

From the

ROBERT ALI

The Slow Ride

Here comes the litter,
It's saggin' on the frame,
Mine torches glitter
With spectral-yellow flame;
Some poor devil caught it,
Some poor buddy got it;
Under the blanket,
He's tired of the game.

Hook on the man car,
The coal will have to wait,
Clamp on the spread bar,
To hold the valiant freight,
Signal for the slow ride,
Let the car of woe glide
Out to the noon day,
To meet the ones who wait.

Add up his wages
And write his final slip,
Close out the pages
And balance up his scrip,
File his comp'ny ticket
Place it in the wicket,
Lay down his shovel,
He's finished with the grip.

Pawns of Draughtsmen

We are the ponderables who adorn
The statisticians' field of asphodel;
Yielding as many eyes, as many limbs
Per thousand tons as ruthless curves foretell;
So many tons per man or men per ton,
Productive to the last foot pound surveyed,
A livin' standard for comparison
With the machine by which we are outweighed.

Below the grass roots where our lives begin,
Beneath that blanket all of you must share,
We pay the price in blood and sweat today
That must be offered for your comfort there;
The savage gas and cruel roof conspire
To block our puny strength by treachery
And dynamite the faithless servant strikes
In furious revolt at mastery.

Our lungs are rotten with the rancid air,
Our joints are twisted by the sulphurous slime,
Our skin is torn and scarred and torn again,
Marking us strange and old before our prime;
We are those luckless rats you read about,
When tragedy promotes us to your page—
Perhaps the very breakfast that you eat
Was warmed by coal that claimed its grisly wage.

Before the distant curfews die away,
The patch lights blink as heavy eyes with sleep

And clutchin' to our hearts the rosary,
We humbly ask the chart our lives to keep;
We thank it for the calories prescribed,
Our housin' and our quota of warm clothes
And other blessin's by the graph presumed
To help us understand the proper pose.

We're careful to observe the hours of rest
And work or play as plotted out for us;
We breed a little stronger than our share
But that's a subject that we won't discuss;
We're bound to crash the av'rage line somewhere
And there the competition isn't bad,
Maybe the draughtsman petered out of ink
Or got the figures bolixed on his pad.

Tools of Flesh

My sweetheart's a mule in the mines,
I drive her without any lines,
When we're on the level, she goes like the devil,
My sweetheart, the mule of the mines.

My sweetheart's a mule in the mines,
I drive her without any lines,
On the bumper I sit and tobacco juice spit,
All over my sweetheart's behind.

—Tune of "My Sweetheart's the Man in the Moon."

We struck in nineteen-twenty-two,
For reasons I've forgotten now,
Except that we got better pay,
Because we raised a six month's row.

The bosses tried to run a bluff
And soften up our cocky spines;
To show that they were fightin' fools,
They took the mules out of the mines.



Anthracite

ISON EVANS

They turned them loose in Cannon's field,
A thousand head among the hay,
The only time in twenty years
That some had seen the light of day.

The smoke, the mud, the cruel grades,
The everlasting dungeon drip,
The crazy rage of men who scourged
With bar, with sprag, with gashing whip.

The filth that scarcely dried at night,
On fetlocks, shank and belly hair,
No water for their fevered tongues,
Except the slimy ditch's fare.

The endless drag from morn to night,
To fill the lousy banker's plate,
One slip that brought a broken leg,
A bullet through the brain, their fate.

Their spavined joints and open sores,
Were mended by the healing sun,
New fire stirred their hulky loins
And warmed where they had known none.

The hybrid foal of horse and ass,
But touched with keener glow of rut,
The mare's barren womb dilates
In futile ardor in her gut.

Gelded, her boy friends stand in shame
And watch the would-be dam cavort,
Then go on grazing pensively,
Conscious, perhaps, of man's harsh tort.

Give me a breathin' spell, O Lord,
In pastures green, with cloudless skies
And willin' fillies moochin' around
With ageless yearnin' in their eyes.



The Start

Today starts butter-thin on Hemlock Ridge,
Like something hidden on an upper shelf;
Are fringes that decorate the scanty day;
Of Winter black that elevates itself;
The crooked scrubs that never had a chance,
Are fringe that decorate the scanty day;
And here and there a dead pine as a lance
Thrusts staunchly out to keep the night at bay.

The kitchen windows throw a homey light
Upon the black frost shining on the grass
The walks and fence rails show up spooky white
The air is like a piece of broken glass;
The roosters start the day out stout and perk,
The cows are mumblin' at their mornin' cud
And hob-nail boots that hustle by to work,
Crunch through the frozen cinders with a thud.

The carbide lamps are Arctic fireflies,
Dancing along the pathway to the mine;
Great, snowy banks of wasted steam arise,
As hoisting engines puff and snort and whine.
Mrs. Krakosky calls out to her man,
"Be careful, Mike." Be careful, Hell, I say,
He's robbin' on the pitch and nothin' can
Be sure, so go on with your work and pray.

Statecraft

Election time is here again, I've got to see old Joe
And get the lowdown off of him, the way the votes to go;
A congressman, a senator, I think a judge or two
Is out to pass the hat around and keep the country true.

They've shook our hand and called us pal and maybe bought
a beer,
So every time their name comes up, I guess we've got to cheer,
But when the polls is closed and dark on next election day,
Us guys'll shovel just as hard and get the same old pay.

But if you want a favor done between election time,
Just try to pull it off yourself and see how far you climb;
Constituents is needed by the boy that waves the flag,
But the township leader, brother, is the guy who's got the drag.

He'll get your tax abated and he'll get your girl a school,
He'll get a license for your hound and bail you from the stool,
He'll fix it so your kid can work before he is sixteen
And pass you out a ten spot if the dice have wiped you clean.

So why the hell should I lose sleep about which candidate
Is this or that, providing that the bastard's on our slate,
And when I pass the word around the patch, what Joe wants
done,
You can bet your shirt that we will lick the soreheads, ten
to one.

The Unions Expose the Shipowners

AMY SCHECHTER

SAN FRANCISCO.

THE San Francisco waterfront unions have swung into action. Smashing through the carefully-guarded secrecy of the shipowners, they have exposed the shipowners' plan of attack and by catching them and their press unaware, they have put the shipowners on the defensive.

In a letter made public recently, of which copies were sent to Assistant Secretary of Labor Edward F. McGrady, President Roosevelt, Secretary of Labor Perkins and a number of House and Senate committeemen, the San Francisco District Council of the Pacific Coast Maritime Federation calls for a Congressional investigation of the conspiracy of shipowners to destroy West Coast maritime unions. A general lockout may have been declared by San Francisco employers as this article is printed.

The letter demanding investigation follows:

"Dear Sir:

"A nation-wide conspiracy of waterfront employers, shippers and allied financial interests to wipe out the maritime unions of the Pacific Coast is outlined in the attached statement for your consideration.

"It is common knowledge that attorneys for these employers have diligently endeavored without success to involve both the United States Department of Justice and the Department of Labor in this conspiracy. We now charge that this coterie of financial and industrial interests is prepared to employ whatever ruthless and illegal measures of force and violence may become necessary to achieve its purpose.

"A prolonged and bitter struggle is certain to follow in the event that these employers and their bankers attempt to carry out their proposals. If it were not otherwise evident, the recent convention of the American Federation of Labor clearly revealed that American workers are fully aware of the fate of the trade unions of Italy and Germany and that they will not peaceably submit to the fascist destruction of the trade unions of America.

"That the plans of the shippers are essentially fascist in nature and cannot be anything but detrimental to the trade union movement in general will be obvious. Such attempts will inevitably arouse public indignation in general and will also cause widespread strikes in associated industries, with profound social and political consequences.

"This Council of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific Coast therefore requests that our charges be made the subject of a Congressional investigation. Such an investigation would be the means of preventing

what would be, for America, an unprecedented attack on organized labor and the findings and recommendations might easily become the basis for a satisfactory settlement of problems which have been a constant source of controversy on the waterfront for more than a year.

"Trusting that this matter will be given your earnest and early consideration, we are
Very truly yours,

SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA
DISTRICT COUNCIL No. 2.
Harry Bridges, President."

The clear and powerful statement attached to this appeal declares that "unless the United States government intervenes there will be launched on the Pacific Coast within a month a struggle which will inevitably achieve the proportions of civil war.

"This situation will result from the attempt of shipowners and waterfront employers to repudiate all existing agreements with the maritime unions, to withdraw recognition from them and to institute open shop conditions which will be maintained by force and coercion."

The statement stresses the attempt that will be made to alienate public sympathy from the strikers through repetition of the lie, already blazoned in the Hearst press in the course of the past week, to the effect that the maritime unions are led by "irresponsible" elements and that "exorbitant" demands on the part of the unions are forcing the shipowners to abandon San Fran-

cisco as a port of call. The successive steps planned by Waterfront Employers Associations in all Pacific Coast seaports are:

1. Full-page advertisements will appear in the larger daily newspapers which will state the intentions of the employers and present arguments in support of their actions.
2. In an effort to maintain an appearance of peaceful resistance, they will then evict seamen and longshoremen from their jobs by laying up ships ostensibly because "exorbitant" union requests make operation financially impossible.
3. All awards to, and agreements with maritime unions will be publicly repudiated in the advertisements.
4. Recognition of all maritime unions will be withdrawn and the shippers will attempt to deal with the men only on an individual basis.
5. Shippers will attempt dictatorial control of wages and working conditions.

Representatives of West Coast shipping companies have met repeatedly in the offices of the Waterfront Employers' Association in San Francisco to discuss details of a drive to smash the unions. A committee of three East Coast steamship executives went into San Francisco to lend their advice and assistance. There are contradictions among the shipowners: the date for opening the attack has been several times postponed because certain shipowners refused to participate in the attack. The utmost pressure has been exerted to bring these men in line. Foreign shipping companies have been offered full compensation "as an inducement to cooperate until the unions are broken."

THE Federation replies in detail to the "arguments" which according to plan will be contained in the advertisements: (1) The unions are not irresponsible, "for every dispute or ship tie-up there is definite evidence of discrimination, bad faith or violation of agreements on the part of the shipowners . . . companies keeping the agreements do not have strikes or tie-ups. Witness the case of the Grace Lines, whose ships run regularly, simply because its executives play fair. . . ." (2) "The unions are run by their own members, not by 'Communists,' 'Reds' or Radicals imported into the situation."

It is a peculiarity of Pacific Coast maritime unions that *officials must submit every action of the slightest importance to a majority vote of the membership*. And that is precisely what the owners object to. They do not like democracy. They profess admiration for Atlantic Coast maritime unions, where the members have absolutely nothing to say as to the functions of their own organizations. Obviously, this is the core of the whole matter: it is democracy the shipowners dislike; it is autocracy they desire. Because they do not like democracy, they



"Put in a strong word against the union.
The big boss just kicked in with a century."