

Bill Siverly

Green Chain

In *The German Ideology* Marx wrote that we produce ourselves
Through labor. My last summer working in the Lewiston mill
I was posted to the Extra Board, so I could be called
Day or night for any available shift or particular job.

I did all kinds of jobs, including two weeks of graveyard
Inside a dusty sweltering tower atop the stacker,
Jumping down, laying out strips of lath, then hopping
Out of the way before the next layer of boards rumbled down.

Green chain was feared by all of us on the Extra Board.
For a straight-eight-hour shift we stood beside the chain conveyor
Jerking four-by-eight-foot sheets of plywood, oozing wet,
Onto platform carts, slamming the iron stanchions with a clang.
Green chain sometimes brought us long wet boards heavy as God.

My father believed hard work built character in his kid,
So he picked me up at the mill gate, grinning like morning sun.
Every cell in my body screamed with pain, my arms hung on the car
seat
Like pounded meat, my brain bruised with exhaustion.

Even then I knew I was only a temporary tool,
And some day most jobs on the Extra Board would be done by
machines.

Green chain was so hard, we were not expected to live.
If labor was how I produced myself, I wanted a different job!