

Labor Day is for the Bees

By Dennis Knight

"I've got a writing job for you, pal, are you interested?" It was a strange voice disturbing my Sunday slumber, with a speech impediment I couldn't quite place, but it seemed he buzzed through his esses. He droned on, "I know you're there, buddy, and you claim to be a writer, so wake up and listen."

And there he was, gazing from my kneecap, up and over the mound of my waistline. I was fully reclined in my la-z-boy, and couldn't lift my head enough to see him except by rolling my eyes downward. I was captive in my chair and at the mercy of a yellow menace with a stinger.

"Gompers' the name, and honey's my game." He went on, "We've read some of your stuff down at the union hall, and you're just the boy for this job. Things have been getting bad for my courageous brothers and sisters in the AHM&P, the Amalgamated Honey Makers and Pollinators, and we need some fancy new slogans for our picket signs."

"But why me?" At the moment I couldn't even find words to get out of my own mess, and I certainly didn't have fancy language for a bunch of crabby honey bees with picket signs. Of course, I have always respected their work and thought it might be the most important job on earth, pollinating the blossoms that mature into the grasses and fruits and vegetables that feed the world, and, after all that, making nice honey for my biscuit. Suddenly, I felt sympathetic. "Okay, Mr. Gompers, I'll give it a try. What are you looking for?"

Gompers buzzed about and herded me to my desk. "Labor Day's coming up, and every year at this time we hear stories about working men and women, how they struggle, how they build societies and how they yearn for a better life. They've been getting attention for two centuries, but now it's time for honey bees. We need some hot new slogans to buzz up our membership, shake the world and swat down the capitalist beekeepers! "

I clicked the mouse and, as my computer woke from its nap, I booted my own brain and waited for words to flow. I was used to this predicament, because it strikes me every Sunday afternoon with a Monday writing deadline looming.

"Here's one. How about, 'Buzzing for Bees?'" Gompers twisted the tip of his wing into a thumb, pointed it down and buzzed a profanity. "Okay then", I offered, "how about 'Buzzing for Justice?'"

"Stronger, man, stronger!" We went back and forth with iterations that included demands for better working conditions, less power to the queen, production bonuses, more space in the hive, wing therapy and reduced flight time. We pondered threats of stinger attacks and nectar sabotage.

Finally, the sweet, perfect sequence came together, and fancier words were never before written on a picket sign, "Love Your Local Honey Bee, or Go Pollinate Yourself."