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THE POWER OF THESE TWO HANDS

By T-Bone Slim

The construction workers have made millionaires from coast to coast—Maine to California; Minnesota to El Paso; at all points, projects and places in between, wherever undertakings of any size have been completed.—“With the strength of this poor old back! With the power of these two hands!” (A “brain” of a contractor never made him a millionaire—cheap lodging houses are full of contractors—unemployed.)

It was these two hands, yours and mine, that finished the job of boosting him into a purple automobile; while we beat our way back to civilization (so-called) in box cars, ice boxes, etc., for, if we “put out” the price of transportation we find there would have been no use of going to the job in the first place). We don’t go to these jobs just for the sake of making new millionaires. No. We go there to get something for ourselves and that something is—you’d never guess it in a thousand years—money.

It is a stake we are after. We do not go to these jobs merely to take on some work; we do not go there merely to wear out our old clothes; (old clothes can be worn out); we don’t go there merely to eat and sleep—if we did, we would not be on these jobs in the good old summertime, we would sleep under an apple tree with our mouths wide open. No. The only thing that brings us to these jobs in these out-of-way places is the fact: “We need the money.” It’s a question of money, and God knows, too much money never ruined the author of this screed. Too much money never made a tramp of a working man.

Now it happens that we, as construction workers, building this road, building this dam and power house, building this tunnel, removing this mountain (and digging a cellar in which you could put it) have a position in society to maintain but we cannot do it without money. And, plenty of it!

It happens that we, the construction workers, moving these rivers around from one place to another; putting in ponds, reservoirs and lakes wherever needed, digging out here, filling in there, have a social position of great importance. But it also happens that society has utterly failed to take care of us, in any sense; it has neglected to reward us for the big things we have done and on the little things, society has stripped us clean—robbed us blind. We have nothing! Nothing to show for all the work we have done. That is the situation—and what is the solution?

You might say (according to this) that we, the builders of a new society, are traveling in tough luck—and you might even go so far as to suggest that we ought to get together in a general construction workers union, in a big way—to point out these things to society, in a big way—you might argue that “we are used to doing big things, so why leave our unionism frail?” And I will agree with you. Now...

First, before we go any further, we will make a few observations. We will see how the land lies: The thing that sticks out most

plainly is the fact that the bosses are looking for trouble—and, they are going to find it. Morning, noon and night and between meals, they are going around with a chip on their shoulder (you might say) looking for some one to knock it off. Sometimes seven days a week they are on our trail, telling us, do this, do that and the other thing—everything. All together!—Yo, Heave!

Not merely every day, every hour, but almost every minute we find the boss camping on our trail looking after the profits “they get out of our hides.”—And, it has been SO a long, long time—long enough!

We have been harassed (interfered with) in our work to such an extent that we could not do our best work (at any time) the easy way—the **right and light** way. Always have we been “up in the air” over something or other when the boss (leather lunged boss) arrived on the job with his authority.

If we will look about us we can see that it is high time something was done “to clean camp” but before this can be done there is a certain step to be taken by the workers—so they can act as once. They must lay away all sentimentalism and look at themselves merely as fellow workers producing the “thing” that society needs. They must view the job as merely so much work to be done and paid for, in full—both ways. Looking at our job in this light we see that we have no reason to worry about what will confront us on the next job; what will bother us next year, or a hundred years from now; what is going to “queer” us when we get ready to take over industry or, any of **all the questions being pressed upon us right now** when we are about to start dickering with the Boss.

We can see that we have some “very immediate demands” to make—and, if we have any other demands they will no doubt occur to us as we go along.—Our position is such in these camps, denied of all comfort, entertainment and even necessities of life, that we are in no position to “take on questions” of puzzling nature and in no way can we get away from the immediate things right in front of us. The “things” confronting me and you on the job are the things that make it almost impossible to think—to read—to learn and, not only are they “immediate demands,” they are **intimate demands** and will have to be taken up, in an intimate way with the boss at each camp before we can hope to better our condition as construction workers. We are held fast by these things. We can’t get away from them—until they first are corrected—remedied.

Now let us consider that the big mills and manufactories have their own construction companies and that these mills and factories for the first time have started shipping men—construction men—into their gates. Let us see these men as they are on the job: The “alarm clock” wakes us up in the morning to grab a hasty breakfast—pasty breakfast—which, because of its “quality,” it would be far better to leave untasted. We grab a nose bag of sandwiches (sand—) and make a dash for the time-clock to punch in. (Being single we lose no time kissing friend-wife good-bye). (To be continued next issue).