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Tom Mooney, a Miner's Son

(By a San Francisco Newspaper Man)

TOM'S voice fell upon my ears for the first time some six years ago. It may have been more than six years. I was a labor reporter at that time for an evening newspaper. I heard Tom Mooney make an appeal for miners on strike somewhere in the West. I don't remember just where that strike was, but if I were to go up to the County Jail this afternoon and ask Tom, he would be able to tell me. He remembers all of the troubles of the working people. I haven't got time to go up to the prison today, however. Besides it doesn't really matter just where that miners' strike took place. It was only one of the many struggles the miners of the West have had to take up for—I was going to say a place in the sun—for a little of the brightness and decencies of life.

I remember very clearly the speech Tom made for those miners and their women and children. The scene was at the weekly meeting of the San Francisco Labor Council. Mooney was a delegate from the Molders' Union. The hall was packed with men of all trades, men who built the city, men who fed the city, men who clothed the city, men who labored with hammers far up in the clouds, men who sweated in the sombre depths of steamers, men who drove great drays through the streets, men who worked naked in the furnace-like kitchens of restaurants, men who went down to the sea in ships. Women were there, too—laundry girls, waitresses, garment workers. In the center of the floor was a long table for the newspaper reporters, among whom was yours truly in all the blush and bloom of youth and beauty.

Everybody listened to the secretary, who was reading aloud communications. He came to a letter from the miners. It was a request for financial aid. The company had driven them out of their homes, which belonged to the company. The miners and their families were camping on the hillsides. Money was wanted for tents and food.

It was not a long letter. It was not brilliantly written. No attempt was made to play on the feelings. It was a plain, matter-of-fact letter sent by miners. There was no whine in it.

Somebody got up and pointed out that the Council's treasury was very low at this time and he didn't see how he could give anything to these people, though he was in sympathy with them and hoped they would win.

The charity-begins-at-home delegates stood up and had their say: very sorry for these brothers; I'm with them all right; but their own state ought to take care of them; we have troubles of our own.

The letter-of-the-law members wanted to know whether these miners were properly affiliated. What seal was on that communication, Brother Secretary? Who are these men? Was this strike duly sanctioned by the proper officials?

Tom Mooney took the floor. I didn't know his name at that time. He was a new delegate. We looked around when he raised his voice and saw a clean-cut young fellow, broad in the shoulders, with black, flashing Irish eyes. He had washed his hands as hard as he could after his day's work, but still they were not clean. An ironworker, especially a molder, finds it mighty hard to get all the dirt off his hands, unless he is thrown into jail where time wears it off. He used his hands a lot while he spoke. Sometimes the fists were clenched; sometimes the palms were spread out in appeal.

For fifteen minutes Tom Mooney spoke. Behold, that far-off mining country rose before us under his toil-stained hands! His voice was a cry from the wilderness. The anguish of the women, the woe of the children, the deep purple anxiety of the miners, all this we found in the young molder's voice. We heard the tramp of the gunmen in the little homes. We saw the miners and their families driven out into the roads. We heard the sobbing of the women, the whimpering of the little ones, the muttering of the workers, the yells of the armed agents of the mine barons.

We saw the highways littered with the poor belongings of these families. We saw the frayed household things, looking so sorry in the broad light of noon. We saw the tattered bedroom articles of which the good wife was ashamed, the used-up furniture, so miserable in the open roadway, the worn-out effects she had hoped the neighbors would never see.

We saw the outcasts struggling out to the hillsides.

We saw them putting up their rude shelters on the bleak sweep of the mountains, the men shouting brave words of cheer, the women frightened before the fist of calamity.

We saw them in the dusk out there on the hills, looking down on their desolated homes—the raw earth their fireside now, the cold sky their roof, and bitter winds to whistle lullabies for their young.

Pariáhs all! Wives, babes, grandmothers with silver hair, thin youngsters of frail health, men, tired and careworn, sitting beside the old women who bore them—all **pariáhs**, all homeless.

We saw, through Tom Mooney's eyes, the night come down upon these people. Then, out of the black bulk of the mine properties, searchlights flared! The powerful lamps cut through the gloom, swift moving swords of light. Far and near the searchlights hunted, quick, alert, weird, menacing, the cruel eyes of the masters, the glaring eyes of Greed!

We saw the searchlights hesitating on the hillside camps, on the white faces of the women, on the blanched faces of the children, on the angry faces of the miners, on all the tattered, frayed, shaky household things of the outcasts. The flashing, reaching, pointing searchlights gave the scene a war aspect.

War it was, cried Mooney. War upon our people! War upon me and mine! War upon the family of Toil of which we, you, I, all of us are members. War upon our women, upon our children, upon our brothers in travail! These be our brothers, our sisters, our little ones, though we are separated by mountain ranges! Their fight is our fight, their enemies ours, their sorrows ours, their pains yours and mine!

This ironworker's voice reached into our hearts and played upon the harp of our sympathies. There was a lump in my throat I couldn't swallow. My eyes got full, and I was wishing the Council hall was dark, as in a movie show, where your neighbor can't see when you're stirred by some deep trouble on the screen.

What the outcome of that strike was I do not know. But the next time I go up to the County Jail, I will ask Tom. He will tell me through the bars how those miners made out. He keeps track of such things. He cuts them out and pastes them in scrap-books. If he had not given so much attention to other people's troubles, he would not be locked up in a steel cage today, sentenced to be hanged by the neck. And for something he had no more to do with than any infant that may have been born in that hillside camp of miners.

When Tom had finished speaking the request of those miners for financial help was not tabled. Money was voted to them, and a good round sum at that.

Now, I don't mean to say that Tom got off any fancy oratory like a lawyer or a politician. He isn't built that way. The talk of a lawyer or a politician comes, as a rule, from the head. They can say things which they do not feel at all. Tom's speech came from his heart. At times it was not smooth; he stumbled for words because there was so much surging in him. But he didn't stumble often. His sympathetic imagination showed him that community of troubled miners just as clear as if he were on the spot. He felt their problems as if he were living in them. When he said these are my people, O the understanding in his voice! When he said their pains are ours, O the depth of feeling, the breadth of sympathy he put into that!

I said to myself there and then, I don't know who you are, old chap, but you've got altogether too much soul for a workingman. Men like you have been jailed, crucified, shot and hanged throughout the ages by the masters.

I got very well acquainted with Tom Mooney after that. I have seen him in many aspects.

Mooney in the foundry, in the dust and gloom and steam and smoke, almost naked to the waist, carrying the long ladle full of liquid metal, which sizzled and sputtered and sent out showers of sparks like miniature fireworks. "Pouring off," the molders call it.

Mooney during the noon hour, eating his lunch on a pile of burnt wooden moldings outside the shop.

Mooney trudging home from work at night, just one of the homeward-bound army of toilers, his face blackened, little sweat streaks through the smudge, his clothing singed and scared from metal sparks.

Mooney, the student, bent over books at night, his eyes aglow with visions, happy vision; of Labor's future, visions of Labor enlightened, Labor brave with consciousness of its importance and power in the world, Labor no longer groping in the dark, Labor with its head in the sun, Labor all-powerful, Labor almighty, Labor the Master of the House of the world and no more the beggar at the gate.

Mooney, the speaker on public platforms, in the halls of Labor, at national conventions, on street corners during strikes, at defense leagues for workingmen; Mooney speaking for John Lawson the miner; Mooney crying out against the Ludlow massacre, against Calumet, the Cherry mine disaster, the Triangle shirtwaist fire, the robbery of the Danbury hatters, the shooting of Joe Hill, the Lawrence mill strike prosecutions, the imprisonment of Ford and Suhr, the West Virginia mine injustices, the Coal and Iron Cossacks of Pennsylvania.

Mooney the industrial outlaw, the foundry doors closed to him, walking the streets a marked man, blacklisted, feared, hated, turned away from door after door.

Mooney the son, cuddling his aged mother, soothing her fears, joshing, laughing, rollicking, cutting capers around her, sporting with her at picnics, springing jokes at her in halls, packing her off to movie shows.

Mooney the husband, his wife, a little musician, sharing his ideals, his hopes, his enthusiasm, working at his side for the betterment of workingmen and women, and meanwhile teaching music to the children of the poor.

Mooney the strike organizer, attempting to organize the underpaid platform men of the United Railroads, the most powerful financial and political force in San Francisco.

Mooney and his wife arrested on the principal street, after having tied up the cars by calling off motormen.

Mooney and his wife and three other union men, a few days after the failure of the car strike, charged by a United Railroads detective with being responsible for the Preparedness bomb outrage.

Mooney, convicted by a shady jury and by perjured testimony, receiving the death sentence, fearless, defiant, scornful, a smile of contempt on his lips.

Tom had never looked so splendid as on the day when he stood up in the dock and heard his life read away by twelve men who, since the Oxman perjury plot was exposed, have been sneaking through the streets of San Francisco like thieves. One long, burning look of scorn Tom leveled at them, and then he gave his strong arms to the miner's widow who is his mother—brave old Mother Mooney.

She wept, but she didn't grow hysterical. That old lady hasn't been off her feet one single day during all this trouble; while younger women have spent many a day sick in bed. Every day, since the first week Tom and Rena and the rest were locked up, the old lady has visited the County Jail, rain or shine.

I asked her one day how in the world she managed to keep up so well.

"Sure I don't know," said she, with her south of Ireland brogue. "I got to stand up under it. I've seen lots of trouble before this. Tom's father was a good deal like Tom is now, always in labor troubles. I lost him early on account of a bullet they put into him during a mine strike."

One day I got the story of Tom's father out of her. She told it to me while she was putting up a lunch for her son John. John is also a molder by trade, but, like Tom, was driven out of the iron trades. He is now working on certain street cars which do not belong to the United Railroads. He works nights. In the early evening the old lady goes out with John's lunch to a certain street corner and waits for his car to come along. Then she hands him his bundle of lunch. She told me this story while she was warming John's coffee.

Bryan Mooney was the name of Tom's father. He was a coal miner. During his life, which was not long, he worked in three states—Indiana, Illinois and Pennsylvania.

He died in the coal regions of Indiana when Tom and John and Anna were little toddlers.

Bryan Mooney worked most of his time in and about Davis County, Indiana. It was there during a mine strike that he was shot by a strikebreaker. That bullet was what shortened his life, thinks old Mrs. Mooney, though Bryan did not pass out till quite a bit later.

Bryan Mooney was unarmed when he was shot. He and his brother were approaching the strikebreaker, intending to argue with him peaceably, when the fellow drew a weapon and shot Bryan down. Before he could fire again, Bryan's brother felled him with his naked fist and kicked the gun out of his hand. While the brother was scrambling for the gun, the scab got up and ran. The brother fired at him, and the fellow toppled over into a ditch.

He hadn't been hit at all, but both Bryan and his brother thought he was dead. So poor Bryan Mooney, with a bullet in him, had to go hiding in the hills, he and his brother. The affair had been witnessed from a distance by mine agents, and the brothers knew that the company would have the law down upon the Mooney household.

Sure enough the authorities walked in upon Mrs. Mooney and her children, bringing the first information of Bryan's trouble.

His reputation for peace and quiet was not at all good with the bosses. They didn't let him remain in one place very long. The family was constantly shifting from place to place. He worked through the coal regions of three states, and it was not because he liked traveling. No man, she says, liked a bit of comfort and peace better than Bryan Mooney.

"But sure, the wages in them days was terrible low and in some places the miners had to live all the week in the company's boarding houses and at the same time keep their families in other places."

Bryan Mooney did not remain silent nor inactive under the harsh conditions. There was no American Federation of Labor at that time. But the Knights of Labor move-

ment came into the coal regions, and Bryan Mooney threw himself into this, heart and soul.

"Poor Bryan Mooney, God rest his soul," says the old lady, "might have done better to keep his tongue in his cheek. The bosses made his life a burden to him, giving him the worst end of the work when they'd give him any at all. They kept us moving from place to place like Gypsies."

During the last month of his life, there were two miners at his bedside every night, the miners selecting a committee of two to sit with their passing comrade night by night, at Channelburg, Ind., where he died.

He was laid in a plain wooden coffin and carried to his last resting place in a common wagon used for carting freight. He was buried in the coal regions that had drunk his sweat during his troubled existence. Coal miners lowered Bryan Mooney down, down to his last shift, the shift that was to have no ending, the shift from which he would never return, but a shift that would not be disturbed by the clink of drills and the thump of hammers. And that poor grave, in the midst of the Indiana coal regions, was dampened, let us hope, by the tears of miners, for even miners have been known to weep.

Coal miners guided Bryan Mooney's widow away from the grave at Montgomery, Ind., sharing her grief, and they gave their honest hands to his little children—John, Anna and Tom. The miners chiseled Bryan Mooney's tombstone out of a huge chunk of slate coal to mark his last resting place.

It is fitting, I think, that the son of that coal miner should now be standing in the shadow of the gallows, bold, undaunted, defiant, splendid, a champion of the rights of Labor, a fighter for Justice, a Herald, a Singer of a Better Day, willing to lie that his people may have a fuller measure of life and liberty.

Little did those miners think, as they guided Tom Mooney from his father's last resting place, that he was to develop into a man after Bryan Mooney's heart.

The fact that Tom was a coal miner's son was held up by a San Francisco newspaper as proof of his criminality. The San Francisco Call, August 4, 1916, referred to Mooney as—

"A creature from whom the coal black has never been cleansed."

Which means that Tom Mooney's father got coal dust in his blood during his life in the black regions, and this coal black was transmitted into Tom's veins.

As if there were anything criminal in the honest coal that Bryan Mooney dug, the coal he sent up to bring cheer to the human family, the coal he dug to bring light and warmth to humanity, the coal he brought out in the sweat of his face to give comfort to men, women, children. The coal he mined to put a happy glow on the walls of hospitals, where the sick and the maimed lay. The coal he produced to sing and dance in merry blazes on the hearths of poorhouses, warming the hearts of the aged and the friendless. The coal he brought out, in pain and in sweat, to put the red glow of happiness in thousands of firesides throughout the land. Coal, that great boon to humanity, Bryan Mooney may have got the black of it into his system as he toiled in the bowels of the earth, he may have put that coal black into his child, and if so, Tom Mooney was a criminal beyond all doubt, and the jury should not hesitate a moment in hanging him.

Tom made answer to the Evening Call through the bars of the County Jail.

"If there is coal dust in my veins," he said, "I am not ashamed of it. I was born in a coal miner's shanty, that is true enough. But I am not hanging my head. It is my boast that I came out of the loins of honest Labor. I'm proud I'm a coal miner's son."—Reprint from "The Tri-City Labor Review," official organ of the Alameda County (Oakland, Cal.), Central Labor Council.

Edw. N. Nockels, Secretary Chicago Federation of Labor, says every union man in this country should buy and read

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