masterpiece that it should be made available in English, and he decided to translate and publish it in the United States.

In this Foreword I want to pay homage to two persons without whom not only *The Fishermen*, but also other important novels by Hans Kirk would not have reached the U.S. book market.

The first, of course, is the Danish author, Hans Kirk, the son of a country doctor in Jutland, who came from a family of fundamentalist fishermen and poor peasants on the west coast of Jutland, whereas Hans Kirk's mother came from a background of well-to-do farmers and landowners.

Hans Kirk himself was born in 1898; he was educated at an elite Danish boarding school and was later admitted to the University of Copenhagen, where he studied law. After having taken his degree in 1922 he was employed for a year in the Danish legation in Paris, and then for two years as a civil servant in the municipality of Copenhagen.



He felt, however, that his life was empty, and he decided to give up his career and become a writer whose subject was real people. For a while he wavered between becoming a country postman or a fisherman, and when members of his family had decided to move away from the hardships of the fishermen's lives on the west coast of Jutland in order to settle down on an island called Gjøl in the Limfjord where they could continue their trade in a milder climate, Kirk joined them, becoming a boarder at the home of his uncle and aunt, while helping with the fishing and acting as a general jack-of-all-trades for the group. It was here that he began to write his first novel.

In *The Fishermen* he describes how a group of North Sea fishermen were forced to move from a rough and hard existence to a milder climate without in any way changing their religious fundamentalism, which brings them into conflict with the religious indifference or agnosticism of the local population in their new environment.

The fishermen are never held up to ridicule, but are described with profound sympathy. Socially they are at the bottom of the scale, but they are proud men and women who are able to put up with their situation in life, for they know that they will get their reward in life after death.

In spite of the fact that it was common knowledge that Hans Kirk was a convinced socialist and atheist, most Danish critics gave the book a warm welcome, calling it an important literary event, and the author was hailed as a new creative writer of great importance.

After the publication of *The Fishermen*, a novel or series of novels was planned dealing with the transition from an agricultural economy to industrialism in Denmark. Kirk's idea was to describe what happened locally in a small Danish community in Jutland, where the building of a cement factory changed the entire social pattern. Previously the lowest paid group of workers in the country, the day labourers, who did not have any land of their own, worked as underpaid slaves for the farmers and big



landowners whenever they needed them, but with the coming of the factory these workers gradually became wage earners, thus having a regular income. As a child Kirk had witnessed the building of a cement factory near Mariager Fjord in his home district. He decided that a development that began at the end of the nineteenth century and went on until the 1930s could not possibly be told in a single novel, and he therefore planned the work as a trilogy, of which the first volume, entitled *Daglejerne* (*The Day Laborers*), was published in December 1936, and the second, *De ny Tider* (*The New Times*), three years later.

Hans Kirk was busy working on the final volume of the trilogy when World War II broke out, and in April 1940 German troops occupied Denmark. In June 1941 the Danish government at the order of the occupying power told the Danish police to round up as many members of the Danish Communist party as possible and arrest them. Among those sent to a Danish concentration camp was Hans Kirk, who was not charged with any crime other than being a communist.

Kirk had managed to bring with him the almost completed manuscript of the final volume of the trilogy, and he finished the manuscript while he was imprisoned. But in August 1943, when the Germans took complete power and the Danish government abandoned control of the country, some of the political prisoners managed to escape, while others, less fortunate, were deported to a German concentration camp.

Among those who escaped was Hans Kirk, who immediately joined the Danish underground resistance movement, but he had to leave two manuscripts behind in the camp, which was now taken over by the Gestapo, and the German guards burned both manuscripts, that of the final volume of the trilogy, and that of a novel called *Slaven* (*The Slave*), which Kirk wrote in a Copenhagen prison.

After the liberation of Denmark Kirk decided to rewrite the manuscript of *Slaven*, but did not manage to do the same with the (untitled) final volume of the trilogy.



The Slave, which is now also available in English, takes place on board a Spanish galleon in 1679, sailing with a crew of ninety-two from South America to Spain, loaded with riches from the colonies. It was published in Danish in 1948 and in English (in Iowa City) 52 years later. In an interview conducted shortly before it was published Kirk said: "The Slave was written in a prison cell in a Copenhagen jail during the last months of 1941 and the spring of 1942. To us who were jailed, it was a last desperate situation, in which we had to ask ourselves if it would become necessary to capitulate vis-à-vis Nazism, which the Danish Social Democrats at that time were ready to do. This book was intended as an answer to that question."

Other important works by Kirk, not yet available in English, are Skyggespil (Play of Light and Shade), a charming book of personal childhood reminiscences, and Vredens Søn (The Son of Wrath), in which the scene is Israel at the time of Jesus Christ. The novel is not about Jesus of the Gospels, but about a well-intentioned rebel called Jeshua who fails to be content in his fight against the oppressors. Kirk saw Jesus as the first communist; he is described as a revolutionary, and therefore he was crucified.

Hans Kirk died of cancer in June 1962. His name is still known by most Danes as the author of *The Fishermen*, the best selling Danish novel of all time.

The other person to whom I want to pay homage is Marc Linder, who in addition to being a professor of law at the University of Iowa is the translator, editor, and publisher of Kirk's main novels in the English-speaking world.

After having studied ancient Greek he had a graduate fellowship for three years in Germany in the late 1960s. During these years he made Danish friends and spent some time in Denmark and learned Danish. He studied political science at Princeton University and received a Ph.D. there in 1973, writing his dissertation on economic theory in the Soviet Union and Cuba. After a year as a research associate at an agricultural university in

Germany, he taught social science as a visiting professor at Roskilde University Centre in Denmark. By then he spoke and read Danish fluently, and one of his Danish students presented him with a copy of *Fiskerne* in the original language. Initially he was put off by the religious figures in the book, not being prepared for what Kirk was up to, and he read only the beginning of the novel, but picked it up again a few months later, and it became—and has remained—his favorite Danish novel.

When Marc Linder returned to the U.S. in 1977 he decided to translate the book into English. When he learned about the Penguin translation that had been discarded in 1950, he tried to contact Penguin, but got no reply, and he gave up.

In 1980 he entered Harvard Law School, and from 1983 to 1990 he lived on the Texas-Mexico border, working as a lawyer for a government funded legal services agency representing migrant farmworkers in lawsuits against their exploiters large and small. During these years he continued to write books and articles.

"In 1999 I simply got a bee in my bonnet about translating Fiskerne," he told me in a letter. "I saw the book on my bookshelf and just decided that it was time." He finally got someone's attention at Penguin, which said it did not own the rights, and so he worked things out with Gyldendal, Kirk's Danish publisher in Copenhagen. Unfortunately, history repeated itself and publishers were uninterested. Marc Linder wrote to me: "They said: You want us to publish a 70-year-old book by a dead author no one in the United States has ever heard of? Get lost! wasn't discouraged, but soon discovered that there were many intricacies I had not thought through—e.g., Jutland dialect and all the hymns! I was lucky to find two Danes here from Jutland, whom I could ask questions of. I worked 12-16 hours a day for months on the translation, introduction, and notes. I completely revised the translation 20-25 times, and even read the entire manuscript aloud three times. A professional translator could not afford to lavish that kind of tender loving care on a book.

But *Fiskerne* is a labor of love (of labor) for me, which I have spent a considerable amount of my own money on without taking a penny. Proceeds are going to the University of Iowa libraries."

His translation of *Fiskerne* was published in 1999 with an excellent introduction and precise and detailed notes by Linder himself, whose background research is impressive.

His translation of *The Slave* followed in 2000, also with an introduction by him.

And with the present translation of *The Day Laborers* and *The New Times* all Kirk's major novels are now available in English. I have profound admiration for Linder's excellent translation and important apparatus of notes, undoubtedly the best and most useful work any translator of Danish literature has done.

ELIAS BREDSDORFF Former Head of the Department of Scandinavian Studies in the University of Cambridge