

Badgering The Badgers

By T-BONE SLIM

In the progressive state of Wisconsin, a very good state, in the very hot bed of progress, Madison, Wisconsin, in the very shadow of the capitol building, a left handed landscape expert located the park benches where shade never lights—other side of the walk would have shaded the benches 21 hours per day. Well, what's my beefing about other than that the trustful park bench patrons should not be tormented thusly in this advanced age, the 18th century?

Al, fellow mortals, I fear that left handed expert will never be satisfied until he crashes the gates of Phil LaPollette, pulls the capitol inside out and scorches a bevy of our best legislators—mebbe cause them to turn out laws in bass clef? I'm nervous.

Lots of people thought "the law," not far from Baraboo, Wis., was troubled with a mild case of blueberry hysteria when he went down to the jungle and put a stop to washing the "North-Western Rail" road" soot off unemployed noses and soiled shirt collars. Some thought the robbing of two filling stations in California was what brought new life to the great man.

Still others thought he takes exceptions to bums swinging such deadly weapons as Gillette's safety razors in broad daylight.

One there was that thought "the law" was victim of "the green-eyed monster" on account of the good coffee the boys were drinking. Be that as it may (I won't tell on him), "the law" performed his duties in a masterly fashion and nobody was killed—prosecutor was vicious.

Am thinking of washing my shirt in Lake Michigan—I offer this as a warning to all vegetarians who do not drink beer.

"It will not happen in our time" (it's happening now) is like saying "it's no use," and reaching for the cyanide caramels.

The force of this attitude hit me strongly yesterday as I rode the tops of a passenger train pursuant to my newly acquired habit of taking open air treatments: Prior to leaving Madison, Wis., in tears, when I left this emotional town, a professor by almost superhuman effort and engineering skill forced himself to his feet and announced, it will be 40 years before Uncle Samuel gets out of this middle-middle. I went over the proffered figure and found a slight discrepancy wherein the scholar's pencil had slipped in two places and after putting this and that and the other together and dividing it by the mean horsepower of prosperity ballyhoo I found it will be 42 years, 6 months, 20 days and 40 seconds before prosperity will give us a nod, and most of that time will be spent in jail. "Forty years!" I gasped and got a mouthful of cinders, "forty years," and to think I'm figuring on staying in this world only twenty-nine more years. It will never happen in my time, I may as well dive off this train between stations. (I would have, too, only I happened to think of a good rocky place a couple of stations farther up the line—you know how it is, a man hates like the very dickens to dive into a nice pile of soft sand.) Unfortunately, just then, the thunderheads that had been gathering let go and gave me the damnedest baptism I've had since I fell off the Battery wall. The upshot of that unfortunate circumstance was the lowering of my temperature, "cooled me off," as the saying goes, and opened my memory to grow sluggish—Zipp! Zoomer, clickety click! We shot thru the rock cut before I could pull myself together—just sat there dripping water and wondering what it's all about. Oh, well, some other time—I never backtracked before supper.

Funny, how such a small matter as a thunder storm takes man's mind off the more serious matters and causes him to start worrying how to dry his clothes. Wasted worry for just then the train hit a tunnel and lo! when she emerged, the clothes were dry. Smoke, gas and hot cinders had accomplished what seemed impossible—then I had to start worrying how to get my clothes wet again and introduce them to soap.

A dark prospect, to be sure, but there is a cheerful note that intrudes itself upon us:

Waupun, Wisconsin state penitentiary, is getting full this and only recently went on double shift. According to Warden Oscar Lee the demand for bigger twine was greatest known in history of the institution (industry, I mean) and when

the supply dwindled down to a few bales he simply had to put on another shift.

The cheerful tone to this lies in the hope that when we get all the prisons working two shifts we may get a little work for ourselves. But that hope should not buoy us up too much insofar as a double shift in the penitentiary means expansion. So after all we should not let our mouths water too profusely. Another Waupun could be built at once and Milwaukee alone could fill it before noon tomorrow from milk thieves and bread robbers—now and again a high-pressure citizen of Chicago whose foot had strayed across the deadline.

Let us cease to worry. There are no jobs. If work was to be had, a little worry about making contact would be perfectly proper. But since there are no jobs why in the name of common sense worry over it. You can't worry anything into existence, least it be lice and I'm sure you don't get lousy. I do not expect you to cheer up and cheer your head off. No, I'm merely pleading with you to quit holding conversations with yourself—get a soap box and let them all hear it.

What moots it that each prisoner working in Waupun is costing some poor unemployed worker 2 or 4 dollars in wages per day. What moots it if an idle prisoner costs only, say, 60 cents to support per day.

What moots it if an unemployed worker would gladly pay that prisoner's board if given the job outside the walls. What moots all those things that prisoners come first; that prisons are used to beat honest men out of a living and to bankrupt so-called legitimate concerns? What? What? What? Why worry? It's a crazy system.

"But the prisoners will go crazy if they don't have work." And if prisoners have work, the workers will go crazy—why be so damned solicitous about prisoners? I think thou art a hypocrite!—I mean, insincere.

Much complaint is heard in this state about women handing bona fide tramps a lawn mower or a hand-ax instead of a handshake when these worthless apply for chicken or jelly sandwich. Everybody knows a woman has no right to sell a sandwich to a bum (or a banker) without a license issued by the town or county politicians, and to get around that law, the women trade a sandwich for a clipped lawn or a cord or two of splintered wood.

Editor, can you imagine such an utter, brazen contempt for our laws and institutions? And coming, as it does, from the finer sex it is well the more robust patriots look to safety of our republic.

Yesterday a young man, soft spoken, entered the jungles and wanted to sell a pair of pants for twenty-five cents—he said he had done "all of fifty cents' worth of work for them."—Here again we have the unfathomable female in a rather on a pair of second hand pants! Now, hardly ever do I approach the dwellings of such unprincipled members of our society, and when I do I do not inquire after the health of a sandwich—no beating about the bush for me—I tip my hat and come to the point off hand: "Lady," says I, "where's your lawn mower—my muscles crave exercise."

I've had 'em faint on me—so surprised were they.

Worries galore, small and big—the few thousand prisoners taking the places of that many free men is one of the small ones—drop in the bath tub considering 6 million jobless and 3 million part-time workers; and I mention it only because it indicates how fast politicians are dishing up relief to a desperate people. The remedy has been left in their hands and, I hasten to prophesy, next winter will be just like this summer, only colder. Sixty-thousand millionaires in this country, with minor exceptions, function not as distributors of wealth, but collectors of it. They are not satisfied or happy with one or two or seven dollars a day—they want thousands and get it. Let us be conservative in our figures:

Henry Ford cleared \$120,000 per day, seven days a week, last year. Let us assume some of these millionaires were not that fortunate. Let us assume they averaged only one-third of that sum—\$40,000.

Sixty thousand times \$40,000 equals \$2,400,000,000.

That amount represents what the 60,000 millionaires collect from the American people per day.

Is it then a wonder, nickels and dimes get scarce?

This collection continues throughout the year and at \$2,400,000,000 per day it amounts to \$878,600,000,000 a year.

And if these 60,000 millionaires "kick off" today, the collection will continue tomorrow just as if nothing had happened—they can be so rotten in the grave that their bones crumble to dust and still the collection goes on unabated—once a millionaire, always a millionaire.

But you say, "they re-invest this money in utilities, factories and lands."

Quite right, but that is optional with them. Did they not do so they would not be in a position to collect on an ever growing scale. They may do as they see fit with that wealth. They may either salt it away in barrels for a rainy day, invest in new industries or ship it into foreign countries and collect on a world-wide scale.

But that too is a minor matter and should not silver the locks of a true blue American—Barnum said it!

In these hot days the cows in Wisconsin's fertile valleys have a habit of bunching up in Wisconsin's gurgling brooks and fighting Wisconsin's energetic flies (the six legged, winged parasites), with their nose too clean tails.

Every so often a too trustful fly that looks like a good-will ambassador incarnate, gets an unsanitary smack in the eye from a tail he wasn't watching—that isn't fair, the cow should smack him with her own tail.

A cow's tail, even when in the best of sanitary repute, is a fearful weapon to lay across the nose of those little birds hardly more than an insect and the bunching-up of those cows for that purpose verges right high unto criminal syndicalism if not outright treachery.

Even in the Minneapolis workhouse, where I spent my happy childhood, where the cows' tails are washed with warm water and castle soap, it is common occurrence to find a prisoner off his feed for weeks at a time, after a smack across the "kisser" by a patient bossy. The cows have it!

This evidence of organization was the only evidence that came under my notice in that superb state.

The Waupun penitentiary was the only industry working full blast.

None of these be very cheerful conditions; yet, even in the case of millionaires we see a hopeful light streaking through the murk: Suppose all those 60,000 millionaires decided \$40,000 per day is too high wages for being interviewed and for making after-dinner speeches and whoopees.

Suppose they decided, half that amount would be sufficient for their daily needs—\$20,000 per day. That would leave \$439,000,000,000 and if "distributed" among the people evenly, each man, woman and child would receive \$3,600 per year; close to \$10 per day.

Suppose further those millionaires decided to make no more deathbed gifts of \$25,000,000,000 a crack (to dodge the income taxes), don't you think they could get along on \$20,000 per day? Or \$10,000—that would leave \$7,200 a year to each man, woman and child in the country.

Some of their best supporters get only that much for a whole year's ballyhoo.

T-b S.
P. S.—Wisconsin has its millionaires, but they are not so thick in mind, body and numbers as those in other states I know.