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Published by Ronald Caplan on 1993/8/1

From Breadlines to Battlefields For years in vain we fought to gain. We of the workless mass, A chance to work though our struggle irked The idle and wealthy class. Deprived of a home we were forced to roam, A hungry and ragged throng. And few were the friends we encountered then To lighten our war along. Though mill and mine of every kind With idle goods were stacked. And vaults were stored with a golden hoard Still we of the workless lacked. Nor statesmen cared at the way we fared, Though poverty seared our souls. We had only the jail and the hungry trail To a flophouse dark and cold. While pompous priests, from their pulpits screeched Of heaven and love and truth. We lived in a hell and learned too well The curse of a squandered youth. They paid scant heed to our grievous need. Though pledged to uphold His word. They shared the best and they cared the less For the sheep of the common herd. In vain we fought to improve our lot But our rights they refused to give. Though all we asked was an honest task That would make life fit to live. But never a cent could be had or spent • No "hunger fund" was raised. The workless class • we were only trash. Unworthy of help or praise. But today in fear as danger is near. From a source they helped to build. They look to us when they find they must And our blood would ask us spill. What right, we ask, have this useless class To demand we engage a foe They helped maintain wit-i the selfish aim Of saving the "status quo" ? Why should we band in a far-off land And wealth for another wrest. If here at home we have only known The fate of the dispossessed? What's left to lose if we should refuse To fight for De-mockery? In the name of Christ what a costly price They should ask for our poverty. • Beachcomber Steelworker & Miner, 17 August 1940 John J. MacInnis: "And they were out asking me to be a sucker to go out and get shot • Christ • for \$30. a month. Imagine.... "The country was always in turmoil around those times. George (MacEachern) and a few more that were in the Party...I remember down at the Lyceum they wanted an open forum • and they wanted the government to show their confidence in Canada by taking two billion dollars and putting on a big program of public works. Of course, 'Where's the money coming from?' was always the story. But the day the goddamn war started, two billion went over as credit to Britain." Inspired, enthused, or just content to get the phrases out of his head and down on paper, MacInnis immediately wrote two more: "I don't know if you call it writing or not, but that's just a source of annoyance to me now because a phrase will pop in? to my mind and then I feel I got to put it into a rhyme or some damn thing or another. That's pretty well how they started." (Family tradition has his grandfather, also John, as a writer of songs and verse.) These initial efforts were, however, thwarted. As the editor of the Steelworker & Miner soon explained on the front page (in) "A Word to 'Beachcomber': We are forced to inform 'Beach? comber,' the local poet, that we cannot publish his two last contributions because we have been officially informed that his poem 'From Breadlines to Battlefields,' which we published the week before last, contravenes the 'Defence of Canada Regulations.' "We have reason to believe that certain potential fascists holding high positions, whom we have occasion to



castigate from time to time are constantly 'drawing the attention' of the authorities to items in the 'Steelworker and Miner' which are not to their fascist tastes. Our readers can guess who they are." MacInnis was little concerned about the attention and he continued to write, although only his "romantic" verse made it into the newspapers for the next couple of years. (John J. MacInnis: "M. A. MacKenzie was informed from Ottawa that if he printed any more of that 'tripe' as they called it that they'd shut him up. It didn't bother me.") Early in 1943 he began his industrial verse with "Doscomocra? cy." He followed this up with his most popular work, "Dosco's Inferno," a personalized account of work in the Open Hearth department.

Dosco's Inferno  
 Oh! tired am I of the ceaseless toil  
 And the endless cares and woes  
 Of the paupered years and the deathless fears  
 That a low paid worker knows.  
 All my toil filled life has been fraught with strife  
 And all that I have to show  
 Are the callused palms of these workwom hands  
 And a faltering step and slow.  
 From my early youth like a soul-less brute  
 In a Godless way I've slaved.  
 In Dosco's mills where the labour kills  
 And hastens an early grave.  
 I've shovelled ore thru a fumace door  
 In the heat of the boiling steel  
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