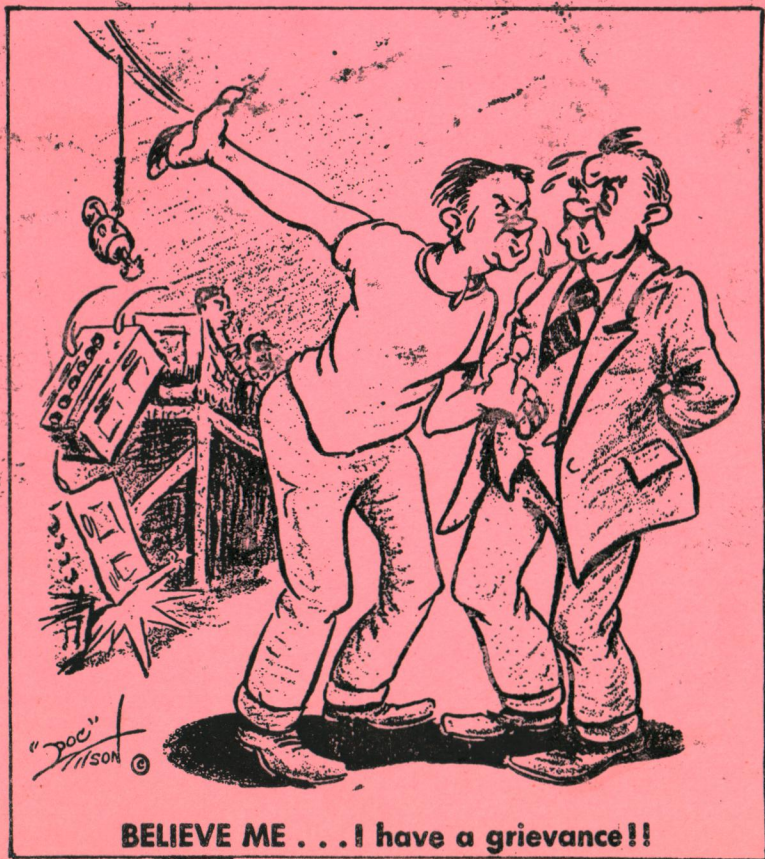


POEMS FROM THE SHOP FLOOR

A LABORER LOOKS AT LIFE

THEN & NOW

FLOYD HOKE-MILLER



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Limited Reprinting
photo-copied from a typescript
originally issued in 1984 in
honor of the
Flint Sit-Down Strikers
and other pioneer union builders

Reissued to commemorate the 50th
Anniversary of the historic
events of 1936-1937

This printing
October, 1987
Flint, MI

A LABORER LOOKS AT LIFE

THEN & NOW

POEMS FROM THE SHOP FLOOR

BY

FLOYD HOKE-MILLER

SELECTED AND COMPILED BY RONDA HAUBEN

CARTOONS BY "DOC" WILSON

Doc Wilson

Dedicated
to
those
who
fought
the
battles
recounted
in
these
poems
and
to
the
upcoming
generation

INTRODUCTION

I first came across Floyd Hoke-Miller's poetry when I uncovered some early issues of "The Searchlight", the newspaper of UAW Local 659, Flint, MI. Workers like Floyd Hoke-Miller had captured Plant 4 of Chevrolet during the Great Flint Sit Down Strike of 1936-37. They went on to create a shop paper which they subtitled "The Voice of the Chevrolet Worker".

The right to industrial unionism in auto had been won through the occupation of the factories. The pioneers of industrial unionism in the auto industry believed that their union could only be built from the shop floor up and so they fought to guarantee rank and file workers their voice. Poems like these of Floyd Hoke-Miller were an expression of that voice.

One of the poems in this volume contains these lines:

Let's rest our tasks awhile and look ahead
And weigh the hard earned lessons of
the past;
Let's leave no stone unturned, no word unsaid
That would our bonds release, our chains
unfast.

The purpose of this little volume is to make it possible for the reader to "weigh" some of those "hard earned lessons of the past" which are contained in the poetry written by this SHOP FLOOR BARD over many long years. These are but a few of the hundreds of poems that he has written and that he is still writing and publishing today.

Ronda Hauben
August, 1984

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POET'S PREFACE

Introduction

This collection of especially selected poems covers a period of fifty years of my life in the Labor Movement, and possibly the most colorful and historic ones also.

They are intended to dramatically depict the age-old conflict between the doers and the directors of human activity. My original entry into the proletarian movement began very early. In 1914, it became a part of my being to champion the common cause.

In the year of 1934, there was a well established and concerted effort to organize the factory workers into an industrial structure known as horizontal unionism, by the Committee for Industrial Organization, within the confines of the vertical one of the AFL. I immediately joined. Having a class-conscious background, I had a BRC activated card and an IWW. I came from the traffic department of the Canadian National (Grand Trunk Railroad) when I hired in at Chevrolet.

My sincere appreciation goes to the compiler for her tireless effort to preserve history and bring out the publication of this pamphlet and for the distribution thereof....she has been more than an asset, she has been an inspiration. Without her work, these poems would still be buried in the limbo of oblivion. I owe a debt of gratitude for a revival of my participation in the never-ending battle with the boss.

A LABORER LOOKS AT LIFE

Let's rest our task awhile and look ahead
And weigh the hard-earned lessons of the past;
Let's leave no stone unturned, no word unsaid
That would our bonds release, our chains unfast.

Let's bow our heads in sorrow for workers' blood,
For loss of limb and life they gladly gave,
For broken bodies tramped beneath the mud--
Those men that lie within a martyr's grave.

Within the maw, beneath the face of Mother Earth,
We toil where damp and ebony darkness reigns;
For coal, for ore, for sparkling gems of worth--
The miners they say, but men of forgotten names.

We feed the furnace and pour the molten metal
Into the gaping moulds of wire and sand;
We stack the stock and keep the fact-'ry fettle
By sweat of brow and strength of human hands.

From little shops to fact-'ries tall and wide,
In heat, and din and dust, our hands they need
To shape ten thousand things, there inside
Those walls where profit rules along with greed.

We track the furrow to the end, we stack the hay,
We shock the wheat and milk a herd of cows,
Yet this does not complete a normal working day
For many's the tasks life on the farms endows.

Both day and night, we work, with eye and hand,
On trucks, on planes and other cargo carriers;
On roaring trains that speed across the land--
A transport gang that knows no barriers.

Of all the good that's grown, or made by man,
Our toiling hands are used for distribution
Where'er the foot of man is set, in any land,
You'll find our apt and ready institution.

We take the mails and watch the graph and key.
Against all odds, your wishes and your wares
We carry, 'cross the land, the air and sea
To lighten burdens and lessen cares.

And last of all but surely not the least
Are we, the ones that do domestic work
For friend and foe, for man and lowly beast--
The kind of task the proud are prone to shirk;

Still all the hoarded wealth that man amasses
From minted metal to gems that radiate
None was gained without the working classes
To ply their trade--with brawn and skill create.

THE LABORER, YES

You ask me why I praise his kind
And why I seek to rouse his mind
To thoughts beyond his daily
task,
Wherein the chains that daily bind
Are shrouded lies to keep him blind--
And those are the things you
ask
About the man the Gods don't
bless,
The Laborer, Yes!
I'll tell you why I take this stand
To praise the one with hardened hand;
With daily drudge and sweaty
smell,
He's the greatest one in all the land
But yet, the least one in command
Of all the goods the traders
sell
And take the more and give the
less
The Laborer, Yes!

THE FORGOTTEN MAN

Work, work, work,
Underdog!
Forgotten man!
In periods stark;
In periods wan,
From dark 'til dawn;
From dawn 'til dark;
Tilling the soil,
Tending the wheel,
Feeding all men
Their every meal.

Work, work, work,
Drawers of water!
Hewers of wood!
You give the gain;
You give the good;
By strain and sweat,
By sweat and strain,
For making the wealth
Is your career,
Doing all things
And daring all fear.

Work, work, work,
Usurers' slave!
Vendors' prey!
You give the main;
You give the way,
With brain and brawn;
With brawn and brain;
Planning the job,
Proving the plan;
Counting the coin
For the other man.

A POET MUSES

Whenever I am fancy free
And ponder what that I should write
The thought that comes to me
Is of the worker and his plight.

I see him on the job all day,
I see him in his home at night;
And then I wonder when his pay
Will make his budget balance right.

He works with zeal because he knows
That honest labor's not a sin;
For all the things that's made or grows
Requires the skill of working men.

Sometimes he works the whole week through
But weeks like that are very rare,
It's usually just a day or two
In which to earn his keep and fare.

But when the tedious day is o'er
Therein his humble home I see
Him gaily greeted at the door
By tiny tots in cheerful glee.

His tired eyes, they turn away;
His lips, they force a friendly smile.
That haunting fear he does betray
From little souls, his thoughts beguile.

There's need for clothing for them all
And coal to fill the basement bin;
There's bills to pay both large and small--
How can he take it on the chin?

MY OBSESSION

'Tho I may use some pseudonyms,
A nomdeplume or phoney,
I never stoop to downright whims
Of writing pure baloney.

I know that workers make the works
By brains and muscles toiling
And taken by the class that shirks
Whose object is despoiling

That's why I strive in all my rhymes
To paint the picture clearly
Of how there can be better times
If workers plan sincerely.

THE BIG MACHINE

The white-hot sparks a flyin'
An' Bulls a standin' 'round
A thinkin' bout their bonus
If speed-up plans are sound.

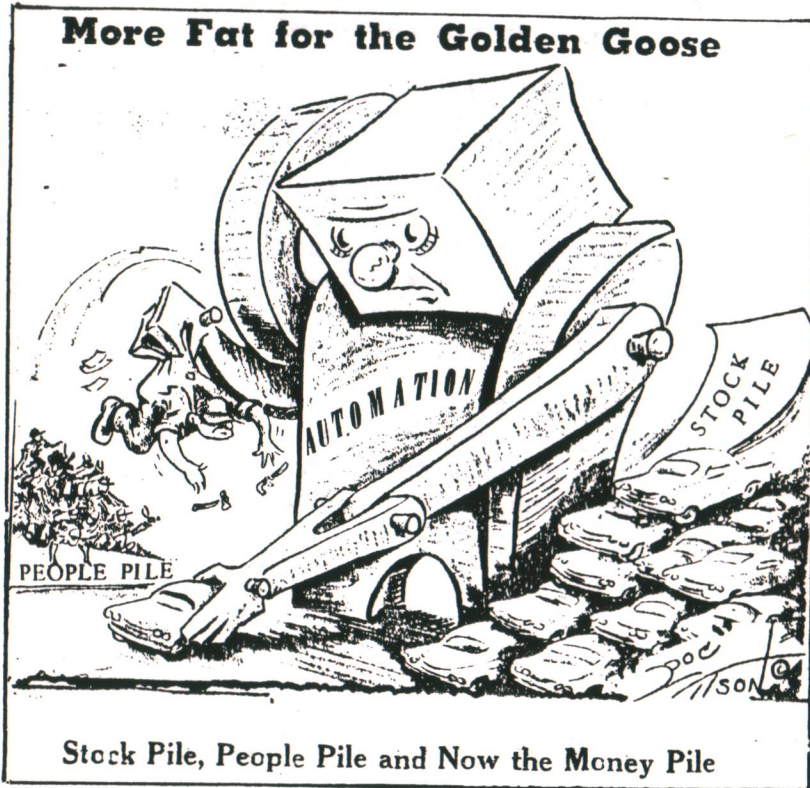
They're puttin' in a big machine
With cats an' elbow grease
An' when the jigs are set
One dozen jobs will cease.

A dozen men to take the air
An' line up for the dole--
The big machine is master
To pawn the worker's soul.

Each man of toil a glancin'
In pangs of sheer regret
'Cause most of modern methods
Are made the workers' debt.

A NEW NAME FOR AN OLD EVIL

The Boss-man bought a big machine,
And called it automation.
He said that labor cost too much,
And brought about inflation.
The workers set the damned thing up,
And got it in production.
Then he announced with business pride:
"There'll be a plant reduction!"
A score of men then lost their jobs;
A score of men were laid off.
But the Boss-man loves his big machine,
Because it so richly paid off.
And then he heralded near and far,
The progress he was bestowing;
And passed the hurt of displaced men,
As temporary furloughing.



THE SCRAP HEAP

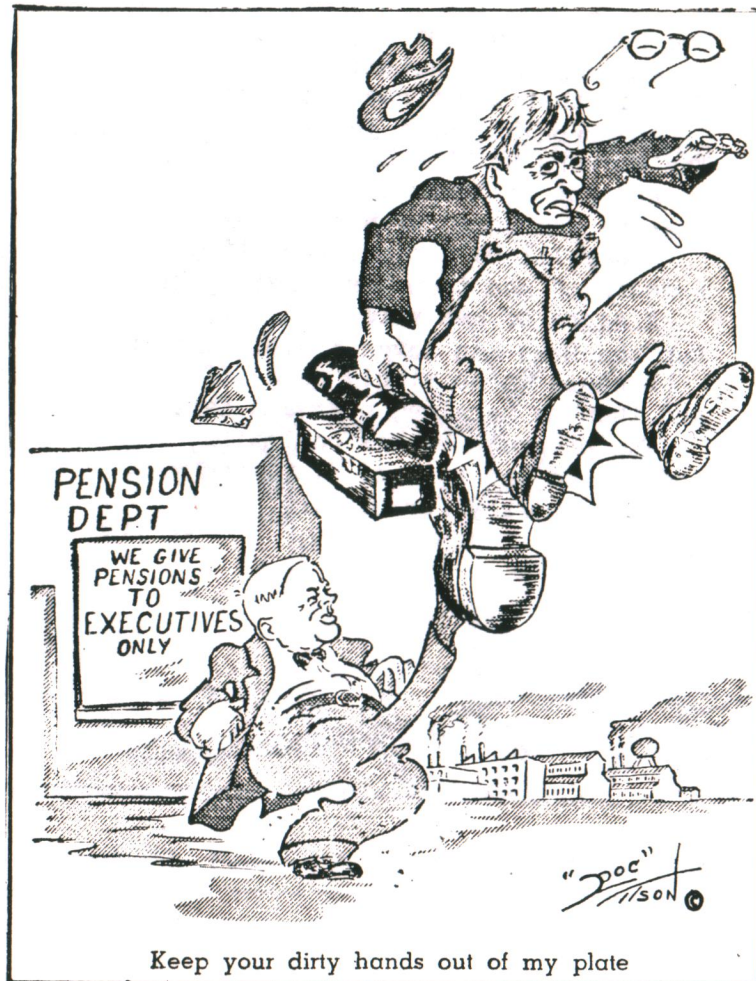
They're taking out the old machine
And putting in the new
Because it does so much more work
Than ever the old could do.

It's headed for the melting pot--
They're selling it for scrap
But throwing it into discard
Is surely no mishap.

Because it has no thinking brain;
No breath of life or soul;
It does not have no mouths to feed;
No love, no hope, no goal.

They're kicking out the old work ox
Without a price upon his head
To graze upon a barren pasture
'Til nature finds him dead.

And all because the Boss man owns
The plant and working tools
But only rents cheap human flesh
To slave like long-eared mules.



NINETY-FIVE AN HOUR

(Note: This poem is written about a speedup.
The men were asked to run 90 per hour and
were told that they would not be asked to run
more. Well, they run the 90 per hour. Then as
true Chevrolet Supervision, they didn't live
up to their promise and now demand 95 per
hour. -- Brothers take warning.)

When Marshall died and went his way
'Twas sure a glorious hour
But all he heard Saint Peter say
Was, "Ninety-five an hour!"

"I've closed the joint and shut the gate;
Now don't you look so sour
There're many more that come too late
At ninety-five an hour."

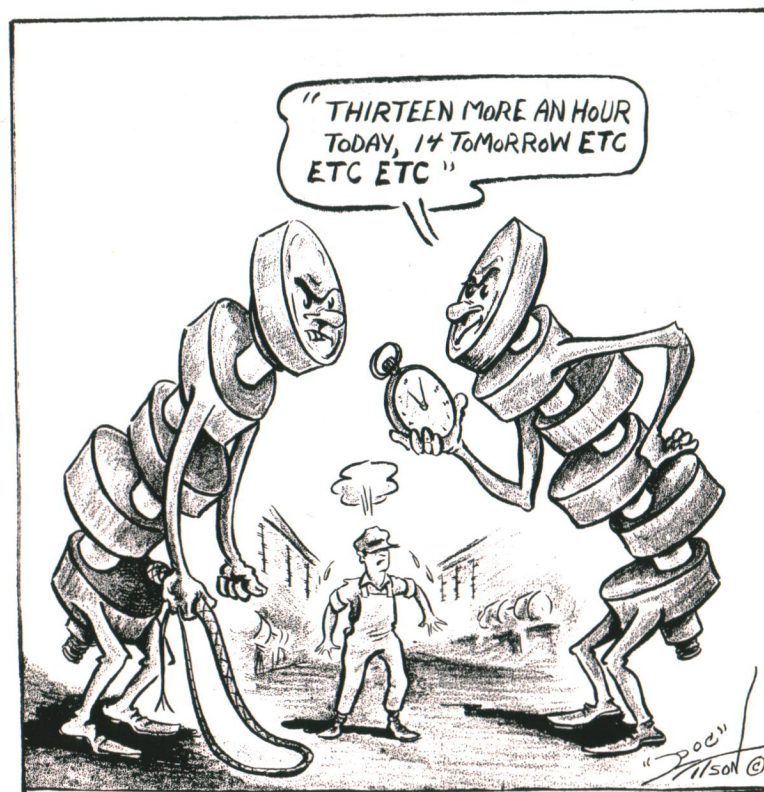
"Go down to Hell and see Old Satan,
He needs men of your power;
I'm sure he will not keep you waitin'
At ninety-five an hour."

The very next Old Mule Ears came
Amid a thunder shower
And dripping wet he cried his name;
"I'm ninety-five an hour!"

"They named me that in Chevrolet
Because I made men cower
For my demands each working day
Was ninety-five an hour."

"There is no room," Saint Peter said,
Shouting from the tower,
"We've let the last of room and bed
At ninety-five an hour."

When Mule Ears reached the burning hole
Old Satan said in glower,
"Now here's a shovel for this soul--
It's ninety-five an hour!"



DRAMA IN DIALOG

He stopped to mop his sweaty brow
But as he feared, a boss-man neared
To check the time of day
With angry words to say:

"You're wasting time, you're falling down;
You've got to raise your score
Production's a' jumped, so let's get humped
And get the Big Boss more!"

The worker eyed the man with scorn,
And saw his hands were neat and trim;
He saw him dressed in Sunday's best,
So this he said to him;

"I know I'm dumb as all 'get out'
But for the toil of men like me,
I'm sure that you and the Big Boss too,
Would find your lives less free."

FOREMAN IN THE CAN

I'll sing a song about the can;
The dirty, putrid, smelly can
That's still a blessing to mortal man
When he's allowed to use it.

They never clean the damn thing good
Nor treat its use like they should
Although its need is understood,
They think all men abuse it.

And now the boss-man he's a stool
To spy upon the working fool
And see for sure he breaks no rule
While answering nature's callin'.

He's lost the halo 'round his head
And wears a Hawkshaw hat instead
Like Tracey looking for a Red
Who's working for Joe Stalin.

This I'm sure, no honest man
Would dare police the worker's can
Like poison oak or Salvarsan
He's hated by all who know him.

Now he would mend his snooping way
If working men would only say:
"You've got to end your foul display!"
And then proceed to show him.

I'D HATE TO BE A FOREMAN

A foreman I would hate to be
And have the men look down on
me
As something short of dignity
Without a conscience, heart or
soul.

When every time I turned my
back
There'd always be some dirty
crack
About the scruples that I lack
And never a word to extol.

I don't like words unfit for use,
Nor tongues of scorn that hates
induce
But still there is a sane excuse
When used against some mad
Legree.

Who drives his men at fearful
pace
As if it were a chariot race
And by all odds he'd save his
face
And win the victory.

To aspire, I never can,
To exploit my fellow man
For Mammon's parasitic clan
That ever lies in luxury's lap.

That's why I wait to see the day
When none can rise and boastful
say
"I gained my lot the easy way
By shearing the working sap."



LABOR AND THE BOSS

Machines I've made, machines I've run
But never owned a single one
Since here I've been a slavin';
I've built the banks for all the boss-men
To put their money safely in,--
It's nothing I've been savin'.

I've tilled the soil for corn and wheat;
I've raised the green stuff and the meat
That both of us have eaten,
But still I'm poor and he is rich,
That's why I'm always prone to bitch--
I know the boss is cheatin'.



WHO?

Who may call his word supreme?
Who may wear the crown?
The royal breed
That starve and bleed
The workers to the ground.

Who may hoard the yellow coins?
Who may own the soil?
The church and state,
The rich and great
As lords o'er men of toil.

Who may dine in sumptuous feasts?
Who may spend yet save?
The ones that hold
The means to gold
That make the masses slave.

Who may dwell in mansions grand?
Who may live in state?
'Tis those whose birth
Gave them the earth
Including the poor man's fate.

Who may hide behind the flags?
Who may shun the battle?
The parasite
Who takes the right
He grants not to his chattel.



TOUGH COOKIES

"With no apologies"*

I asked a guy to tell me why
The workers were labeled "Red"
By all the rags of Sale price-tags,
And this is what he said:

"You gotta be tough, you gotta be rough,
You gotta have guts and gall,
To work for wage this day and age
When big shots own it all.

You gotta be rude, you gotta be shrewd,
You gotta have a gift for gab,
To hold your own against the throne
Of Old King Get By Grab.

You gotta growl, you gotta howl,
You gotta show your teeth,
Because a slave is never brave
When coward underneath.

You gotta fight for what is right
As liberty's never free--
For the iron jail, the coat of mail
Is held for you and me.

You can't be nice to human lice
That feed upon your blood,
And boast with pride about their side
A liftin' you out a' the mud."

*Note: In a news release to the Detroit newspapers, the then head of Labor Relations for G.M. made this comment on the workers and the Flint labor situation: "They're tough cookies."



HE'S ON YOUR BACK

If the boss says no and fails to show
A will to view both sides
Don't stand and talk, lay down and balk
For it's on your back he rides!

So it's bear in mind whenever you find
That all of your logic fails
Don't swallow your pride but stand aside
And let him man the sails!

FACE THE FACTS

Stand up and face this candid fact,
All words are void unless you act;
You may be right in each demand
But money rules with an iron hand.

You sweating worker, black or white,
Don't ask your master what is right
Lest he tell that age-old story
About his right to Capital's glory.

Just use your right to go on strike
And let him see what laboring's like
Because he makes no thing he owns
For life does not exist by loans.

Of course he'll rant and madly rave
About the balking of his slave
But with his money he still needs labor.
So pass this fact on to your neighbor.

THE LINE IS DOWN

No wheels' a turning;
No boilers' burning;
No juice past the panels!
The poor have struck
To change their luck
And rest their fetter;
To worse or better
Their short and simple annals!

No groans or grinding;
No flames a'blinding;
No men within the shops a'working!
The line is down;
No wheels go round
And silence reigns
O'er capital's gains
Where haunting fears are lurking!

THE PICKET

I am the guy with nerve and guts;
The soldier of all your labor fights
My road through battle has many ruts
But ne'er too rough to guard your rights.

Through rain and snow, along I tread,
To show my protest of oppression;
To win more money for meat and bread
Or gain some other fair concession.

I've lost my blood that you might share
In shorter hours and higher wages--
The biggest burden of labor, I bear
Is breaking the shackles of the ages.

UNION FOREVER



Tho' politicians come and politicians go
Let Unionism go on forever.
But vote for him whose records show
He kept the workers' cause his first endeavor.

Now has he fought for higher wages
And the thirty-hour week;
The dream through the ages
Of the lowly and the weak.

Because machines are taking powers
That were our jobs of yesterday
But it's the same old tedious hours
With the same old lousy pay.

HIGHWAY TO HEAVEN

If you want to go to heaven
I'll tell you how to do it
Just follow the Reuthers
And they'll lead you to it.

Just climb upon their wagon
And ride up to the stars,
Old Peter will be a 'waitin'
To let down all the bars.

For they're organizin' heaven
So don't you dare to doubt it
And there is not a thing
That God can do about it.

So tighten up your bellies
And march along with them
For any man that doesn't
Gets sawed right off the limb.

They've got a lot of money
And all the bosses behind 'em
But they're on the worker's side
No matter where you find 'em

Now the bosses have a winner
In the "little auburn head"
And he who will not follow
Is a damned and dirty "red."

Note: Written in response to an article called "Destiny's Darling", a color feature in Collier's Magazine. This lampooning is done in hyperbole, without malice (aforethought) or bitter bias, but with the sincere regret for the unexpected, unfair use of triumph. These lamentations are following a general purge wherein many who had contributed so much to the formative labor pattern instituting collective bargaining rights (on a horizontal basis) found themselves subjects of political anathema for no other reason than honest dissent with compromise.

GOVERNMENT BY INJUNCTION

No rich man's fined for taking bread
From out the mouth of babies
But when the workers can't be led
They get a case of rabies.

The judge he sits upon the Bench
And writes their rank injunction
But never gives a single inch
To let Miss Justice function.

Although there might be Liberal Laws
Upon the statute books
The rich still have their paid Hawkshaws
And Judas-loving crooks.

Some day the workers may awake
And find their destined hour
Lies within their right to take
Miss Justice in their power.

BIG POLICEMAN

O, big policeman with your gun
I wonder what you've ever done
To make the common man your friend
Except to promise and pretend.

You hound his footsteps everywhere
From work-house to the country fair
With eagle eyes always alert
For any action to subvert.

But with the rich you're always told
To guard their person and their gold,
And never let the common man
Contest their privilege or their plan.

SEVEN LONG YEARS AGO

Remember the time we didn't
work

When every answer was no
And the wheels were stopped,
And the hammers dropped
Just seven long years ago?

Remember then they called us
"red"

When "forty men" held the shop,
And the papers lied
And the "strong-arms" tried
To see that blood was shed?

Remember that Russia was a foe
The "big-shots" wouldn't own,
And the "stooges" armed
And the "bulls" alarmed
Because our ranks had grown?

Remember it then and see it now
That time has told the "tale"
And the truth is bared
And the honors shared
With the "calf" behind the veil?

Note: "forty men" - the day we sat down, the daily newspaper carried a headline "Forty Men Take Plant Four Chevrolet". There were probably 1500 inside during the Sit-Down at one time or another
"strong arms" - men on the job who the company paid extra to carry a hardwood stick made especially for their task
"big shots" - upper eschelon
"stooges" - those granted arms permits gained by the Corporation
"bulls" - policemen
"tale" - evidence of a new power
"calf" - Mammon's idol, the golden calf
"Russia" - the Soviet Union was not a foe on a geopolitical nor on an economic level but for internal politics was supposed to be a foe

SUBVERSIVE

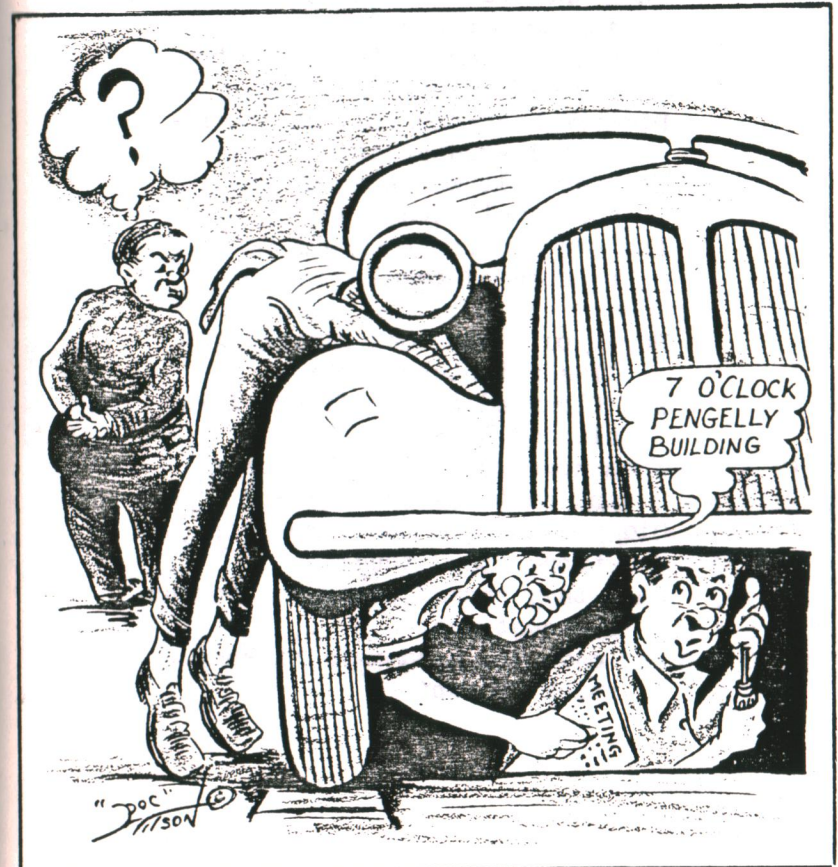
Remember when the "Sit Down" came?
And all the papers laid the claim,
Against each Union Member's name?
"SUBVERSIVE!"

'Twas then the "Big Shots" howled with fear,
"The revolution now is here;
The stand they take is naught but sheer."
"SUBVERSIVE!"

You worked in chains that galled your pride,
And when you tried to save your hide,
The "Bulls" and "Bears" stood up and cried:
"SUBVERSIVE!"

The economic ills you feared
And increased crops of "Stools" appeared,
But when you called their hand they jeered:
"SUBVERSIVE!"

Note: "bulls and bears" refers to stock
market investors.



WERE YOU THERE?

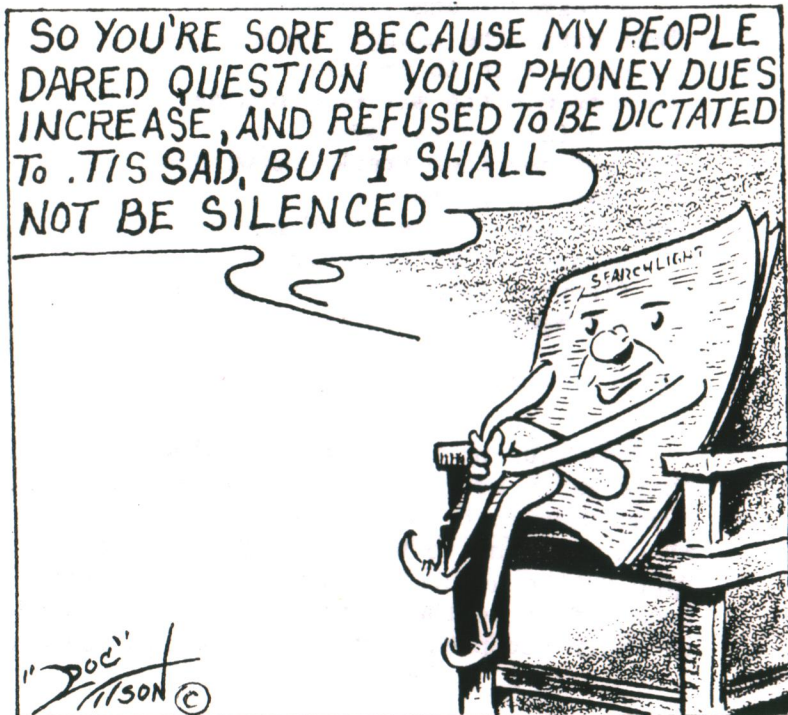
A Saga of the Flint Sit Down

Were you there when they hung
the GM goose,
When the tear gas rained
and hell broke loose
In gushing blood, in broken bone
and mad mayhem?
Did you hear the toilers scorn
a gallowsed effigy
In heartfelt words about the
sour apple tree
And see a union born all
because of them?

Were you there when slavers ran
like frightened rats
And flounced in the fracas like
blinded bats,
When workers pulled the power
and shut the Chevy down?
Did you observe the company's
strong armed thugs
When they showed their traitorous,
turncoat-mugs
And made the hand-made hickory
stick renown?

Did you hear the shrilling
screams of angry wives
That dared the slugging blue
coats with their lives
And stormed the streets outside
the factory gates?
Did you see them break the windows
glass by glass
And let escape the blinding,
strangling force of gas,
In fighting female fury to succor
endangered mates?

Note: During the 1936-37 Sitdown in Flint, there was a song popular among the strikers, "Hang Old Sloan to the Sour Apple Tree" which was sung to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic". The "goose" in this poem refers to the effigy hung out the window of their occupied factory by the Sit Downers.



VOICE OF THE CHEVROLET WORKERS

It matters not what bossmen say,
How much they rant and rave
Their Sunday suit and higher pay,
Do not exclude the grave.

* * *

The wage-slaves toil at their behest,
Producing only by their word
There's no denying one request,
Their voices must be heard.

* * *

They know quite well that banker men,
And owners of the tools
Connive with pie cards when they can,
To treat the laborers as fools.

* * *

Their language may not stand all tests,
But let them have their say
For on their backs the burden rests,
They MAKE the Chevrolet.

DISUNITY ADIEU

With CIO we fought the foe
And proved again our might,
With ballots showed we're right,
Which ends this verbal fight
And lands the deadly blow.

The plan to draft support for craft
Has failed to make the grade
Because machines are made
As robots for the trade
While workers follow aft.

For AFL we toll the knell
But sing no dirge at wake
Nor shed a tear, nor ache
For those who stand and quake
Because their fortress fell.

Note: This poem is on the transfer of power
from the AFL local to our CIO local by the
National Labor Relations Board election. A
resurgence of radical unionism, but alas, alack,
with a middle of the road President of our local.

REMEMBER

WHEN there was no CIO
The worker was a so-and-so
And merit was all-the-go
Remember?

WHERE the bosses' favor fell
Depended upon how well
Our peonage would sell
Remember?

WHY the workers began to see
Their rights to labor liberty
Lay in the power of unity.
Remember?

HOW there came the AFL
With bargain rights to sell
Not worth a hoot in Hell.
Remember?

Note: This is about the pitting of the AFL
against the CIO, advocating vertical unionism
against horizontal as a strategy to divide and
conquer.

THE WORKER BY YOUR SIDE

The workman by your side,
Does he pass the load on you?
Does he wear a union button
Or make you pay that too!

Does he give the union credit
For all it's done for him,
Or give some lame excuse
For staying on the limb?

Is he the kind to snitch,
To tattle, squeal and blab—
Is he a paid-up union man,
Or what you'd call a scab?

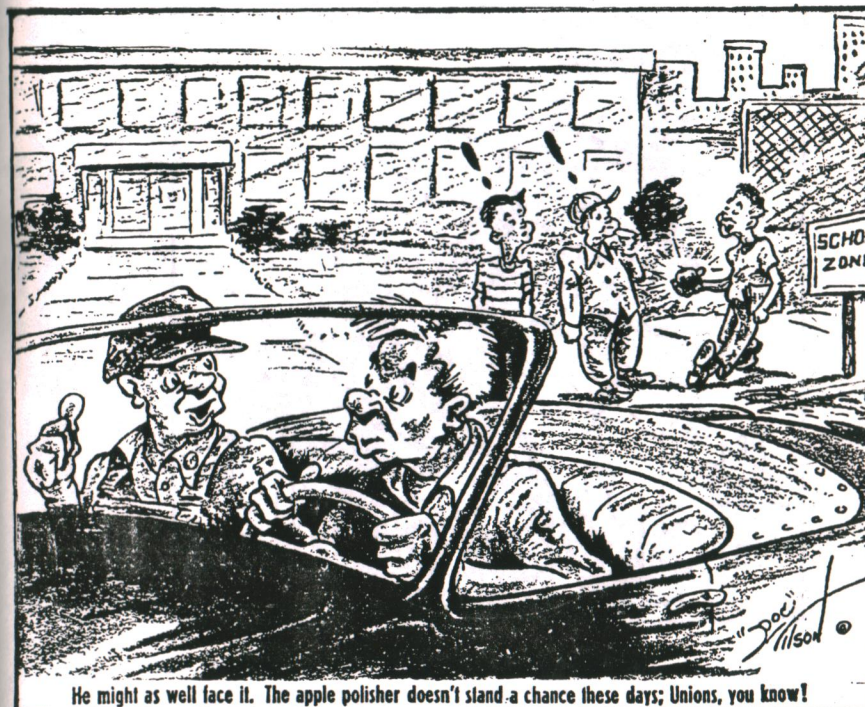
Does he court the boss's favor
And pay him back with beer,
And if you talk about the union
Turn up his nose and sneer?

Where was this fellow-worker
When you were out on strike
And raised the sweat-shop wages
For scabs and men alike?

Did he sell his soul for silver
And double-cross his neighbor
To put a feather in his cap
By fighting union labor?

If so he is a traitor,
An outcast and a rake;
A cross between a sewer rat
And a yellow-bellied snake.

Note: I think it was Oscar Ameringer who said that there was no scab worse than a union scab. There are three kinds of scabs: for personal reasons, for the company benefit, and the union scab.



BEHIND THE VEIL, A THREAT

"The technique of getting men out on the street is perfect, the picket line is as perfect as the Coldstream Grenadiers used to be -- but when it comes to getting the men back in again, the scheme is not so good." Excerpt from a G.M. official's speech before the American Newspaper Publisher's Association in the New York Times on April 26, 1940, as reported by International News Service Wire.

Behind the veil there lies a threat
To all the unions far and wide
The speaker vainly tried to hide
In subtle words, sincere and strong,
The harshness of the profit-net
By homilizing right and wrong.

"It is a perfect plan
To stop the worker's bread,"
Behind the veil I read,
"And put him on the street;
To live the best he can
Or starve in grim defeat."

"The union picket line--
A modern Coldstream Guard
With technique vain and hard,
Can close the factory gate
But still the right is mine
To let them work--or wait."

"Since I control this vast domain
It matters not the wants or needs,
The rights, the hopes or creeds
Of men who make the things I sell;
The mailed glove I shall retain
To own; to conquer and to quell."



IT CAN HAPPEN HERE

'Twas once upon a well-known time
Within a certain place,
The people held their Man sublime
As Master of their race.

He looked upon the world with fear,
And trained their youth for battle,
So all the rights they held so dear
Were changed for brands of cattle.

Their Unions sold their right to strike
Without consent by vote,
And built against the slaves a dike
To keep their ship afloat.

For all the gains they'd ever got,
They had to fight and bleed,
Because the rich had cast their lot
Within the die of greed.

The price of bread was raised each day,
But wages stayed the same;
While workers strived to plan their pay
To keep their home and name.

Their food was 'lotted one by one,
Their rights to go or come;
And everything within the sun
Was 'neath their Master's thumb.

He held the lesser breeds as bad
And forced them to the wall;
He said the many should be glad
He'd come to heed their call.

Their call to lead a master race
And make the world their mat,
Wherein there'd be no more disgrace
For rulers such as that.

THE STRIKE'S THE THING

We're equal to any beneath the sun
But let our aims be greater;
No matter what we've said or done
Columbia's our Alma Mater.

We've got the right to belly-ache
So let our words do action
For lest we lose our right to break
The Fascist's forces of reaction.

All through the ages we've made the change
When men in mass demanded,
Since now it's war, it's still not strange
The working man's commanded.

That we repeal the futile pledge
There'd be no war-time striking
For since it's become a sacrilege
It's past the pale of labor's liking.

We went along and marked our time
In trusting our rights were equal,
As day-by-day our rights decline
We know the strike's the sequel.

For seven months we've held our peace;
For seven months we've waited.
Should not the worker's patience cease
When tyranny's not abated?

So now I say it's let us strike
As one among the workers
To show the drones just what it's like
When labor quits the shirkers.

Note: This poem called for a repeal of the
WWII No Strike Pledge.

BACK TO WORK

Back to work! the Helot cries
 Inspired by some tyrant's lies
 Knowing well his fellow men
 Will not forgive him of his sin.

Break the strike, rescue the rich
 And let the wage slave rave and bitch
 Let their babies beg for bread
 'Til they're willing to be led.

Down with unions! They're very bad
 Their greedy leaders have gone mad
 Think what the workers' raise in pay
 Would cost the stockholders in dismay.

Hoist the flag! Let glory wave
 O'er the crack pot and the knave
 Stir the hatred of all G.I.'s
 Against their class and their ties.

Smash the line! Uphold the boss
 The poor can suffer any loss
 Parasites must live in ease
 And run our life as they please.

Note: This is the cynical Admonition
 of the Turncoat!

I don't know why I went to vote,
 My ballot was not tallied.
 Am I supposed to be a goat
 That's ever blindly rallied?

You may select the one you choose
 But lay no bets upon the winner,
 So cast your vote win or lose
 Lest someone call you sinner.

And when your exes have been made
 The bosses steal the boxes;
 It's then free choice is there betrayed
 By cunning, lecherous foxes.

Now someone says the tyrants sham
 The sacred rights of choosing,
 But who is he 'twould give a damn
 For voting right then losing?

Note: This poem concerns a question
 I asked a union member: "Did you exercise
 your democratic right by voting?"

TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT

OR

IT'S TEA TIME IN THACTVILLE

There's a tempest in a teapot
From the heat that's been applied
And the damn thing sure is hot
For the piecards there inside

Fakers charge about the kitchen,
Want the tea made to their taste
But the scullions keep on bitchin'
And the brew might boil to waste.

Seems as if they want a blend
Good for boss and workers, too
So they've asked in Labor's friend
Taft and Hartley's polly crew.

Yet there's some who say it's hoey
'Cause the polly's the bosses' tool;
Proving all are not as screwy
As the burden-bearing mule.

But the party date's been set,
Serving brew with ballot box 'n all,
And the stiffs must not forget
Oxen have to know their stall.

Note: Written to comment on the Taft Hartley
Act.

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE

Big business made a choo-choo
To pull the devil's train
And carry on the commerce
Of grabbing all the gain.

They took the thing to Washington
And gave it to the boys
With a stink pot full of money
To buy themselves some toys.

The nit-wits fired the furnace
And made a lot of steam;
They took it out for trial
To hear the workers' scream.

So Truman waved his veto
And stopped the engineer;
But Congress climbed aboard
With NAM on its rear.

While Taft blew the whistle
And Hartley rang the bell
The engine got to moving
And the workers went to Hell.

Note: This poem was written to
protest the passage of the Taft Hartley
Law during Truman's Administration in
1948.

THE WAGE SLAVE

It matters not your color,
Your cult or craft or creed,
If you're a wage-hour worker
You're still a slave indeed.

The ruling class is master
And dollars are the chains
By which they keep you bonded
For purely personal gains.

Two things are ever sacred,
Their bank and ballot box
And woe! the humble worker
That tampers with their locks.

They let you cast your ballot
But keep the right of score
And watch you make the money
While they attend the store.

This class is not your savior,
In fact they'll never be--
They'll always be your burden
As long as you're not free!

LABOR LEARNS

We do not own those big combines
For big combines are dear;
And big combines are for the rich
To hold the poor in fear;
A fear of what their moves would bring
To make our lives more drear.

We work in faith that soon will come
The good we've surely earned
Producing wealth by others claimed
By whom our rights are spurned
While holding high their sacred gold
They do not know that we have learned.

FEATHERS AND FAKERS

I asked a worker on the job:
"Why do you look so glum?
Has someone tried to rob
You of your pay-check chum?"

Then he replied in sour note:
"My friend, you're not far wrong!
These Labor Fakers get my goat
By singing the Bosses' song."

"Not long ago the fight was hot
To stop the Company's Plan
Of putting the worker on the spot
By canvassing every man."

But now behold, who has the ball
And running past the guard
To cinch the play for workers all
In GM's own back yard?"

"So now you know just how I feel
About the whole damned mess
When Fakers up and plainly steal
The Bosses' method of duress."

"Community Cheat or Feather Drive
They're all the same to me;
I'm doing well to keep alive
Without the aid of charity!"

"I'd suck a lollipop instead
And let the workers call me kid
Before I'd wear a feather red
Like all those bosses did!"

Note: This poem concerns a conversation with a worker on the position of certain labor leaders and the Red Feather Drive -- wherein the worker said he'd rather suck a lollipop and be kidded for childishness than wear one of those Red Feathers through forcelike supervision did.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

The bosses and the labor skates
Buried the hatchet and their hates
And then they lined up together
To sell the underdog a feather.

And the feather it was red
Like the blood the workers shed
To break their bonds and make them free
From the bosses' tyranny.

Now when they met to plan their drive
It was a strange and odd behive,
You couldn't tell the worker from the drone
For equally their raiment shone.

They dined and drank amid much glee
And classed themselves equally
In their attempt to make secure
The age-old plan to milk the poor.

Note: "A Care and Share Program of
yesteryear."

OF UNION MEN, SCISSORBILLS AND STOOGES

Let the scissorbills be bosses
The Union needs them not;
Let us count them not as losses
We're best without their lot.

The Big Boss knew their striping
Long before he called them in
For their outlook met his liking
And his need for pigeon men.

He was sure about their thinking
And the company they kept;
He was sure, in labor finking
They were more or less adept.

We were fooled into believing
They were union men at heart
But the knack of shrewd deceiving
Is a brand of bossing art

Union men are never waiting
To hold an overseer's job --
It's the system they're hating
That permits the rich to rob.

Note: The term "scissorbill" comes from a fowl
born with bills that do not match, but cross,
making the ability to feed itself difficult to do.

JUDA'S GOATS IN POVERTY FLATS

The boys are mad; the boys are sore!
Come all you workers, hear my story,
At how some men achieve their glory,
In poverty flats around plant four.

Each one was once a union man,
In all degrees to Shop Committee,
But now, alas, what a pity,
They've up and joined the other class.

They sold the brainstorms in their head,
On how to raise production,
And cause a work reduction,
That gave the Boss a break instead.

Now one man does the work of two,
Because of their defection,
From working-class protection,
And the corporation's crew.

The moral here is wash your brain,
Don't let the Boss-man do it,
Or you may live to rue it,
From losses more than gain.

FOR BOSSES ONLY

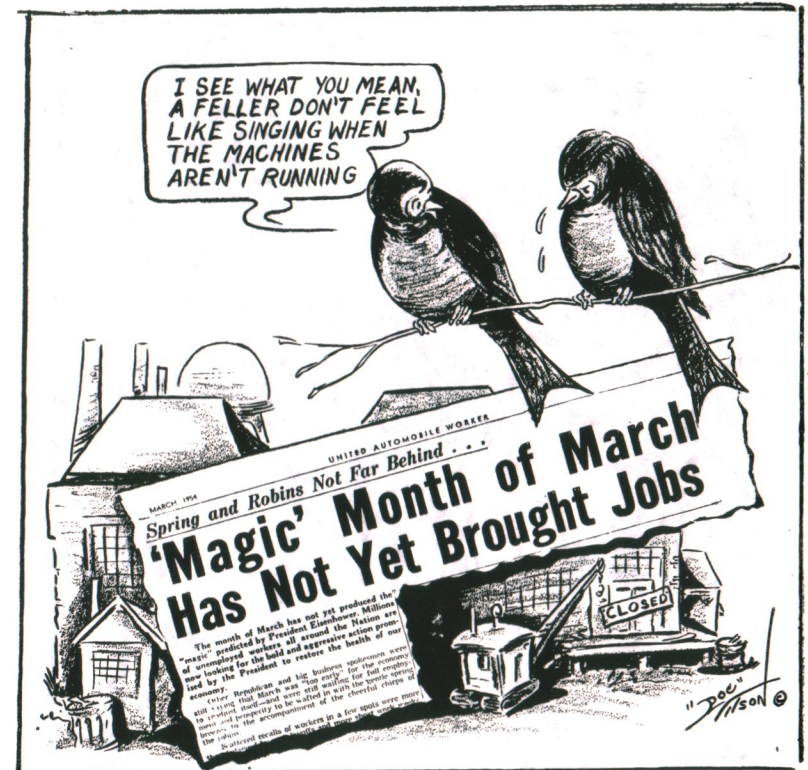
It's only the bosses that get their
pay
When lay-offs take their turn
But working men, right there and
then
Must borrow from some other day.

It's only the bosses who buy good
bread
And drink the choicest wines
While those he hires and oft' retires
Still are thirsty and underfed.

It's only the bosses who wear
white shirts
With coats and ties and all
But men in grime, in grease and
slime
Go dressed for duty in dirt.

It's only the bosses that mansions
enfold
Or homes like dreams come true.
Yet many wage slaves go to their
graves
From hovels their masters hold.

It's only the bosses that ride
limousines
Or drive in the luxury cars
And in their pride they do not
hide
Their power over men on
machines.



L A B O R

I do not own a limousine
Nor gaudy sailing yacht:
I do not court the king or queen
Nor head a strange Amgot.

They call me not a saint or sage
(My name they would defile)
And all because I work for wage
I'm just a bastard child.

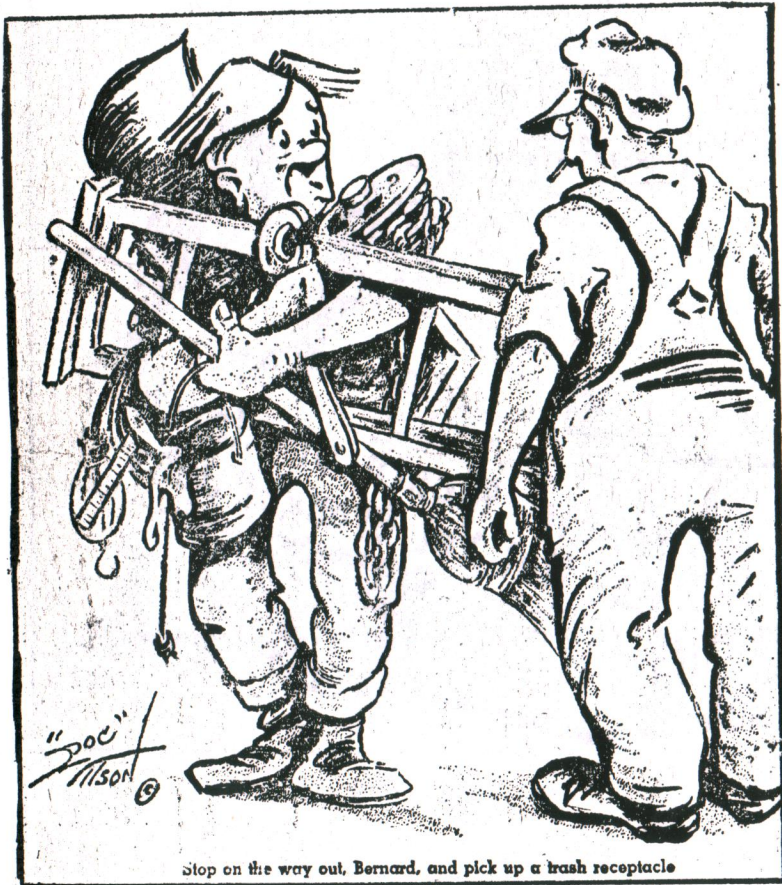
I do not wear a crown of gold
Nor seldom a ruler's cloak,
Yet all the things that 'ere was
sold
Were made beneath my yoke.

My lot in life is work and wait
And question not the Voice
That's been the Master of my
fate
Without my right of choice.

I rarely wear the golden stars
Nor seldom rate the leaf--
I'm pointed out to wear the bars
And always get the grief.

The cannon's mouth is fed by me,
The ship, the tank, the plane
And all the glory of the free
Is by my blood and brawn and
brain.

I do not sit on boards of war
Nor parley for the peace
And yet it's Me they wave it for
Until the gun-shots cease.



Stop on the way out, Bernard, and pick up a trash receptacle

POLITICS IN BLOOD

War is waste, a wanton waste,
Worse than famine, fire or flood--
Guns to gore for greed of gain;
Playing politics in blood;

War is loss, a lethal loss;
Blight for man in bloom or bud--
Hectic horror to haunt all hope;
Playing politics in blood!

"OF WAGE SLAVES
AND CAESARS"

Omar Khayyam, the Persian poet said:
"Me thinks there never bloomed a
 rose so red
As where some dying Caesar bled!"
But down the ages since his time
Most other poets in their rhyme
Have sang of Caesars as sublime,
Whose warring quests they glorified
And praised the peons who bled and
 died--
But wars have filled no empty maws
Nor won the workers no holy cause!

LABOR'S PLEA

Let not the night go down
Upon our head
'til we are fed.
Jewels for our crown--
Give us this day our bread.
We stand in line and wait
In direst want
With bodies gaunt;
Uncertain of our fate
And wonder why some men vaunt
About the sacred right
Of man to work--
When dangers lurk
Both day and night,
And the future lies in murk

GRANARY OF GREED

A jug of wine
A loaf of bread
Does not suffice my lot
For feed and breed
Is not my hope divine,
But slave 'til dead
Is all my class 'ere got.

While sluggards sleep
The frugal sweat
At labors far and wide;
They sow and hoe
Yet do not reap
But wax in debt
Toward the sluggards' side.

Some time the herd
Will rouse awake,
God speed the day
And fie the lie
Of words absurd
That "heaven has the cake
And earth the common clay."

THE HAND THAT DOES NOT FEED

Why is this hunger left to be
While foodstuffs spoil in store
To keep a trading system free
Wherein the few get more and more?

Why do the high and mighty quake;
Why do the rich men rant and rave;
Is it for the poor man's sake
The system they would save?

Is it for fear that their fate
Might be endowed with honest work,
So any trend of thought they hate
Wherein such dangers lurk?

Are those ill-kept a mighty threat
To heartless men of money-power
Whose greed could easily beget
Their fatal doomsday hour?

Will hungry men rise in despair
And bite the hand that does not feed—
Rise up and take their rightful share;
Rise up and slay the Dragon Greed?

BEGINNING OF THE END

(As a Cynic Sees It)

Quit all worker-with-worker communion,
The thing that gave bargaining its birth
And work with the Machine Owners' Union,
For they need help to rule the earth.

What's good for the corporate boss
Is good for you and all the nation;
So help him in both profit and loss
To insure his Mammon-aspired salvation.

Labor run unions are now out-of-date,
But "Papa knows best", be sure of that.
Let the "bossman" lead for heaven can wait
As the "strike-to-win" is now "old hat."

PROFIT SNARING

A Saga of a Sellout

This is a story that's oft' been told
It's ever so new, yet ever so old,
About a man's greed for power and gold,
And what he'll do to his fellowman
To ply his reasoning if he possibly can:

About a man that bargained with the boss,
To share his profit and his loss
Without any reference to the gross;
They dealt only with the overall net
To figure out what each would get.

The person he made the bargain with
Was neither his kin, nor his kith;
His touted loyalty was only a myth
For he ate pork chops and T-bone steaks
And not fast foods and poor milk shakes.

In the Realm of Reason where shadows lurk,
Dame Truth demanded that some must work,
That all could not sit down and shirk,
So the worker conceded to the well-known fact,
'Twas plainly feasible they make a pact;

Then the boss man said, "Now you look here,
I'll tell you when you can interfere--
And when you can boo, and when you can cheer.
You do the acting, I'll run the show,
For these are the things you need to know.

"I own the shop and the robot machine;
I own the savvy that can not be seen
And all get a cut on the old long green.
We didn't agree on whom I could hire,
What parasites to keep, and those to fire.

Now all these things, they belong to me:
The important role's between us three,
It's just a logical form of our trinity
The good God granted to the ruling classes
To form the fate of the toiling masses."

When there came time for a settlement,
The boss got a dollar and the worker a cent;
He dealt with the bank, the boss with the mint,
His act was confined to that of a cage,
The bossman had the world for a stage.

Now this a saga of a common sellout;
A story of deceit beyond all doubt,
A tale of reason that's put to rout;
It's the price of dominance and disgrace,
The working class is lined up to face.

PSEUDOSOCIALISM

Black Magic at Black Lake

Recent news conjures up
Food for serious thought--
Ghosts of the evil Gods
Make the Heavens quake--
Barriers broken,
Walls no longer standing
'Round the Forbidden City--
No more secrets hidden,
Union strategy cast to the wind--
Bosses and the workers' servants
Sit there, side by side,
Planning a solution
At the mountain top--
Voices loudly proclaim
From the crest:
"Enmity shall not prevail--
Mammon has a way!"
"Peace at precious prices,
Subjugation of the masses!"--
Echoes valliantly,
Defiantly,
From the valley
Where the armor clangs
Where the sabres rattle--
War at the work place--
Courage against dismay
Cries loudly out:
"Defeat is not admitted--
May it be that Black Lake
Not become our Death Valley?"

Sound the clarion!
Change the criterion!--
Quality of Work Life
Must be changed to:
Equality of Work Life!
Special privileges for none!
No superiority before God!--
Let it be known that
Hamburger incomes
Never equate with
T-Bone appetites,
Nor Economic Royalists
Horny hands of toil!

KERMIT JOHNSON

THE MAN HISTORY IGNORED

Shooting star,
Comet's tail,
Scintillating light
Flashing momentarily
'Crost the horizon of hope,
Magnifying greatly
Lesser bodies,

Kermit Johnson.

Mem'ries of the past,
Star dust trail,
Leaving foot-prints
In the path of time,
Indellible, ineraseable,
Historians overlooked
All because dim-sighted
Politicians anathematized

Kermit Johnson.

Internationals, four.
Dimensions, four.
Three ruled the roost;
Canonites black-balled
Space-time too dim;
Contemporaries shouldn't see
Depth beyond common ken of
Them that really knew,

Kermit Johnson.

"Many a flower
Blooms unseen
Wasting its fragrance
'Pon the desert air,"
Sang a forgotten poet
Of the distant past
Reminding me
Vividly of

Kermit Johnson.

Those that knew him
Inside the fortress
Will never let
Politics blind them
From the facts
Like was done
In "The Many
And the Few" of

Kermit Johnson.

Note: Kermit Johnson was the rank and file leader the Chevrolet workers credit with having played a crucial role in planning and carrying out the strategic capture of Plant 4, thereby assuring the victory of the Great Flint Sit Down Strike of 1936-37. He has not always been recognized for his important role in historical accounts of the strike.

REPORT
MARTYR WITHOUT MENTION
CHAPTER A

The only life lost in the holocaust
Was the one that Sammy Watters gave,
A man I recall that gave up his all,
But no mention now marks his grave.

It is a shame we've neglected the name
Of a Union hero from out of the past,
By an assassin's knife he lost his life
And leaves our mem'ries still aghast.

'Twas in the year of '41 after we'd won
'Oer the "Giant on the Beach" in Flint;
We'd laid him prostrate in a trammled state
With all his vaunted potentials spent.

Now Sammy was not afraid when he went to aid
A Union in the throes of dire distress,
For the picket line is both yours and mine
To make the boss-man's pressure less.

It comes to me now of the where and how
That Sammy did more, than his normal part--
I clearly remember 'twas in a bleak December;
A day of infamy to live within my heart.

I can see it all yet, I can't forget,
As he surged forward and fell to the ground,
While the muffled moans, and gurgling groans
Were heard above the confusion around.

Note: Sammy Watters was murdered in the battle
for industrial unionism in Flint. As a member of
his UAW Local's Flying Squadron, he went to aid
the picket line of a sister CIO Local. His
murderer was tried and acquitted. His funeral
procession was the longest ever in the history
of Flint as unionists paid tribute to this fallen
warrior.

TO RED:
A WARRIOR RETIRED

Gallant warrior for the cause
Sorry that you've left the ranks,
Let me say again we miss you --
For what you've done, a thousand thanks

Battles ne'er became too furious;
Enemies too great or strong
And the mile-stones you left behind you
Will guide the passing throng

Dauntless courage was on your banner,
Labor's rights written on your heart --
Leading your proud procession
From the "thirty-seven" start.

Note: The foregoing poem is written
in appreciation of the tireless effort
on the part of Brother Ernest Le Vior
for the union movement in Local No. 659.

DEAR MACK

It's not farewell; it's not adieu;
It's only to say "I'll remember you,
A true-blue fellow-working friend
Fighting faithful to the end."

"Fighting for the cause of right,
That justice prevail over might,
Where working men and women too
Could do the things they'd hoped to do."

It's not good-bye, nor au revoir,
Because the things that you were for
Will make me feel you're not away
But working with me every day;

Just working from the other side;
As spiritual mentor and a guide
To help me in this war with life
Against the wolves of want and strife;

So let these truthful words be said:
"Although your body now is dead
Your spirit lives to make men free
And reap the fruits of liberty."

Note: The foregoing is dedicated to
the memory of Fay McKnight of Dept. 461,
who passed away Friday, Feb. 24, 1950.

THE CURTAIN'S DOWN

In all respects, let it be said:
The curtain's down, the act is o'er
The Reaper's played the final score
And many mourn because you're dead.

It's surely true the world's a stage
With each a part -- a chosen role
And time allotted for each soul
To play its part and turn the page.

To those of us still in the show,
We'll not forget how well you played--
The Union Man so unafraid--
That boss-men knew how far to go.

The rebel cause was better served
Because of honest men like you
Who played THE MANY AND THE FEW
Without the honor they deserved.

Note: Dedicated to the pleasant memory of Clyde
Boone, a good and faithful unionist who passed the
"Great Divide" on May 30th 1963..

GOODBYE, BILL BAILEY

Gone but not forgotten
Is a phrase we often hear
When we speak of people's passing
That we hold in reverence dear.

But it's more than words we're saying
When we think of good old Bill
Who's left us but a memory
And a place that's hard to fill.

Years on end he spent in toiling
In the grease and grime and dust,
Working hard and striving faithful
For the common worker's trust.

Never did he prove disloyal
To the friends he toiled among—
'Tho it's now good bye Bill Bailey
May your life not go unsung.

Note: To eulogize with honest conviction the
memory of a man with many friends, Bill Bailey,
who Crossed the Bar April 20, 1953.

"AN OLD SOLDIER FADES AWAY"

An old soldier from out our Union ranks
Lays down his arms to rest his weary soul
From constant toil with little pay or thanks
Wherein he fought so well to win a worker's goal.

'Though still we'll hear the echo of his kindly voice
And catch a fleeting shadow of his smile
It has become his maker's final choice
That he stack arms and walk the last lone mile.

We'll miss, of course, his earthly presence here
Remembering still the hard-fought battles won
But may we say to those by blood who hold him dear:
We're thankful for all the goodness he has done!"

Note: Written in memoriam to big, honest,
jovial William T. Weaver, aged 66, who took his
sojourn into The Big Beyond amid the shadows of
death, June 19, 1951 A.D.

THEY AND BROTHER TOM KELLEY DIES

(SIC SEMPER TYRANNIS)

They called you Red and rebel,
But is there one to truthfully say,
You did not have a heart of gold
For every child that labor bore?

They scorned your politics
Your Creed of Human Rights
Against the vested tyrant few
In Mammon's Sacred Temple

They said you had no God --
Yet what a lie they wrought,
For that you served was not of greed,
But good for goodness sake.

They held in doubt your honesty
Your purpose to the bitter end,
But who did more to break the chains
That bound the wage-hour slave?

Note: In respect and appreciation
memory of Thomas Kelley, one of the diminishing
"Old Guard" and charter member of Local 659,
who took the Great Voyage on the Ship of Fate
Dec. 20, 1956.

NO PICKETS IN PARADISE

LEIC YELIEX MOY

I hear the fall of marching feet;
Of countless pickets on their beat
Throughout our native land.

I read the placards that they bear;
About the galling yoke they wear;
And the justice they demand.

This vision of an endless war;
Re-emphasizes what Labor's for:
That tyranny must be withstood.

The wage-slave's battle never ends;
The conflict does not rest with friends;
Nor with forces for our good.

I remember well a wages-slave;
Now resting silently in his grave;
That fits his panoramic frame.

He faced the weather, bitter cold;
With spirits high and courage bold;
To show the boss-man he was game.

Few pickets ever matched his zeal;
In serving the line for commonweal;
For strikes brought all that Labor got.

Although these words of honest praise;
Marks the end of your days;
We'll miss you Carl, a lot.

Note: In memory of the picketing-est picket
Local 659 every had, Carl Fuller, who went to
his reward Tuesday, January 12, 1960.

TWO PEAS IN A POD

In mem'ry designs I write these lines,
'Tho belated in time they be,
Of two men small, but standing tall--
They were a blessing to me.

Both Lovey and Chris we surely miss:
Alike as two peas in a pod;
Both laughable men, but lovable when
The Chair gave either proceed nod.

Thro' shadows dim, I still see them,
Anxious, alert and ever on their toes;
Now years have gone, they still live on
As ones who gave no quarter to foes.

"To Indigo-China no, we won't go!"
Lovey so often boldly remarked.
Geography was not his lettered lot,
But vivid thoughts of reason he sparked.

"I rise to remark!" will always spark
The mem'ries of days I knew Chris;
With that or more Chris got the floor
Despite the raspberry or the hiss.

Both little and loud, but glad and proud
To be a member of the "Flying Squad,"
They led the way, in parade or fray;
Both pure as gold but plain as sod.

Note: This is not an attempt to stereotype, but to portray the variables of humanity, small and large, lean and fat, male and female in many ethnic evaluations: people of many political persuasions, religious-reformists in many social levels were combined in the cauldron of unified-dissent to form a force, a basis for bargaining in the field of "wage slavery." This poem was written in respectful memory of Lovey Laney and Chris Common.

A WARRIOR'S DISCHARGE

'Tho taps have sounded for you, Steve,
The battle still goes on;
'Tho many aching heart will grieve
To know that you are gone.

You fought the worker's battle well!
You gave no quarter to the foe;
And when the fight got hot as hell,
You knew which way to go!

You charged ahead or held your ground,
But you never did retreat
And all the boss-men here have found
Old Steve was hard to beat

No poet's words can eulogize
The exploits of your fame,
But what your friends will recognize,
Old Steve Hodges' name.

So with these words I say adieu
And may the Other Side
Prepare a resting place for you
Of which this world denied.

In memory of my dear friend, Steve Hodges 1889-1950

Note: Steve Hodges was a 1937 sit downer and a militant activist until his death in 1950.

APPEAL TO REASON.

Howard Foster

A Crusader with a Collective Conscience

Who said that justice lends not to bid;
That liberating truth must oft be hid?
Censors Did!

And so at times in human dealing
They must remain a mental feeling,
'Neath a lid!

Forego the brazen "no win myth".
Retreat, return, comeback with,
Patience amid!

For justice, like truth is totally blind--
Demands to remain a state of mind,
Try and rid!

They can't see you, they must be sought,
Remaining within, as they really ought--
Pure and livid!

Shall they submit to the use of lies,
Depending only on tyrant's eyes?
God forbid!

Note: Howard Foster was a 1937 sitdowner, regarded as fearlessly militant. Following is part of Howard Foster's statement before the House Unamerican Activities Committee in 1952 -- "I spent 20 years, perhaps the most difficult and best years of my life, building a union, and I don't intend to let anyone get their hooks into that union and tear the guts out of it."

In Memory of Jack Palmer

Ashes to Ashes

Before me is the urn
That holds your ashes, Jack;
In essence,
The last remains --
Profound reality of fourth dimensionalism
The last equation
In the nth degree
Of one I loved,
and being not disagreeable
In our disagreement.

I do not know,
Nor can I with assurance say.
They'll be retained
As keepsake
by those that loved you too,
Or cast to the Four Winds,
That Mother Earth
May claim in her own way
That which She gave
In the beginning.

The laudatory remarks,
Freely given,
At your Commemoration assembly of loyal friends,
Still ring within
My ears;
Reminding me
That good-works
Will never die,
For Truth will out
And overcome
The exploiter.

Note: Jack Palmer died in 1983. He was active in many union battles, particularly in the efforts to form a labor party and in the fight for the cost of living.

IN RETROSPECT

Today in musing back through
Labor's struggle here in Flint
My heart goes out to Old Pop Hill
Whose active life is nearly spent.

My memory is prone to e'er recall
The valiant way he fought
The iron barrier of the bosses
For the freedom all men sought.

And many's the time I've seen him
When the battle lines were weak
Standing boldly in the forefront
As protection for the meek.

But the ranks of warriors are waning,
The radical group grows thin
And I'm wondering if the workers
Will rise again like men.

So here's a toast I'll offer
That his life may longer yet be spared:
"May all your friends that know you
Defend the struggle that you shared."

CRUSADER'S CROSS

"Tho' rebels die of natural cause
Or land upon the Cross,
The tyrants still enact their laws
To show that they are boss--

Sometimes within the scheme of earth-bound
mortal things
We find the parting sad when life no longer stays
within the Temple of the Soul,
That's why the heartaches and the sorrow
the grim-faced Reaper brings
Is greater when a loved one's called to his redemption
sort of his goal.

"Tho' you have gone beyond the veil of mystery,
now, Dear Jim,
The footprints you have left upon the trail
of Terra Firma's time
Will be as marks in right directions,
never growing dim,
For those whose choice is freedom
from misery, want, and crime.

Note: In respectful remembrance to class-
conscious fellow-worker, Jimmy Kiger, who
departed to the Great Beyond on September 5,
1951.

A REBEL RESIGNS - (A REQUIEM IN REVERSE)

We'll not forget the things you said,
The time you gave, or deeds you did,
For such as these are never dead,
Although your presence has been hid,
The Union formed with men like you
And boss-men toned their sound,
So in the place of tyrants grew
A search for "Common Ground"
Although we know it cannot be
But times have changed the score,
To where the air is much more free,
Than ever has it been before,
The Big-Boss still maintains the mill,
And tries to use both fang and claw,
To force men's efforts and their will,
Within the patterns of his law,
The battle still has not been won,
You helped the calloused wage-slaves fight,
So Ralph, we promise to carry on,
This war to gain more economic right
It's not a prayer we offer now,
No requiem can affect the dead,
But praise for you, we must allow,
And hold you in esteem instead.

Note: To the memory of Ralph Stott, a
loyal defender of the union cause, who entered the
Great Beyond -- we miss you, Ralph.

"REBEL WITHOUT ARMS"

The sun ne'er set on Rebel Fire,
The Spark that feeds the Flame of Hope,
And gives to those who would desire
To gain the good within their scope.
You did not wish to rise above,
Nor ride upon your brother's back;
You shared your labor, life and love
For what the Underdog might lack.
I'm sure the Keeper of the Score
Will see the goodness you have done,
And give you Peace for evermore
Beyond the stars, the moon, the sun.
I know the earth is sometimes prone
To thwart the Sower of Good Seeds,
But every Order finds its own,
So will the Doer of Good Deeds.
They say you're gone, but that's not so,
Nothing but the Flesh, the Blood, the Bone,
I'm speaking now to the Spirit I know,
Not writing an epitaph for stone.
In words of Love and words of Life;
Let Truth prevail, let Freedom ring
And Reason tire not of constant strife,
For the Truth is greater than the Thing.
Now Bert, it's not just plain good-bye,
But au revoir, I'm telling you;
My cherished memory shall never die
For one I held as tried and true.

Note: To the indelible memory of my late
and loveable friend, Bert Boone, 1901-1969.

IN SILENT SORROW

(Written in the memory of a union
crusader for the cause of the
common man, Ashley Pennegar.)

Now your passing it is written
And you're sleeping with the dead,
Leaving loved ones sadly smitten,
We that knew you bow our head.

Bow our head in silent sorrow
For a sincere man of worth;
One who sought a bright tomorrow
For the workers of this earth.

BEYOND THE BLUE HORIZON

Beyond the blue horizon
Your weary soul has fled
Into the great Hereafter
To grace the living dead.

The world is now the loser
For much you rendered here
To free the sweating worker
From want and war and fear.

No quarter for the enemy,
No fear of dangerous foe
Was e'er a motto blazoned
For all to see and know.

You fought the fallen angels
That bore the Croesus sign,
The despots and the tyrants
And all their spawn of swine.

If all the streets are gilded
And all the gates are pearly
You'll use them as your honor
For serving the working world.

I'll miss you George so greatly
For none can take your stead
For all our years of friendship
Were bound where Labour bled.

So now the hour of parting
Has come between us two
And in my heart is sadness
For this, my last adieu!

Note: To the cherished memory of George H. Carroll, the greatest warrior for the cause of human decency, freedom and social justice I have ever had the pleasure of fighting with, who took up his lamp and went through the Inner Door, October 1, 1954.

IN MEMORIAM

To Brother Harry Baker

May those nearest to you
 And dearest to you
 And all those others,
 Union sisters and brothers,
 Calm their conscience in the knowing
 That it was your firm belief
 That no monument is made of grief
 But to carry out your union creed
 Would be a marking stone indeed.

The proletariat has gained his just
 expression;
 The "Happy Family" hoax remains no more;
 There is no merit-birchrod o'er the door
 To force their "Papa's" money-mad obsession
 That labor is the sacred duty of the poor.
 And since they sought and won their rights
 collective
 The kids that once were meek, and worn, and
 pale,
 With birthrights up for pawn or outright sale,
 Have grown to men of strength, but face invective,
 Because they dared to raise the wage slave's bail.

ABOUT THE POET

Poet Floyd Hoke-Miller today continues to write poetry on the issues facing the shop floor worker. He retired in 1963, after 33 years as an auto worker in a GM factory in Flint, MI. Like other auto workers of his generation, he is from a long, progressive, working class tradition. He was reared on newspapers like The Waco Iconoclast, The Appeal to Reason, The Industrial Worker, and The National Ripsaw. His father was a Socialist Party supporter who had seen and heard Eugene V. Debs speak in person. The poet's own leanings identified him with industrial unionism and the IWW by the time he was 16. By the early 1930's, he held a union card in the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks. Throughout his many years, his guiding credo, learned from Debs, has been: "When I rise it will be with the ranks, and not from the ranks."¹

Floyd Hoke-Miller was a Sit Down Striker in the seizure of Plant 4 in the Flint Sit Down Strike of 1936-37. Dubbed the Poet Laureate of his Local, UAW-Local 659, he is a union man who contributed on a regular and frequent basis to his local union newspaper, which provided a vehicle for the publication of his poems and columns. It is a poem by Floyd Hoke-Miller that prompted Ralph Marlatt, the Editor of "The CIO Auto Worker - Flint Edition" in the early 1940's to write:

There is a new art growing up in America. A new labor culture is being born. Our writers, our artists, our singers are the people in the shops. Their art is woven around the shops. It is a culture that is...a product of the industrial age in which we live.²

The 1936-37 Flint Sit Down Strike won auto workers the right to organize industrial, as opposed to craft unions. The continuing struggle for industrial unionism became the theme of this poet's work over many long years. His poetry honors not only the men and women workers who made that victory possible, but it also documents the hard and determined struggle waged by workers like those in Flint to maintain and build on the 1936-37 victory.

NOTES: 1. See for example Ray Ginger, The Dending Cross, New Jersey, 1949, p. 17.

2. This quote is from a column Marlatt wrote called "Nuts and Bolts". An undated copy is included in Floyd Hoke-Miller's papers at the Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI. Most of Floyd's poems were originally published in the shop paper of his Union Local The Searchlight. Often he used nom de plumes like Vickey Van or pseudonyms such as Evelyn Pierce. A few of his poems were published in other labor papers like the Industrial Work of the IWW:

THE CRITIC AND THE REBEL
We've had our rebels, both good and bad
From Attila the Hun, to Ivan the Mad
We've had Crusaders for the Carpenter's
cross
That history records as a religious loss.
We've had soap-boxers stand for human rights
Only to be martyrs for their courageous
fights;
But none like those with the Barons of
Barter
Where Labor fought Capital for a Magna Carta
So let the critics rant and let them rave
We are all destined to some sort of grave;
And if the rebel's maligned as totally
rotten,
He'll be remembered when the critic's
forgotten.

Whether history calls him a hero or a heel
There is one thing it can not conceal --
He was a Rebel!

Note: Written in response to the review
"Exuberance, rough edges missing in show" by
Joseph Matuzak, Flint Journal, May 10, 1985.

TOASTING A THRUST AT THE HEART OF TYRANNY

By Floyd Hoke-Miller

Here's to the workers all, at Hormel,
That had the guts to stand and tell
Their boss-exploiters to go to Hell
And tend the fires already started.

"---there never bloomed a rose so red
As where some dying Caesar bled."
In stressing a point of leader and led,
So stated a poet long since departed.

That's why man's inhumanity to his kind
Brings Oscar Ameringer and Joe Hill to mind.
Digest them thoroughly and you will find
Their words are a case for constant study.

Accept these greetings from a Wobbly of old
That's never been invited in out of the
cold;

One that's never been bribed or ever sold
Saying still, "The boss is not your buddy!"

Poet's Note: I do wish the best of success
in the fight of the meat workers to gain a
higher position in their war against the
boss.

The poet is a retired U.A.W. pioneer who was
a sitdowner in the Flint Sit-Down Strike of
1936-1937.