

Labor's Lament

Kevin Eldridge

There's a quiet hanging heavy
With the passing of the days.
As the promise of a good life
Lies rusting on the ways.

Now a man's worth ain't how much he makes
Only how much does he owe?

My Granddad worked the coal mines
In the east Kentucky hills.
Eighteen hours in the hole
All he had to show were bills.

Twenty-five dollars in company script
Chained a man and his family
To a future mortgaged indefinitely
To black lung and indentured
Servility.

A new deal and a union card
Broke the bonds and set them free.
Goodbye sorrow, hello hope
Thank the Lord and the Wobblies.

Since a man's worth should be what he makes
Rather than how much he owes.

But the work that was supposed to be there
Moved to Mexico and overseas,
Now the second mortgage and the child support

Are my only legacy.

Because a man's worth isn't what he makes
He's only worth how much he owes.

Not a lot of value left
In the labor from the hands
As commodities and usury
Suck the spirit from the land.