

Translation from German: Eulenspargel

If a newly arrived immigrant cannot become a doctor for whatever reason, then the next best solution is to follow the career of an official in the public service. The salary of an Israeli civil servant is not very high but his work allows him to make frequent tea breaks with stimulating conversations because of which he is generally seen as an intellectual.

The most prominent characteristic of an Israeli public servant consists of being absent. That is: he is present, but not where he should be, i.e. not in his office. Most of the time Israeli public servants find themselves in a meeting. There are thousands of excuses to hold meetings. Some meetings last two to three days, others last only five to six hours. That is how long you have to wait. So let us wait . . .

On one hot day in summer my father-in-law Bernhard, an old Zionist who had recently arrived in Israel, was given a letter of recommendation¹ for the housing cooperative "Amidar" requesting them to allocate him accommodation, and if possible to not demand a higher price than the usual one.

As my father-in-law requested, I went to the central office of the "Amidar" myself in order to quickly get his application through. I was directed to room nr. 314 where someone called Cheshwan was to deal with the matter.

Room nr. 314 was empty. In a neighbouring room I was told that Mr. Cheshwan was just now in a meeting with Mr. Stern but was expected to be back any minute now. In the meantime I was invited to take a seat. I took a seat. I sat a while. I walked back and forth. I sat down again. Then the door opened. A man pushed his head through the gap and asked: "Where is Cheshwan?"

"He's in a meeting with Stern", I said. "Take a seat."

The man seemed to be in a hurry because he disappeared without saying anything else. A few minutes later another man, obviously an official, appeared and searched nervously around the room.

"No need to be nervous", I reassured him. "Cheshwan is in a meeting with Stern, but he should be back any moment. Take a seat."

"No time. When Cheshwan comes back, please tell him that Mayer expects him in an urgent meeting. He should join us immediately."

"Okay", I said.

Hardly fifteen minutes had passed when another official came in and asked: "Where is Kirschner?"

"He was just here", I answered. "When Cheshwan returns from Stern I'll send him over right away. Take a seat."

"Thanks. Do you happen to know if he's undertaken anything regarding the Ramat Aron building project?"

"That's quite probable", I said.

¹ Because the State of Israel is not capable of providing every new immigrant with immediate accommodation, the old Zionists among the immigrants are given a letter of recommendation to help in the search for a flat. As consequence, a large proportion of new immigrants are Zionists. (Until now fifty two secretaries of Theodor Herzl have been counted.)

"Then I'll take the folder with me. If he asks about Feintuch tell him that I'm in a meeting with Mayer."

A few seconds later Kirschner stood out of breath before me: "Where's the Ramat Aron folder? The old one will blow his top if it isn't found immediately!"

"For heaven's sake!" I called. "Only a minute ago Feintuch took the folder to the old one!"

"And where's Cheshwan?"

"He's still talking with Stern. I'm waiting for him here."

"Good", said Kirschner. "In that case return the Goldberg Plan into the Givath Seren folder!"

"With pleasure", I said, took the papers, searched the shelves for the Givath Seren folder and added the Goldberg Plan. I had hardly done that when Feintuch rushed into the room:

I burst out "What are you doing here?!", because I was beginning to lose my patience. "Why aren't you in the meeting? With the old one in such a bad temper! Do you enjoy having a row?"

"I'm already on the way. I just wanted to pick up the Goldberg Plan."

"What do you need the Goldberg Plan for, Feintuch? I've just put it into the Givat Seren folder. Should I dig it out again? It's unbelievable! Everyone exploits me. And I idiot let me be exploited by everyone."

Feintuch was visibly confused.

"I only wanted the Goldberg Plan for Mayer", he stutters apologetically. "Anyway what do you think of the Plan?"

"It's not bad. But I'd like to know what the old one says about it."

Feintuch took the Plan with him to pass it on to Mayer. Before he left he added that the old one wished me to look through the list of presumptive tenants of the Shekem building project and write a report on it for Stern.

I started with the job straight away.

While I was in the middle of checking the list, Feintuch appeared: I was to come to Mayer immediately. "You'd think I have four pairs of hands!" I commented in justified reproach, gathered together the papers and went to the old one. Mayer wanted to hear my opinion about the architectural qualities of the Ramat Aron project. I told him openly that the houses stood too close together and the windows were too small. Kirschner began to stammer. "Always the same . . .", he said. "So much the worse", I returned sharply. "And that's yet a further proof that it just can't go on in this way."

The old one agreed hundred percent and transferred Kirschner in another department (he will follow me with his hatred, I thought to myself), and gave me the task of managing the Ramat Aron project. Straightaway I called Feintuch and requested a detailed report within 24 hours. Then I procured a car, drove out to Ramat Aron, had an in-depth conversation with the architect, checked the plans, made a few minor improvements, and fired a complaining engineer without his gratuity. Then I

