

Comprehension 20: CSS 2003

Q: Read the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

My father was back in work within days of his return home. He had a spell in the shipyard, where the last of the great Belfast liners, the CANBERRA, was under construction, and then moved to an electronics firm in the east of the city. (These were the days when computers were the size of small houses and were built by sheet metal workers). A short time after he started in this job, one of his colleagues was sacked for taking off time to get married. The workforce went on strike to get the colleague reinstated. The dispute, dubbed the Honeymoon Strike, made the Belfast papers. My mother told me not long ago that she and my father, with four young sons, were hit so hard by that strike, that for years afterwards they were financially speaking, running to stand still. I don't know how the strike ended, but whether or not the colleague got his old job back, he was soon in another, better one. I remember visiting him and his wife when I was still quite young, in their new bungalow in Belfast northern suburbs. I believe they left Belfast soon after the Troubles began.

My father then was thirty-seven, the age I am today. My father and I are father and son, which is to say we are close without knowing very much about one another. We talk about events, rather than emotions. We keep from each other certain of our hopes and fears and doubts. I have never, for instance, asked my father whether he has dwelt on the direction, his life might have taken if at certain moments he had made certain other choices. Whatever, he found himself, with a million and a half of his fellows, living in what was in all but name a civil war.

As a grown up try often to imagine what it must be like to be faced with such a situation. What, in the previous course of your life, prepares your for arriving, as my father did, at the scene of a bomb blast close to your brother's place of work and seeing what you suppose, from the colour of the hair, to be your brother lying in the road, only to find that you are cradling the remains of a woman? (Glenn Patterson)

Questions:

1. From your reading of the passage what do you infer about the nature of the 'Troubles' the writer mentions.
2. What according to the writer were the working conditions in the Electronics firm where his father worked?
3. Why was his father's colleague sacked?
4. How does the writer show that as father and son they do not know much about each other?
5. Explain the underlined words/phrases in the passage?

Comprehension

Q1. The troubles refer to the deteriorating political conditions of Belfast at the time. The city was suffering from civil war, leading to violence and protests spread across across the region. There was also financial insecurity marked by low wage labour and reduced opportunities for work. In short, the nature of the troubles was political, economic and financial.

Q2. The working conditions in the electronics firm were tough and exploitative. Workers were not allowed any time off and underpaid for their labour. The workers did not have much rights. The work consisted primarily of building computers, carried out by ordinary metal workers. The working conditions, therefore, were unsatisfactory with limited rights and incentives.

Q3. His father. The writer's father's colleague was sacked because he took time off from work. It was a difficult time, with greater supply of labour.

and low demand. Employers were cruel and demanding.

Absence from work, even for a wedding, thus, was unacceptable.

The colleague was sacked as a result for his long absence from work.

Q4. The writer shows that his father and him do not know much about each other by highlighting the nature of their relationship. They did not talk about feelings and emotions. Communication was limited to discussing the affairs around them. The writer did not share his aspirations or take any advice from his father. ~~He~~ ^{He} ~~never~~ also highlights this by saying he never asked his father what if he regretted the way he had lived his life. Therefore, the nature of relationships shows that as father and son, they did not know much about each other.