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With my vision blurred with the dust it stirred And a man just dared not fall. I've shovelled their ore from the stinking floor Of Ships from beyond the seas, And my stomach tumbled with the gas was chummed From shovelling manganese. I've bumed my feet in the hellish heat Of a slag-pit's fiery glow. And I've froze my ears at the scrap yard shears On a night that was ten below. I've swabbed their sewers where a man endures A stench that's beyond compare. In air so foul that the rodents who prowl Have all abandoned there. Now my nerves are frayed and my hair has greyed And slowed are my work-worn hands, And my back is bent from the youth I've spent At Sydney Steel's demands. For a man that toils in a steel mill spoils His chance for a ripe old age For the hazards to health are early felt And he's old at middle age. Now these are but few of the jobs I do That briefly I've made mention And I feel in my heart that I've played my part. And I've earned an early pension. • in the Highlander, Sydney, 19 August 1970 Slim MacInnis' last published work appeared in a local news? paper in 1988, forty-four years after his initial, upsetting to some, "From Breadlines to Battlefields." The verse, "Tramping Down the Highway," is a comment on the contemporary condi? tions now prevalent in the industrial Cape Breton area. When you've used up all your poge? y And can't pay your room and board And you're tramping down the highway Dreaming dreams you can't afford.... And the whole dam Constitution Wouldn't buy a single meal When you're tramping down the highway Or laid-off at Sydney Steel.... • in The Northside Tribune, North Sydney, 10 August 1988 Not much had altered in sixty years. The workforce at the plant is now settling at a little over 700 and the out-migration has in? creased. In his writings Slim MacInnis had come full circle. He has also left a small but valuable record of impressions and , comments in verse of working at the steel plant in Sydney. j'iixilnghanris United Fabrics, wallpaper, paint, custom draperies, blinds, PFAFF verticals J Anchor SEWING MACHINES Perfect for the person wtio loves to sew ATTENTION QUILTERS; mding Variety of US Cotton Quiltii 213 Commercial Street NORTH SYDNEY, NS B2A 1B5 (902) 794-4536 John J. MacInnis (photo by Don MacGillivray) "i had no use for school at all. Not a bit. When I was about 12 my old man decided he was going to move out to Grand Lake.... That would be considered pioneering today because of the way we lived. Got our water from a spring, chop wood for heat, no phone, no electric light, nothing. Lived out there for four years and then we moved back to Sydney. School about 400-500 feet away at Grand Lake. We went up to Grade 8 there and then I had to go to the Academy. So I spent two years at the Academy and I didn't get a good pass mark because I didn't know a goddamn thing about algebra. It was a foreign language as far as I was concerned. We didn't have it in the country school. But they had it in the city schools so they were a whole year ahead of me on that. I could never catch up. So I gave it up, I quit, and went to work at the Steel Plant." EDITOR'S NOTE: We first saw these poems in an article called "Work Poetry / Poesie de Travail: The Industrial Verse of 'Slim' McInnis," in the academic journal Labour/Le Travail We thought our readers should see them. We have omitted some of the footnotes,



incorporated others into the text, and slightly re? shaped the article. We have added a few more portions from Don MacGillivray's conversation with John J. MacInnis in a dif? ferent type throughout.this article. Our thanks to Don MacGillivray, and to Gregory S. Kealey, editor of Labour/Le Travail, for permission to reprint this article {La? bour/Le Travail, Department of History, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, NF A1 0 5S'. Don pointed out that "Dosco's Inferno" and "Steelworker's Lament," were brought to his attention by Peyton Chisholm, a researcher with the Steel Project. He also offered special thanks to retired steelworkers George MacEachern and Wally MacKinnon for their information and insights. And, our thanks to Claudia Penny for photographs. SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS: Laurel S. MacDoweli, "The 1943 Steel Strike Against Wage Con? trols," Labour/Le Travail, 10 (Autumn 1982), 65-85. "The Coming of the Trade Union Act, 1937" in Issue 23 of Cape Breton's Magazine. George MacEachern: An Autobiography • The Story of a Cape Breton Labour Radical, edited and introduced by David Frank and Don MacGillivray, UCCB Press, 1987. "'Parade of Concern' for Sydney Steel • a Talk with Fr. Wm. Roach about the 1967 March" in Issue 58 of Cape Breton's Magazine. "Arise Ye Nova Scotia Slaves" and "The Yahie Miners" can be found in And Now the Fields Are Green: A Collection of Coal Mining Songs in Canada, collected with a narrative by John C. O'Donnell, UCCB Press. Real Estate serving Industrial Cape Breton and North Victoria & Insurance "If you're thinking of selling your home, give us a call." R. Hickey & Co. p. O. Box 96, North Sydney B2A 3M1 Gerald Brennan, Mgr. Residence: 794-4564 "And remember: No sale, no charge." 794-3119