



Worshipping Strange Gods

Nothing but trouble—ain't I the unluckiest . . . Trouble is worse than having a boss hollering at you—you wouldn't be able to stand the story about my troubles, so I will tell the one about the boss hollering.

I had accepted a position in an extra-gang and with three others I proceeded to valiantly charge upon the ties, brandishing a deadly looking number 2. And let me remind you again that when I tamp ties I wield a wicked hip—four rail lengths, 88 ties, in one hour (piecemakers please note)—tie and a half per minute.

But, I've never seen it to fail; just about the time I get going good in an effort to open up a few pores for the purpose of fitting myself to catch a cold so as to put a ragged edge on my literary disposition, the boss lets loose a yell, "Shake your legs."

We were tamping center, short sanded, so I told my mates that I guess he means we should work faster. They told me that's the way they dope it out too. "Well," says I, "If that's the case, we must be using up too much time per tie. We are using too many strokes and the strokes are too long. We shall have to use shorter strokes and less of them."

So we cut our strokes to seven. But, again the plaintive plea penetrates our ear: "More tamping and less visiting." "This won't do," says I, "it's 7 miles to town. We better cut the strokes to four and shorten 'em accordingly." So we did. We made seven rail-lengths in 22 minutes—which, I believe, is the record. Piece makers, please note.

We tamped 154 ties in 22 minutes; 7 ties per minute—and then the roadmaster calls us back—I thought, "here's where we get our medals." Nothing of the kind; he made us go all over it again, for fear there might be a loose tie we might have overlooked . . .

Which there was, I am sorry to say, and for which I apologized fully, stating our hurry had led us astray and the yelping of his demented foreman had temporarily unbalanced us—I plead insanity of the first degree, loss of memory and near-sightedness as the cause for those loose ties—"But," says I, "we kept up; we four center tampers kept up with eight end tampers and four jack tampers. Not only that; the 12 end tampers couldn't keep us a going—and if the boss had only thought to holler once't more we would have went ahead of the jacks."

Just a small picture of the capitalist system—

Our preliminary tamping was wasted—we had to go over it all the second time; including the first four rail-lengths that had received its full quota of strokes.

When I offered the boss my resignation that evening, a look of anguish crept into his eyes. "You shouldn't pay no attention to me," he says; "I was only hollering to one man in the bunch. You see, yesterday which was Sunday, when the rest of the gang was "laying in" for time and a half, this man with five others showed up for work and I had to take them out—I lost a good poker day that way—worked hell out of them and gave only 35 minutes dinner hour—that's the reason I was hollering, but I wasn't hollering at you fellows."

"But," says I, "you didn't have no holler coming—you had six men out there Sunday—whinin'-h—I didn't you order 'em to sit down, make it seven handed and beat 'em out of their day's pay. I tell you, I can never forgive you—s'posin' I had ruptured myself . . . Supposing the whole four of us ruptured ourselves jumpin' up and down on them shovels like two pairs of 'banty roosters.' Just think of it—right before all those gandy dancers—you holler, making it appear that we were trying to put something over on the company—I am completely unstrung; my feelings are all unravelled; you have broken my heart and cracked my liver—I won't be able to work again until they start inflating labor."

"Aw, go to work," he says; "I'll put you on as a water boy until your liver heals up and I'll build a fire under them six that broke the holy Sabbath—the one day in the week when the boys can get together and look over Hoyle's catechism—go on to work!"