WOBBLY POEMS OF HUMOR & REBELLION

Son of a Mexican Wobbly father and a German socialist-pacifist mother, Carlos Cortez was born and raised in Milwaukee, but has long made his home in Chicago. During the Second World War he served two years in the federal pen at Sandstone, Minnesota for refusing to fight the bosses’ war, and shortly afterward joined the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Ever since—as poet, artist, editor and public speaker—he has been one of the union’s best-known figures.

Renowned especially for his powerful woodcuts and cartoons—he is probably the only Wobbly whose work has been exhibited at New York’s Museum of Modern Art—Cortez has also been, for many years now, the most noted columnist for the union’s newspaper, the Industrial Worker.

His poems have long been Wobbly favorites—Joan London and Edward Abbey are among the many who have praised them highly—and several have appeared in anthologies. This little volume, however, is his first collection to appear in book form. Passionate tributes to Joe Hill and other Wobbly martyrs; lyrics protesting war and racial injustice; humorous assaults on modern technology and moving celebrations of biodiversity—all the poems of Carlos Cortez exemplify the old IWW slogan: “Let’s make this planet a good place to live.”

Eugene Nelson, founder of Homes For All and author of Bracero, Huelga: The First 100 Days of the Delano Grape Strike and Pablo Cruz and the American Dream, contributes a short Introductory essay.

POETS OF REVOLT
Number Three

Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company
Books for Rebel Workers Since 1886
This book is dedicated to my parents, Alfredo and Augusta Cortez.
C.A.C.

On the Cover:
Carlos Cortez: Self-Portrait
(woodblock, 1985)

Most of the poems in this book originally appeared in the Industrial Worker, monthly organ of the IWW. For information on subscriptions, and on IWW activity today, write to IWW, 3435 North Sheffield Avenue, Room 202, Chicago, Illinois 60657.

FIRST EDITION
© Copyright 1990
Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company

Printed by 100% union labor.

Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company
Established 1886
P. O. Box 914, Chicago, Illinois 60690
CARLOS CORTEZ

With its banana splits
and split atoms,
Quiz shows and loan offices,
Juke boxes and supermarkets,
Nuclear tests and piece-work,
Best-sellers and marriage-counselors,
Formulas and falsies,
Progress goes on
And on and
On and
On

Leaving farther behind
The spot on the road
Where the wrong fork
was taken

POETS of REVOLT
Number Three
Carlos Cortez reading his poems at the Kenneth Patchen Festival (Ohio, 1989)
INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare wrote "The face is no index to the mind." But the moment I first set eyes on the legendary Carlos Cortez at my second convention of the Industrial Workers of the World in 1972 in Chicago, something said in my brain: this man is a genius. A genius of intellect, a social genius, a genius at living. And: his face is a poem, his whole being is a poem. For there are people, a fortunate few (Walt Whitman was one), whose vivid, lively love of life and the world is so great that it overflows through their eyes and glows from their faces.

I had been attracted to the IWW partly because the accounts of it I had read evoked a vision of a group of people who treated one another with more love and respect and high-spirited good humor than any aggregation of humans I had ever read or heard about, while at the same time risking their well-being in one of the most selfless and important social struggles in history. As much as any Wobbly I had met or was to meet, Carlos Cortez, to my almost delirious delight, matched this passionately wishful pre-vision I had of the prototypical old-time Wobbly, saint and rebel and jovial sharp-tongued social critic and hearty boon companion all rolled into one. No doubt in my seeking out of idealistic Wobblies I was looking for a brother—since I was an only child—and a father—since my own had been ruined and consigned to a pauper's urn by the heartlessness and irrationality of the capitalist economic system.

I already knew something of Carlos. I knew he was about fifty years old, the son of a Mexican Wobbly father* and a German socialist-pacifist mother. That

---

* The Smithsonian Institution recently released an album containing a recording of Carlos's father, Alfredo Cortez, singing one of Joe Hill's songs.
he had grown up in Milwaukee and later moved to Chicago. That he had spent two years in federal prison in World War II because he did not want to kill living things. Although I was glad that enough people fought to defeat fascism, I also thought it extremely important that some people kept alive the commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” I knew that he had written the biting, humorously satirical and unique column “Left Side” in the IWW’s Industrial Worker newspaper for many years, and two of the most moving poems in Rebel Voices: “Where Are the Voices?” and “Digging the Squares at Jack London Square.” I knew he was no ivory tower writer but had distilled his prose and poetry from the sweat of long hours as a stevedore and at other brutal, boring and underpaid jobs. I knew that his wife Marianna was from the nation that gave the concept of democracy to the world. I knew Carlos was an acclaimed muralist, woodblock artist and cartoonist. It was almost too much to hope that I could become a personal friend of this remarkable individual. It was one of the miracles of my life that we did become close and lasting friends, and even compadres.

In those heady days of my first IWW conventions I was to meet other brilliant and dedicated Wobblies: Walter H. Westman, the one-legged workhorse (he had lost his other leg in a freight-riding accident) who had doggedly kept the One Big Union’s books for disappointing decades when the IWW all but disappeared; Fred Thompson, the IWW’s own chief historian and theorist, who had spent four years in San Quentin as one of the “criminal syndicalism” victims; Frank Cedervall, the greatest public speaker I had ever heard; Bruce “Utah” Phillips, the Wobblies’ superlative troubadour and nonpareil teller of tall tales—and many more. In such a company of remarkable people it was
perhaps inevitable that a talent such as Carlos’s should flourish. In addition he had been influenced by the great pacifist writer Kenneth Patchen, and in art by the printmaker Posada and the expressionist Kollwitz.

After that 1972 convention, perhaps partly due to our common interest in the struggles of Mexican and Chicano farm workers, Carlos and I developed an ever-growing friendship. A few months later he and Marianina came to visit me and my daughter Tamar in northern California, and became Tamar’s godparents. He was invaluable to me in helping broaden my understanding of the IWW and of the world in general. He generously illustrated two my books. He and Marianina have been my generous and gracious hosts on my far too infrequent visits to Chicago, where their large living room was more an exciting center of revolutionary and artistic activity than a conventional home. His upbeat and insightful approach to life more than once has helped save me from despair and has given me valuable inspiration in my own creative efforts. In persuading my half-Mexican daughter to attend D-Q University, a Native American and Chicano school near Sacramento, California, to which Carlos had made a generous donation, he was instrumental in adding a vastly richer perspective to her life.

Poetry, of course, is no stranger to the IWW and its publications. The IWW has perhaps created more art than any social movement in history in proportion to its size. Ralph Chaplin, author of “Solidarity Forever,” penned some of the most stirring poems about union struggles ever written. “An Appeal to Women,” by Vera Moller, about an eastern textile strike in the 1920s, is the best poem inviting women to join the union cause that I have ever read. Jim Seymour’s “The Dishwasher” is a classic, and his excellent sonnet, “To a
Fair Libertarian," in which he downgrades the usual physical charms and avers, "I write but to the brilliance of your mind," was written long before the more recent upsurge of the women's movement. Some of the overtly revolutionary poetry of Carlos Cortez possesses as much literary excellence as any poetry about the union movement ever written. He has written more passionate and sharply satirical antiwar and pro-environment poems than anyone I know. And as far as I know he is the only poet who has written in English, Spanish and Nahuatl.

It should be no surprise that the IWW produces poets. For the best poetry is an intensification of language and life that can thrill the mind more than any dangerous drug, and create the sort of higher expectations from life that lead to social struggle and a better world. Some good poetry can have a moral quality to it that makes us more ethical beings, regardless of the subject matter of the poem. Some of Carlos's ostensibly non-revolutionary poems, like some haiku, have a thrilling originality and freshness to them that electrify and awaken the brain, and make you feel: this is so beautiful and good, it makes my mind feel so alive and good, I feel like going out and spreading joy and justice to every living thing. Perhaps most noteworthy of all, much of Fellow Worker Cortez's poetry has a biting and often outrageous humor of his own which places him solidly in the Wobbly tradition yet makes him a true original.

And there are Carlos's many overtly revolutionary poems, his tributes to the IWW martyrs—the immigrant Swede Joe Hill, the half-Indian Frank Little, and others—and poems in which he pillories the rich welfare cheaters and calls for all people to share in the wealth and work and decision-making of the world.
Long before the present upsurge of environmentalism began, Carlos was pleading, in both poetry and prose, for the survival of the Earth’s diversity of flora and fauna. If there is one thing approaching a common denominator in his poetry it is a respect and love for all living things.

A few months ago I had a dream about Carlos. He was sitting in a beautiful wooded area next to a lovely woman. At some point in the vague and diaphanous dream someone referred to her as Mother Nature. A dozen or so people were gathered about in a circle. Brightly-colored blades of wind-machines whirled nearby. Carlos and his companion were dispensing advice to two groups of co-op members about some conflict involving a desirable balance between nature and technology, helping them achieve a consensus. And doing so gently, wisely, successfully. They seemed to be some sort of combination of ombudspeople and arbitrators. As the dream ended the visitors went their ways happily. Carlos and I talked for a while and then he went to work in his garden. After a hazy interval of time he sat down to write a poem.

That’s the way I see Carlos. As worker, wise man, poet. If there were such a position as chief advisor and arbitrator for the world I would nominate him for the post. For he loves the world and living things more than anyone I know. Recently writers became heads of state in two eastern European nations. As Shelley wrote: “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” With poets and writers and artists such as Carlos Cortez gaining more and more influence, perhaps it will not be long before the world is civilized at last.

Berkeley, California
September 1990

Eugene Nelson
CRYSTAL-GAZING THE AMBER FLUID

Sitting at this bar
Thinking of places
Afar
In my glass of beer
I see
Thru the smoke filled haze
Of this room
Like a crystal vision
Looms
A ribbon of cement
Black line down the middle
Perdition bent
Like a galloping snake
On the make
Thru treeless prairies
And bottomless passes
Ever in motion
Over moonkissed desert
Toward golden California
Grasses
Stopped only
By a big blue ocean,
Man - - - - !
Give me the song
If you can
Of a Greyhound motor's
Tirade
Crawling along
Some old ten-mile grade
Where life can be complete
On a bumpy seat
Watching the great USA
And life itself passing
On its way
And all the while
I say to myself each gulp
of beer
Is costing me
Another mile!
SUNDAY ON MANITOWOC AVE.

The morning sound of birds
Is noisily interrupted
By the passing over
Of Brave New Frontiers,
Spanking new jets
Joined by a bit of obligato
From the church bells.

And after a little while
The birds can be heard again.
REQUIEM FOR A SWED

A cold November morn
Standing alone against a stone wall
Beneath a blue Ute sky

A song writing
Accordion playing
Itinerant
Ballad singing
Freedom loving
Son of Man:

Haegglund,
Hillstrom,
Hill

Far from his boyhood Gaevle
Where his first years were known
Across a continent
And
Across an ocean
In the land of Viking grandsires
Where the Sun first warmed his face.

The same Sun looks down
On capitalist rifles
Whose targets are usually Men of Toil
And Men of Vision
And Men of Agitation.

A Mormon voice barks out:
Fire!!!
A group of rifles bark out:
  Bang!!

Somewhere in a deep green forest
Weighted with the ravages of centuries
A stately pine crashes to the ground.

Over the prison yard’s black cinders
Spreads another hue
The color of the working class standard
And the Sun warms that face
For the last time.

Somewhere
Lodged in a decaying log
A small pine cone sends forth
A green shoot.

Somewhere
In a Rebel Valhalla
Playing an accordion
Singing a song
A spirit waits
For a class conscious
Armageddon
CITY CENTRAL BLUES

With a window of iron
And a mattress of wood,
A concrete floor
Where many a rounder
Has stood

Contemplating
The small horizon
With a bit of despair,
Pensively seated
On a porcelain chair

Sucking a cigarette
Then flicking the air,
Each ash
Belonging to the past
Burning away like life itself
The years stacking
Like books on a shelf

Thoughts before
Never understood
Till face to face
With a window of iron
And a mattress of wood.
COMMUNICATION

So often have I listened to those cultural snobs
Who consider themselves authorities on music
Wax profoundly
On the works of Bach
And the complexity
Of his compositions
That can only be understood
By Musicians' musicians
And certainly beyond
The comprehension
Or appreciation
Of the unschooled
Rabble.

But I remember a bygone evening as I was spinning
A hi-fi Brandenburg Concerto on my low-fi machine
From the kitchen
The voice of my Mother
Who spent most of her life
In a German farm community
Never digging anything
More uplifting than
A wheezy Saturday night
Concertina,

Asking me:
"Son,
What are you playing there that sounds so much
Like springtime."
There are no more pupfish in the waterways around Tecopa, The town they were named after; That is what they tell us, Those officials who keep track of Things like that; what sadness, A whole race of creatures has disappeared Never to come back again! It is said that the big fish always eat. The little fish, and that seems to be The morality of today’s world Only the big fish who did in the Tecopa Pupfish do not have scales, gills or fins Nor do they live under water. It gives me a sadness That a whole race of Creatures has disappeared—never to come back. The buffalo, they had meat and hides And were in the invader’s way, That is why they no longer darken the Plains, But these little pupfish, What meat did they have? What hides did they offer? And whose way were they in?
I have never seen these fish that were only
An inch and a half long nor have I ever
Had a frying pan that was only two inches wide
So I would never have bothered them.
Anyway a whole race of creatures has disappeared
Never to come back again.
I used to swim in small rivers and lakes
And at the same time drink of the water.
I no longer drink the water
While I swim,
And at many waters it is not even safe to swim;
One river even caught fire
While flowing through a city.
I used to see flocks of antelope
From the bus window.
Now I must go to a zoo
To get close to an antelope.
It’s the same with the buffalo.
I enjoy the Sun when rising in the morning . . . East
And when setting in the evening . . . West
Because these are the times when I can look him straight
In the face without hurting my eyes.
But now there are places where I can do The same at high noon;
It gives me a sadness
That a whole race of Creatures has disappeared
Never to come back again . . .
Did you know about the Tecopa fish
As you raced down
The highways throwing beer cans
Out of your windows?
When you turn up your
Air-conditioners, hair dryers,
And electric tooth brushes
Or when your thermostats are up high
So you can walk around in shorts
While looking at the snowdrifts outside,
Or when you are making
Tracks with your snowmobiles?
Do you even care
That from the face of this earth
A whole race of creatures has disappeared
Never to come back again?
It gives me a sadness.
ATHENS, MAY 1, ’66

We asked the priest for the grave of Lambrakis
But he pointed us in the oppsite direction.

Later when we finally found
The simple concrete shaft
Decorated with the CNVA symbol
Instead of the cross,
We remembered the annoyance on the priest’s face.
Naturally now, we will warn all our friends
But we will also instruct them
To always ask the priest.

CNVA = Committee for Non-violent Action, an anarchist-inclined direct action pacifist group active in the 1960s.
A DIFFERENCE

The scissor-bill who spits
   at my placard,
Hurls obscenities
And yells,
   "Go back to
Russia!"
   Him I do not feel
too angry at;
   He only has a long
way to go.
But the person who glances
   around furtively
Before confidentially whispering
to me,
   "I agree with you;
What you’re doing is great!"
   That one I cannot
stand;
That one, he is going
   nowhere!
PROGRESS

Roaring jets
Fill the sky
That once echoed
With the song of birds

Flashing neons
Shine on streets
That once shone
Beneath moon and stars.

Asphalt and concrete
Smother the good dirt
That once nurtured
Soft cool grass.

Open windows
That once let in
The song of crickets
Regurgitate with the howl
of TV loudspeakers
Chanting the way of mediocrity
To the chemelite multitudes
As the crickets silently go
Some place else.

Roadways once lined
With weeds and flowers
Are festooned
With motels and billboards,
Old papers and broken bottles,
Cigar butts and drive-ins,
Kleenex and step-ins,
Empty beer cans
And empty car-hops,
And certain discarded objects
That cause the cardinal
No small indignation,
As flowers silently grow
Some place else.

With its banana splits
And split atoms,
Quiz shows and loan offices,
Juke boxes and supermarkets,
Nuclear tests and piece-work,
Best-sellers and marriage counselors,
Formulas and falsies,
Progress goes on
And on and
On and
On
Thru
Jerry-built subdivisions
And chrome-plated
Shopping centers,
Hacking its way
Thru the neon jungle
Leaving farther behind
The spot on the road
Where the wrong fork was taken.
YOUNGSTOWN

The waters of the Mahoning
Are being hidden
By a jungle of steel mills
Spreading like a rusty
    scab
On the Ohio landscape.

A once beautiful valley
And its grey-pallored
    hillsides
Speak out
With a lesson on
    Free Enterprise
No textbook could give.
REQUIEM FOR A STREET*

Well, they have finally gotten around to the Street, these apostles of civic improvement, they are advancing with their cranes and bulldozers tearing down the old slums so that newer and bigger and loftier slums can be built on this, the Street once lined with an endless array of small shops, bistros and hole-in-the-wall restaurants where one could bask in the culinary delights of far away places, where one could walk by small music stores and hear strange music that somehow was not strange at all, where the sidewalk passerby would be constantly beset by sidewalk pitchmen and Gypsy fortune tellers; and where else in this standardized American metropolis could you hear of the wonderful quality and ridiculously low price of the latest fashion in suits extolled to you in Spanish with a Yiddish accent or the Gypsy girls who take one quick size-up and start handing you their con-line in the tongue of your ancestors?

It was not the cleanest of streets, not here in this unclean city, but it was a happy street, happy with the smell of pizza, roasted lamb heads, Turkish coffee, and tacos; happy with the raucous babble of many voices; happy with the voices from the ghettos of Bucharesti, Odessa and Wilno; happy with the voices from Piraeus, Salonika and Plaka; happy with the voices of those who had known only the roof of Rumanian, Hungarian and Serbian skies; happy with the voices from Morelia, Ixtapalapa and Nuevo Laredo; happy with the

*A stretch of Chicago’s Halsted Street between Roosevelt Road and Greek Town was destroyed in the late 1950s/early 1960s to make room for the University of Illinois and the Congress Expressway.
voices from Caguas, Ponce and Arecibo; yes, happy with the voices from Mobile, Beaumont and Chattanooga; happy with the voices from Palermo, Catania and Livorno, a small United Nations that somehow wasn't completely united and somehow it didn't make too much difference.

True, it was quite a din but it was a human din, it was a mess but it was a human mess, not like the din that is heard on the street now, the mechanical roar of the cranes and the mechanical thump of the large ball and the mechanical roar of the bulldozers directed from distant offices, committees and kickback artists with mechanical mentalities and mechanical hearts, and not like the mess left in the wake of the redevelopment juggernaut leaving behind a mess that would put a B-29 to shame.

The rubble creeps up on the last remaining pawnshops, bodegas and pizzerias, the last remaining small haberdasheries, kafenios and taquerias; Street of zucchini, baklava and enchilada, at last you are falling before the advance of standardization; Street of olives, snails and avocados, your days are numbered; Street of chianti, mazel and retsina, of ouzo, arak and tequila with your guitar thumping cantinas and belly-dancing tavernas, those who do not know you have the power to destroy you for behold advancing in the distance following in the wake of the bulldozers and rising above the clouds of dust of your corpse are your brand new tombstones called civic redevelopment; human anthills that look like a combination of cell-block and skyscraper, yes they are building bigger and better tene-
ments that are destined to become bigger and blightier areas.

And you, you good city planners and you fat pocket contractors, when your job is completed and you come down here to look at your accomplishments, are you honestly going to believe you've made any improvement other than in the health of your back pockets?
WHAT HAPPENED TO ARMISTICE DAY?

Perhaps a Gold Star can soothe a Mother's aching heart and give solace to a Father's broken dreams;

Perhaps a Gold Star can bring home the bacon and be a companion to a widowed young wife and lie at night between her yearning loins to stiffle nocturnal sobs;

Perhaps a Gold Star can be a good pal to those orphaned kids and play with them in the evening and drive them to school, in the morning as they await their time to audition for Gold Stars of their own;

Perhaps a Gold Star can proliferate and multiply until there are so damn many that Fort Knox will be just another hole in the ground and the parasites can have a real ball pointing with pride;

But I don't think y'oughta worry too much about Gold Stars anymore.

You see—

War is being automated!!!
BALLAD OF A DRAFTEE

He didn't know what it was all about,
Just out of school and no job and
Nowhere to go nor anything to go with,
So when the Board told him he was going
To travel far, naturally he was thrilled.
With his spanking new uniform and shiny new gun
He got on the big boat and began to see
The World.
Months later in a steamy hot
Miserable jungle,
Sweat pouring down his face
And his crotch full of lice,
He still didn't quite know what it was all about
Nor could he understand why these people
Whose freedom he was sent to protect
Were shooting at him.
And when he felt the impact of the bullet
In his last split second of consciousness
He began to wonder.
REQUIEM FOR ‘TWO DAGO REDS’

Tu Nicola,
Non sei morto,
E tu Bartolo,
Non sei morto,

Just because they didn’t like your ideas
They hung a rap on you,
These good upright people
Of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
They tried to tell the World
That you the fish peddler
And you the shoe cobbler
Pulled a heist,

Ma chi era i brigandi?

They pulled every dirty trick in the book,
These upright citizens.
They really stacked the cards
Against you two
Who only wanted to sell fish
And make shoes
And tell your fellow workingmen
Of a better world.

The best legal minds in the country
Showed where they were wrong
But the judge kept a deaf ear.
The Portygee hood who was in the pokey
With you two
Who said he didn’t care for guinea radicals
Saw your families come to visit you
And the little kids who wondered
When their Daddy would come out
And play with them again,
Broke down and told the cops
And told the lawyers
How you two couldn’t have pulled the heist
But the Judge wouldn’t listen.

_Questo vecchio scorpone Thayer,_

He hated foreigners, especially radical ones
And by the living god of Massachusetts
And all that was holy
He was going to see you two burn.
That’s what he boasted as he was playing golf
While you the fish peddler
And you the shoe cobbler
Were sitting in prison
Away from your families
And away from the children
And away from the fellow workingmen
Whom you loved so well.

_No Nicola, non sei morto
E tu Bartolo, non sei morto
Ma quant’genti ricordan’ il vecchio Thayer?_

They had their way,
These scions of the witch burners
And betrayers of the Indians
Who saved them from starvation,
These sons of Cotton Mather.
They shaved your heads
And strapped you in the chair.
They placed the metal plates on your heads
And the bands on your limbs
And turned on the voltage
And watched you burn!

Chi era i brigandi?
Chi era i scorponi!

These men who adjusted the bands,
Who threw the switch,
Who took you from your homes and people
And from the World.
This old man
Who in the name of the Commonwealth of
Massachusetts
Pounded that gavel for the last time.
How many remember their names?
But you, fish peddler
And you, shoe cobbler
The World will not forget you,

Nostri Fratelli,
Nuestro Hermanos,
Unsere Brüder,
Adelfia Mas.

Whatever languages, wherever workingmen
Who dream of a better World come together
Your names live on in their hearts.

No Nicola,
No Bartolo,
Questa e certo,
Non sei morto!
SUBURBAN GAL

There she stood in the chill November afternoon
With the wind whipping at her bare ankles
Among the small group of people gathered
By the tomb of the Haymarket Martyrs
Listening as the impromptu orator
Told our side of the story.

Later on as we were sitting in the restaurant
She listened some more as I told of other martyrs
And how today FBI stooges snap pictures
Of everyone who walks into a radical meeting
And I could see that she understood
Our side of the story.
AMERICA YOUR FACE IS DIRTY

When your bomb fell
More had fallen
Than just a bomb

When you destroyed a city
More was destroyed
Than just a city

When you killed thousands
In one searing flash
More was lost
Than just human lives

Among those survivors you left
Are those who will bear
the rest of their days
Gruesome scars
Almost as gruesome
As your own invisible
Scar

You
O Great Beautiful
Bargain Counter Democracy
Ever vigilant against
Foreign ideology
Making sure
Your
Great light
Shines upon all
Can you ever wipe from
Your face the blood
of
HIROSHIMA!!!
PEACE WALKERS

Walking,
Walking in spite of the taunts of the conformists
   And the indifferent stares of the apathetic.
Walking
   Because somehow they no longer rely on their
      congressmen
      And appeals to the highest office.
Walking,
   Because among other things,
   In the summer of nineteen-forty-five a horrible
      new child was born
   On the sandy wastes of New Mexico
      And a short time later displayed its horror
   On two human cities.
Walking in the hopes of removing the apathy from
   those stares
   And the conformity from those conformists.
Walking,
   Because the walking they do today
      IS ONE LESS WALK
      THEIR CHILDREN WILL HAVE TO DO .
SONG OF THE SECOND CLASS CITIZEN

I whose fathers
Hunted buffalo on the
    plains
And saved the pilgrims
    from starvation
Cannot buy a glass of
    beer
In my own country,

And

I whose fathers
Planted the first cornfields
And built pyramids
Cannot cross a border
In my own continent,

And

I whose fathers
Knew the stench of
    slaveships
And with ancestral memories
Created a new music
Cannot sit where I please
In my own world

And

Whenever I open my mouth
I am told to go back
To where I came from

And

I don't have the fare

Nor

The inclination.

PURIFICATION

The streets of one-story
    suburban ranch type. homes
And their equally conforming
    naked lawn plots
Every afternoon
    at the sound of the
    last school bell
Are magically transformed
    by laughing children.
REQUIEM CHANT FOR A
HALF-BREED WARRIOR

I was the last Wobbly to see Frank Little alive. I told him the night before: "Frank, they're lookin' fer ye. Git out of Butte!" But he wouldn't move!

—Con Lowney, Butte Old Timer

Like your Warrior Ancestors who rode across the Plains
You too, rode across those same Plains
But unlike your Warrior Ancestors who rode their paint ponies,
A boxcar or a gondola was what you rode.

Like your Warrior Ancestors you never faltered
No matter how large the enemy's numbers
For like them, you too were a Warrior.

That Great Western Land that your Ancestors knew so well,
That golden-grassed white-crowned blue-sky Mother Soil,
You had seen become a besmudged Hell
Of soot-grimed Hillsides and squalid miners' camps,
Of red-eyed miners' wives and pot-bellied miners' children
And when you saw that, the blood of your Warrior Ancestors
That flowed through your veins began to boil
And another Indian was on the War-Path.

For you the lance, the tomahawk and the flintlock
Were things of the past as your weapon was even greater,
A weapon feared and hated by the enemy the World
over,
As your weapon was the mightiest one yet:
The organizing of working men and women
and the war-cry was SOLIDARITY!!

From Copper Hill to the Mesabi and beyond your
name was known;
Your name was loved by the miners whose struggle was
yours
And your name was hated by the mine-owners because
you were
The personification of the miners’ struggle.

They feared you, the one-eyed cripple, these big mine
owners;
And they stopped at nothing in their hopes of
throwing
Some of their own fear into you.
In Michigan’s Iron Range they hung a rope around
your neck,
Saying they were going to lynch you but you did not
falter;
And in Superior they kidnapped you and held you
for days
And when you got away, you went straight to the
headquarters
Of these steel company goons, parading before them
On your crutches just to show them they could not
scare you.

During the big strike in Butte when you needed an
operation
But would not get it before the strike was settled,
They broke into the rooming house where you were sleeping
And dragged you into the night, submitting you to tortures and indignities
Not even the most warlike Indian would ever stoop to,
And when they saw they could torture you no longer
They left your mutilated corpse dangling from a railroad trestle,
And it was they who tasted the bitterness of defeat,
For not once did you cry out in pain or beg for mercy;
Not you, Frank Little, half Indian, half Waichitu, ALL WOBBLY!!

They thought by such a deed they would intimidate miners or any other workers who had the guts to stand up
To them, but they were badly shaken at your funeral
When seven thousand workers marched the Butte streets,
Miners, farmers, bakers, cooks, streetsweepers,
Red men, White men . . . any kind of men and women
And they were all angry and not one damn bit intimidated!!

And when you crossed that last Great Mountain Pass
And came into that last Great Valley,
Your Warrior Ancestors were there to greet you
"Welcome, Grandson, You have done us proud!"
THE BUGS

When the dinosaurs first trod the antediluvian Earth
They were here watching
And being careful not to be stepped upon.

And when those reptilian behemoths
Perished in the face of the holocaust
Of the growing pains of an infant Earth
They were here feasting on their corpses.

When the first mammals made their timid debut
They were here nesting in their fur
And burrowing in their skin.

And when a strange new creature walking on two legs
Came out of the trees to build his cities
They were here burrowing between the stone and wood
And luxuriating in his kitchens and sewers.

They were here thriving on smog,
Thriving in polluted waterways
And thriving on insecticides and DDT,
Thriving in soot-blackened cities
And drought-whitened countrysides;
They only looked on with mild interest
As the mushroom clouds began to sprout.
They are still here.
But where is man, where is man, WHERE IS MAN?!?!
CITY OF ANGELS

Like a malignant behemoth amoeba,
   Emerging from the ocean
Spreading across valleys
   And over mountains
Corroding the landscape
   With its population
   Explosion;
Home of the Skid Row Bum
   Plodding his streets
In a downtown that makes
   Chi’s Loop seem clean,
A real Oakie town
   Where white robed salvationists
Fleece their flocks
   In architectural monstrosities
Called Temples of Everlasting
   Mystic Revelation;
Where oil refinery smoke stacks
   And a million exhaust pipes
Roaring down the freeways
   Permeate the sea breeze
With Free Enterprise excrement
   Begatting a bastard child
That floats over rooftops
   Toward the mountains
And failing to climb over
   Comes back to creep
Into the laundry
   Of a million housewives
   And
In the Food dishes
Of a million puppy dogs
And
Into the watery eyelids
Of a million workingmen
Driving down endless Freeway
Caravan subterranean parking
Lot high rent eternity
Wistfully gazing toward
The other side of the ridge
Where
Free from the Grey Imminence
In suburban palaces live
Cinematic courtesans, Real
Estate Brokers, Automobile
Salesmen, and Refinery
Owners
Who gaze back down hoping Man will
Never learn
To advance with technology.
SUN CHANT

Driving down endless
Freeway miles of free
Enterprise desolation
The motorists do not know
A flock of birds fly overhead
Nor do they care.
Only a group of small boys
Standing upon the embankment
And flying their kites
Know there is a Universe.
THREE SPIRITS*

From the wide-belted wind swept plains
   where the imperceptible sobs of the dead tribesmen
   are lost on the ears of the speeding motorist
   bound on his way toward some intangible oblivion

And over the hump-backed backbone of a continent
   whose deep throated canyons and serpentine
      roadways
   are a strain on the nerves of the speeding motorist
   bound on his way toward some intangible oblivion

To the salt-sprayed meadows and tall evergreen forests
   whose rocky-shored ocean is only another obstacle
   in the path of the speeding motorist
   bound on his way toward some intangible oblivion

The shadows of all the long-gone spirits drift endlessly
   unnoticed by those who are destined to become
      spirits
   but notice everything including the speeding
      motorist
   bound on his way toward some intangible oblivion

And occasionally these spirits stop drifting
   long enough to come together in small groups
   to reminisce of days gone by before they
   become part of the spirit-World

And somewhere on a high scrub-timbered mountain
   slope
   overlooking a sprawling, growing West-country
      metropolis

*Frank Little, Wesley Everett, Joe Hill
three spirits come together for a short while
to reminisce of days gone by before they
became part of the spirit-World

One of them a limping battered half-Indian who in
Montana
entered the spirit-World at the hands of a mob
who continued to drag his body over the ground
long after the breath of life passed out of it,
another of a soldier from the first great war
who had been told he was fighting for the freedom
of all men and because he continued to fight for
the freedom of all men in his civilian life
he entered the spirit-World in Washington
hanging from a trestle with his genitals cut off
and the third an immigrant who wrote songs
to inspire the Working men he helped to organize
and had entered the spirit-World in a Utah prison
facing a firing squad
and these three who lived the same hard life and
died the same violent death for all the same cause,
this half-breed, this veteran and this Swede,

From their vantage point among the scrub timber
look down upon the sprawling sea of a city with
all of
its factories and its railyards and its supermarkets and
its apartments and its tenements and homes and the
streets
and freeways where run the speeding motorist
bound on his way toward some intangible oblivion

And they see all the homes of the working men with
the television aerials and new cars parked in front

50
with all the modern labor-saving devices inside
and they reflect on how much has been done since
they
became part of the spirit-World

And they also see these working men and their wives
putting in extra hours of work to keep up the
payments
on luxuries that their Grandsires never dreamed of
while many of their sons go to die in far-off jungles
and they see how much has yet to be done before
many more
become part of the spirit-World

For the time is getting shorter and shorter for this
slumbering Humanity who have yet so far to travel
and they hope they won’t have to welcome too many
more spirits who are only trying to open all men’s
eyes
including the myopic eyes of the speeding motorist
bound on his way toward some intangible oblivion

But they linger no longer as their restless destinies
preordain them to drift ever on without end
and shortly after on the very spot they had rested,
a bit
of hard packed mountain soil trembles ever so
slightly
to break open where a small green shoot slowly
emerges
to gasp hungrily at the clean Mountain air
high above the thoughts
and beyond the eyes of the speeding motorist
bound on his way toward some intangible oblivion
THE DOWNFALL OF DISEASE-GIVER

Long ago before the God of the Blue Eyes
Was known by the Tribe,
The Tribe knew many Gods and Spirits:
Earth Spirit, Water Spirit, Sky Spirit, Corn Spirit,
Buffalo Spirit, Fish Spirit, Moon Princess, and many others
Who were believed in and loved by the Tribe.
Only one Spirit was feared, and that was Disease-Giver,
Who terrorized everyone.
Everyone but one crazy young man named Tall Coyote.
Tall Coyote laughed at Disease-Giver
And said he did not believe in him.
So why should he be afraid of him?
The rest of the Tribe shook their heads sadly, for they knew
For such defiance, Disease-Giver would punish
Poor crazy Tall Coyote.
Sure enough, one day Disease-Giver accosted Tall Coyote
In front of all the Tribe, and said to him:
"Tall Coyote, I have come to kill you!"
That crazy Tall Coyote, he just laughed and said:
"Disease-Giver, I don't believe in you; you cannot hurt me!"
Disease-Giver, he got red in the face and told him to die.
But Tall Coyote kept on laughing.
Again Disease-Giver told him to die;
But Tall Coyote kept on laughing.
After long hours Tall Coyote still laughed;
And Disease-Giver said: "Tall Coyote, please die!"
But Tall Coyote kept on laughing.
Disease-Giver said: “Please, Tall Coyote,
At least have a headache! You are making me lose face!”
But Tall Coyote laughed harder than ever.
It was then Disease-Giver decided
To leave the village of the Tribe
With his tail between his legs,
And was never seen again.
The mind can be a jail, but it can also be a mountain.
Ey — Yaa!
THE LAST EXPRESSWAY

In musty old books that are to be found
In the few libraries that remain
Can be seen pictures of trees.
It is said that there were many trees
In the days before the land was covered
by one hundred-story apartment houses.
In days before the final great war
When the Russians licked the Americans
Or the Americans licked the Russians
Or the Chinese licked them both,
No one seems to remember
Since most libraries have been replaced
By one hundred-story apartment houses.
The construction crews are going to tear up
The last expressway to make room for
More one hundred-story apartment houses.
The last expressway is twenty-five
Thousand miles long
But it has nowhere to go.
SPERANZ!

A small green leaf
Breaks its way
Thru a crack in the pavement,

Glories briefly
In its new-found freedom,
Then withers;

But the root beneath
Grows
Stronger and stronger.
Also by Carlos Cortez

Original Linocut Poster Portrait of

MOTHER JONES

23 x 35 inches on durable stock
$16.50 postpaid from
Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company
1740 West Greenleaf, Chicago, Illinois 60626