

## Work Poetry / Poésie de Travail

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# WORK POETRY/ POÉSIE DE TRAVAIL

THESE POEMS are about work, racism and exploitation. Being a member of the visible minority, my experiences as a letter carrier are somewhat different than my co-workers. In 'The Postman' I explore these feelings about my fellow workers, the people that I deliver mail to, and the work itself. At times the helplessness a worker feels against the employer and in general the entire ruling class is the focus in 'And You Know It.' The ideology profit before people and the push for privatization is resulting in degradation of labour relations in the post office as reflected in 'The Dangerous Dogs.' Institutionalized racism against Farmworkers in British Columbia results in their slave-like work conditions the focus of 'Farmworkers are Workers Too.'

Sadhu Binning

## *THE POSTMAN*

in the dark  
from the mouth of a radio clock  
English words hit like a hammer  
half opened eyes unstable feet  
from toilet to kitchen  
dead silence  
a cup of tea a lunch bag  
labeled clothes take control of your body

sorting mail for Jacksons, Sandhus and Wongs  
surrounded by people  
who have learned life's secrets  
from Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse  
some of these 'brothers'  
don't want to laugh with you  
but at you

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they don't even see you  
they see an image  
nailed in their heads  
by the creators of Donald and Mickey

letters in your hand  
rain on your head  
every dog is a lion in its house  
crooked high stairs  
the cats watch you and jump away  
buried under fliers from Sears and Bays  
your back screams  
still you watch your steps  
and they watch you  
through their half open curtains  
Whites Blacks Indians Chinese  
those kept in the house  
have sharp eyes but limited vision  
some of them see you  
as another somebody  
who goes on strike just to trouble them  
you deliver letters  
that travel from your hand  
to the garbage pail  
what once was a tall and proud tree somewhere  
piece by piece delivered to a garbage heap

you start with a handful  
ends with nothing  
one year two years ten years  
and then you count no more  
along the way your hairs change their color  
perhaps to make some white man happy  
the rest remain the same to the end  
yet piece by piece you deliver yourself

*AND YOU KNOW IT*

no answer  
to my good morning  
she stares at the bag  
and always with a deep sigh:  
'is that whole thing for us'?

her heavy makeup  
fail miserably  
to hide her weariness  
her tired and suppressed voice  
speaks loudly  
of open exploitation  
of boss/servant relation

of course she can never dare  
to express things this way  
all workers in the office  
are part of a 'big happy family'

and then enters  
the boss  
with big round stomach  
first in sight  
(another proof the earth is round)  
in a commanding voice  
he demands  
'is that all you have for us'?  
propelling words  
his rotten breath  
almost touching my eyebrows

he further interrogates  
'hey what is it i hear  
you guys  
going on strike again'?  
doesn't wait for my answer  
'you sure are crazy  
never understand

soon you get a raise  
the prices will just fly up  
(throw his arms upward in the air  
on the way down a finger  
from his right hand  
starts shaking while he stares  
straight into my eyes)  
you'll never catch up  
and you know it'

it makes me feel  
like a prisoner  
when told by the guard  
'don't try to run  
my dogs will catch you  
and rip you apart  
and you know it'

*FARMWORKERS ARE WORKERS TOO\**

we are proud to be farmworkers  
we sweat like all the rest of toilers  
as they do in factories and mills  
yet you say in the eyes of your law  
we are not workers

we came here with millions of dreams  
breaking away from the soil  
that fed us for centuries  
for labour we left the sweet village behind

the pictures we saw, the stories we heard  
before coming here  
do not correlate to the reality  
we are transported like chickens  
to and from the farms  
or made to live in barns made for cows

the length of our work day is such  
stars watch us come and go

late at night and early in the morning

we hear our children cry neglected  
in the strawberry rows  
yet we push on forward  
our elderly give to the last drop  
of their blood to your crops  
many a bangles from newlyweds' arms  
lay broken around raspberry bushes  
in the place of colorful bangles now  
many of us wear skin rashes

farmers and contractors don't always pay us  
when they do it is next to nothing  
when we are hurt and that happens quite often  
we are conveniently thrown out of the system

there is no protection from dangerous chemicals  
our employers act as old feudal lords  
and treat us as part of their property

don't take us wrong  
it's not the work we complain against  
work is what we have known all our lives  
work is what gives meaning to our lives  
there is no job in your fields  
that we can't or won't handle

in response to our complaints  
we are told that in the eyes of the law  
of this beautiful land  
'farmworkers are not even workers'  
that is an insult we can no longer ignore

this is a battle we have been forced to fight  
to pick a stick, to defend our rights  
now you will have to hear our side too  
we will show you  
that farmworkers are workers too

\*(Until recently farmworkers in British Columbia  
were not protected by labour legislation. The farm-

workers, mainly immigrants from India's Punjab Province, have been struggling for their rights.)

*THE DANGEROUS DOGS*

(For Pat Moore)

rain or shine, hail or storm  
the mail must go through?  
forget it  
if it is not good for business  
hell with service to the people  
profit is what we must strive for  
nay we must live for

those are the orders from the top

and how is it going to be achieved?

all that is old must change  
each and every one of us must become  
the spit image of our god: the businessman

starting from the basic things  
like greetings in the morning  
there is to be no more  
un-business like things as good morning  
comments about weather or one's health

so sir!

now when you walk in  
the greetings mean business  
they are meant to show you your place

where is your tie? they ask you

it is not the words  
but the tone of the voice that  
carries the real message:

you are nothing  
an easily replaceable piece of nothing  
how dare you to be you

in here you must be an image of our god:  
the businessman  
wear your tie or else?

where is you i.d.?  
the voice again hits like a bullet  
don't you know  
it must be exposed at all times?

the message carries by the tone is:  
this is not your home you know  
we don't care  
if you have been here thirty years  
we do no un-business like things  
as trusting or dealing with people  
as human beings  
you must prove to us each morning  
who you are, or else?  
?  
the letter will go on to your file  
which has the power  
to eventually annihilate you as a worker

in these days more letters are going on files  
than honors given to mother Teresa

the pictures of 'guys at the top'  
emerging during shop-talks  
come pretty close to Bukowski's The Stone  
if not more sadist or cruel

there is constant fear in the air  
yet the dangerous dogs  
are the last things on our minds

Sadhu Binning  
(18 June 1988)



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