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Dawn Fraser, Writer Selections Those who know of Dawn Fraser (1888-1968) usually know of him as the poet of labour struggle in Cape Breton in the 1920s, largely through his book *Echoes from Labour's War* (selected and edited with an introduction by David Frank and Don MacGillivray, and published by New Hogtown Press, 12 Hart House Circle, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A1. It's 96 pages for \$2.00--surely the all-around best buy in Cape Breton books!) The book also includes a few poems rooted in Fraser's experiences during World War One. But we did not realize the extent of Fraser's impact as a popular poet until we visited Thomas Gillard, interviewing toward an article about that war. Mr. Gillard, a veteran in his 90s, was very soon on his feet, reciting the whole of "Conscript Brown." That poem isn't in the book, nor any of the prose that follows here--though "The Widow in the Ward" (a poem that neatly brings both battles together) is included in *Echoes from Labour's War*. Here are "Conscript Brown" and other selections, plus a portion from a manuscript said to be Dawn Fraser's autobiography • offered here to help insure that we remember him.

Conscript Brown or The Returned Man's Story Perhaps you have heard me speak of Brown, who died at Stanislau. In twenty years of service, there's the queerest case I saw; And I have seen all kinds of soldiers, in barracks, tent and field, The whitest men who ever fought, the yellowest who squealed. 'Twas back in 1917 I first laid eyes on Brown, The M. S. A. was active and the police had run him down; I am one who claims when that law passed, somebody "pulled a bone," Such pale-faced sickly kids as Brown, should all be left at home. Our company was made up most of men who done "their bit," And in a crowd like ours, a Slacker didn't fit. So no matter where we met him, round the canteen or in town. The best he ever got from us was, "There goes Conscript Brown." And we would "ride him" for his shallowness, his lack of nerve and pluck. We never called him "Bud" or "Pal," 'twas Conscript Brown that stuck; But he took it half good-natured, though 'twas hardly meant that way. Seemed a home-sick, dreamy devil, with never much to say; 'Till it struck me kind of sudden, that a boy who could stand pat. Midst the sneers and jeers of hundreds, had a sort of nerve at that.' And I grew to like the beggar, used to often take his part. Let them hit a kid who like it, I newer had the heart; So Brown and I grew chummy; Lord, he taught me half I know. When it came to education, say, he'd make a Monk look slow. But he'd never make a soldier, though well-behaved and willing, I saw the way he moved around he was not meant for drilling; At the Miniature and in the Butts he failed to qualify, And as for bayonet fighting he couldn't harm a fly. I have worked with him for hours, using all my time and skill, That same night I heard him praying, something 'bout "Thou Shalt not kill." And I often told him stories of hard knocks I took and gave. Tried my best to stir him up, but he never thought me brave. I remember one a story of a fight we had in France, Where I stabbed a half-starved Austrian, who didn't have a chance; His comment on that amazed me, thought my yarns had turned his head. With an air like any Parson, "That was murder. Bill," he said. And I could not argue him under, though I



tried it there and then. With nature's law and self-defence and all the laws of men. The laws of men, he told me, with a kind of saint? ly nod. Should always be subjected to the higher laws of God. He had some queer religion, that's why he couldn't fight. He wouldn't kill for any cause, he didn't think it right; Was full of Bible stories, said God taught us to be meek. And if a fellow slapped my face, to turn the other cheek. Well, I had heard some stories, but that one took the pot. And I thought of Africa and France and all the fights I fought; Then my thoughts flew back to childhood, a kid on mother's knee. Oh! far back in my mind it seemed, she told those tales to me. And later when in Sunday School the Bible Class was taught, I only half believed them, but they made me think a lot. And I wondered really why men fought, the strong a- gainst the weak, I knew there would never be a war if all men turned their cheek. I thought of Leige and Rheims and Mons, whole cit? ies torn down; CONTINUED NEXT PAGE (72)