

The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists

a play with music

Book by
James K. Wuensch

Original music, lyrics and musical arrangements by
Jan Van Sickle

Based on the novel “The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists” by
Robert Tressell

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and Jan Van Sickle (Music, arrangements, lyrics)

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The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists was originally presented Off-Broadway by The Labor Theater in 1979, directed by C. R. Portz with the following cast:

Ken Alcorn
J. Bentley Campbell
Bette Craig
Michael Deep
Lee Evans
M. Patrick Hughes
Paul Ledenheim
Sally Logan
David Markey
Keith Walters

NOTE: The cast should consist of ten who double “opposite” roles, e.g., workers and businessmen, etc.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

FRANK OWEN, decorator and painter, 35-40

JOE PHILPOT, painter, 50

JOHN TILDEN, painter, late sixties

ALF WHITE, apprentice, 14-16

WILLIAM EASTON, painter, twenties

RUTH EASTON, EASTON's wife, twenties

BERTIE, a derelict, ageless

BOB CRASS, foreman, forties

JIM SLYME, laborer, twenties

JONNYDAB HUNTER, senior foreman, forties

MRS GRINDER, late twenties

GRINDER, greengrocer, councilman, forties

HARLOW, painter, thirties

MAYOR SWEATER, Mayor of Mugsborough, manufacturer, fifties

DIDLUM, house furnishings, councilman, thirties

RUSHTON, President of Rushton & Co., thirties

SIR GRABALL D'ENCLOSELAND, councilman, sixties

(The stage is divided into several areas, with minimal settings. USC is the exterior of MAYOR SWEATER's new house. It is being worked on and the facade is masked by scaffolding and tarpaulins. DSR is the kitchen area of the home of WILLIAM and RUTH EASTON. DS is an open area, used as a street, or any open area of the town. DSL is an area used both as the city council chamber and as the office of RUSHTON & Co. USR is a stand-up piano. Other instruments used in the play are: a cornet, a baritone, drums, and an accordion. All instruments are played by the actors. AT RISE: The stage is in darkness. LIGHT on piano. Piano player (HARLOW-DIDLUM) plays overture. SPOT on sandwich signs DSC. The front sign, visible to the audience, reads: "GREAT SALE OF LADIES' BLOUSES NOW PROCEEDING AT OYLEY SWEATER'S EMPORIUM!" The upstage leaf of the signs, not yet visible, reads: "DUNDEE JAMS IN CROCK!" Music under and out as BERTIE emerges from between the signs. He is dressed like a derelict.)

BERTIE

Merry Christmas everyone! As part of your Christmas entertainment, I am proud to present to your notice me very own seasonal concoction, "Bertie's Little Melodramas", as exhibited before all the crowned heads of Europe, England, Ireland, Scotland and including North America and Wales. The style of the decorations is ----

(BERTIE quickly looks at the signs.)

--- Chinese! To go with each scene, the band will play a suitable selection of expropriated music, and the audience is kindly invited to join in the chorus!

PIANO

BERTIE'S LITTLE MELODRAMAS!
BERTIE'S LITTLE MELODRAMAS!
BERTIE'S LITTLE MELODRAMAS!

BERTIE

Stop it! Stop the music! I asked for an introduction, not a bleedin' opera! The trouble with him is he loves his work. Well, hello then. Tonight we're going to tell you a story: Life and Love in 1906. Yes, I know. You've always wanted to know about that. This is the story of how a socialist came to Mugsborough. Socialist. Mugsborough. Sounds like just the sort of place he ought to go, don't it? You know, a lot of folks is disturbed by this here Socialism. They wonder what it might be. The preachers say it's the devil's work. Rich blokes say it's a game of Beggar-Thy-Neighbor, especially if'n he's got it and you don't. Me? I don't know what it is. I have no idea what it might be. Just a little while ago, I was walking along the street out there, mindin' my own business, carrying my signs, when this bloke over here, he yells at me, "Oy there, Geordie! Nip on over here for a minute, would yer?" Well, I comes on over, and I says to him, "Listen, my name is Bert, mate." And he says to me, "Well alright Bertmate, don't get excited. We're doin' a little show in here about Socialism, and we need someone authentic, I mean, you look like a working class bloke." "Well," I says, "I am, but I ain't no bleedin' socialist!" He says, "There's wine and beer." "Right!" I says, "I'll do it!" So, here I am. Now, before we begin it's very important for me to explain to you the science of money as it were practiced in the time and place of which we speak. Now listen carefully, 'cause if you miss any part of this you might as well go home right now. Ready? – A pound is called a quid. Shilling's a bob. Twenty bob, one quid. Sixpence's a tanner. Two tanner, one bob. Twenty-one bob, one pound one is a guinea. I should also like to say at this time that – A sovereign's a pound is a quid as well, and a florin's two bob. A crown is five bob, quarter quid. Half crown, two bob, one tanner. Four crown pound, one pound quid. – You got that? Lovely. Now to our story. The people of Mugsborough were always very, very, poor, even in the best of times, because they were in love. They were always giving everything they had and everything their children had to this teeny

tiny group of people they was absolutely crazy about. Now it just so happens, by some strange coincidence, that this teeny, tiny group of people that they loved so much ruled the town and owned everything in it. And I say, that's only right. I mean, If you loves someone, you don't like to see them do without, now do yer? And that's our story – Dedicated to the ones we Love!

(On the word love! A DRUM, four beats intro. Enter The Mugsborough Skull and Crossbones Boys Fancy Dress Carnival and Torchlight Procession In Aid of the Unemployed. The processionnaires are dressed in improvised costumes. One of their number is an impersonator of a bishop of The Church of England. The others carry instruments, banners, sparklers, etc. Distinguished from the others by their fine clothes and bearing are MR and MRS GRINDER. ALL sing. DRUM.)

ALL

RULE BRITANNIA, BRITANNIA RULES THE WAVES!
BRITONS NEVER, NEVER, NEVER WILL BE SLAVES!
(DRUM.)

BISHOP

Ladies and gentlemen! As the religious leader of the Mugsborough Skull and Crossbones Boys, I wish to announce The Mugsborough Skull and Crossbones Boys Fancy Dress Carnival and Torchlight Procession In Aid of the Unemployed!

(DRUM.)

ALL

Hear! Hear! Hurrah!

(DRUM.)

BISHOP

Now I know you will all be glad to help the unemployed!
(DRUM. ALL FREEZE.)

BERTIE

Cause most of you is unemployed as well!

(DRUM. ALL UNFREEZE.)

BISHOP

And all the proceeds will go to worthy causes; The Organized Benevolent Society!

(Chord, DRUM. Cheers.)

The Soup Kitchen!

(Chord, DRUM. Cheers.)

And The Workhouse!

(Sustained chord, DRUM. Cheers.)

And a word of thanks to the concerned citizens and Christian gentry of the City Council –

(Quickly glissando up.)

MAYOR SWEATER, MISTER RUSHTON, MISTER GRINDER,
MISTER DIDLUM and SIR GRABALL D'ENCLOSELAND!

(Cheers, DRUM.)

And now we shall hear from our own Secretary of The Organized Benevolent Society, a man whose fervent desire is –

ALL

Free Trade!

(DRUM.)

BISHOP

So that we can all have –

ALL

Plenty of work!

(DRUM.)

BISHOP

Mister Sawknee Grinder! –

(Piano, DRUM.)

ALL
FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW!
FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW! –

BISHOP
Accompanied by his wife, the ever-lovely Mrs Grinder! --
(Gliss. up, cheers.)

MRS GRINDER
Thank you, I'm so happy!

GRINDER
That's enough, Nell.
(Gliss. down, DRUM.)
(GRINDER makes a speech. The others hum
"Silent Night" *sotto voce*.)

Men, as we all know –
The ship of State is sailing in Troubled Waters.
Economic Improvement Prognosis is bleak –
Trade is down, Unemployment is up,
Money is tight, Credit is weak,
Industry is off, Business is bad,
Christmas is coming, there's a Glut on the Market, and
We must Face the Problem!
The Vicar of The Church of The Whited Sepulcher,
And Ten Benevolent Businessmen of Mugsborough
Have organized The Organized Benevolent Society
Which organized The Municipal Soup Kitchen
To sell soup to Bona Fide Unemployed –

MRS GRINDER
No bums!

GRINDER

According to an organized plan,
And the plan goes like this –
The Vicar of The Church of The Whited Sepulcher will –

ALL

BUY!

GRINDER

Half priced timber for the Church Labor Yard and hire
Bona Fide Working Unemployed –

MRS GRINDER

No bums!

GRINDER

Two days a week, each man to cut
one log of wood into twelve pieces each
and the Vicar will –

ALL

SELL!

GRINDER

One bag of wood of twelve pieces each,
every single bag for one shilling each, and
pay to every single man one penny apiece,
so that every single man can –

ALL

BUY!

GRINDER

From the Soup Kitchen soup by the basin or the quart to those who got jugs,
soup will be –

SOLD!
ALL

GRINDER
For ONE PENNY A PIECE!
(DRUM. FREEZE. BERTIE speaks.)

BERTIE
My grandfather's uncle used to tell me a story about a tailor who tried to lengthen his cloth by cutting a piece off one end and sewing it on the other.

(DRUM. Four beats intro. ALL UNFREEZE, sing.)

ALL
FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW!
FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW!
FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW!
(DRUM. ALL FREEZE.)

BERTIE
No flies on the Vicar. With what he's going to have left over from all that wood chopping, he's going to buy himself a Newfoundland dog, an hand-carved set of ivory chessmen, and a dozen bottles of Irish!
(DRUM, four beats intro. ALL UNFREEZE. EXEUNT singing. BERTIE and PIANO stay.)

ALL
RULE BRITANNIA, BRITANNIA RULES THE WAVES!
BRITONS NEVER NEVER NEVER WILL BE SLAVES!

(They are gone.)

BERTIE

(Steps out of his signs.)

There they go. Helping the unemployed. ‘Course I’m never unemployed. I knock about. I’m never idle. A bit here. A bit there, and the rest of the time is me own –

(Sings, acc. w/ piano.)

I’M BERT. YOU’VE HEARD OF ME, BERT.
 YOU’VE HAD WORD OF ME,
 STROLLING ALONG, HEARTY AND STRONG,
 LIVING ON PLATES OF FRESH AIR.
 I’M ALWAYS IN FASHION, AND WHEN I’M
 DEPRESSED, I STICK ON ME HAT
 AND TODDLE UP WEST.
 THE GENTRY ALL GASP – “WHY, HE’S
 NOT EVEN DRESSED!” I’M
 BERLINGTON BERTIE FROM BOWE!

(Patter. PIANO under.)

God. I had a terrible time getting up this morning. The policeman had to shake me three times. I’ve got this lovely little place down by the river. Get a lovely view of the river there, from underneath the docks. I see all sorts of marine life. Did you know, me Mom was a marine? Me Dad was a soldier. What a childhood I had! Sis and I marching ‘round the breakfast table. Mom would spit. Dad would polish. –

(PIANO PLAYER gets up tries to leave.)

Oy! Where the hell do you think you’re going?

PIANOMAN

You don’t need me.

BERTIE

I-3-2

BERTIE

Yes I do. – (Aside.) We’ve been together for years.

PIANOMAN

Seems like it, don’t it? Actually it’s only been three minutes. –

BERTIE

Get back there!

(PIANO resumes. BERTIE sings.)

I’M BERLINGTON BERTIE, I RISE AT TEN THIRTY,
AND SAUNTER ALONG LIKE A TOFF.
I WALK DOWN THE STRAND
WITH ME GLOVES ON ME HANDS,
THEN I WALK DOWN AGAIN WITH’M OFF.
I’M ALL AIRES AND GRACES,
CORRECT EASY PACES,
WITHOUT FOOD FOR SO LONG,
I FORGET WHERE ME FACE IS –
BUT MY PEOPLE ARE WELL OFF, YOU KNOW.
NEARLY EVERYONE KNOWS ME,
FROM SMITH TO LORD ROSEBURY,
I’M BERLINGTON BERTIE FROM BOWE!

(Patter, PIANO under.)

I wasn’t always like this, you know. I used to be down and out. You know – one job one day, no job the next. Up this hill, down that hill. In this door, out that door. Finally, I says to myself, “Bertie, what are you doing, man?” And I says, “I’m trying to make a living!” And then I says, “Don’t make a living, man, make a life!” -- And look at me now! –

I’M BERLINGTON BERTIE, I RISE AT TEN THIRTY,
THEN BUCKINGHAM PALACE I VIEW!
I STAND IN THE YARD WHILE THEY’RE
CHANGING THE GUARD, AND THE KING

BERTIE

I-3-3

SHOUTS ACROSS, "TOOLDLE-OO!"
THEN THE PRINCE OF WALES' BROTHER,
ALONG WITH SOME OTHER,
HE SLAPS ME ON THE BACK 'N' SAYS,
"COME AND SEE MOTHER!"
I'M BERT! BERT!
AND ROYALTY'S HURT –
WHEN THEY ASK ME TO DINE, I SAY,
"NO – I'VE JUST HAD A BANANA
WITH LADY DIANA!"
I'M BERLINGTON BERTIE, BERLINGTON BERTIE,
BERLINGTON BERTIE FROM –

PIANOMAN

Oh, you do need me, don't you?

BERTIE

Cripes, you know it! –

BOTH

BOWE!!!

(BLACKOUT.)

(The Mayor's house, called "The Cave", shortly before the morning tea break. The men are furiously at work. Their conversations are brief and furtive, for they are not allowed to speak. CRASS is mixing a barrel of paint DS of the facade, in an area that serves as a paint shop and eating place. ALF is pouring tea. HARLOW and OWEN are doing trim work. LINDEN is sanding down a door frame. PHILPOT is atop one of the scaffolds, hidden behind a tarp and humming a little tune to himself. SLYME is scraping down one of the outside walls.)

CRASS

Now, let's see. Alf, me boy. You've put the tea in the bucket, I suppose?

ALF

Yes, Mr Crass.

CRASS

And now you'd like another job?

ALF

Yes.

CRASS

Well, you can take that bucket and rag over there and wash down the porch, we'll be painting that next.

ALF

Alright. I've got them bloaters to cook for tea time.

Never mind, I'll do them.

CRASS

(ALF gets to work on the porch. CRASS makes himself comfortable by the cookfire. HUNTER sneaks in. SLYME notices him.)

SLYME

Good morning, Mr. Hunter, sir.

(CRASS leaps up and makes a show of mixing paint.)

HUNTER

Don't bother making such a fine job of it, Slyme. Just scrape it off any old way. I want to get that wall slobbered over with color by tonight.

SLYME

Yes sir, Mr. Hunter, sir.

(SLYME tears into his work. HUNTER moves over to ALF.)

HUNTER

What are you doing, you imbecile boy?

ALF

Mr. Crass told me to wash down the porch, sir.

(HUNTER proceeds to where CRASS is mixing paint. CRASS suddenly realizes he has a lighted pipe in his mouth. As HUNTER approaches, he drops the pipe into the barrel of paint.)

HUNTER

Crass, why are you washing down the porch?

CRASS

It has to be washed down, sir, if it's to have one coat instead of three, sir.

HUNTER

Washed down be damned! Just have'm sweep it off. If you make the color thick enough, you can just throw it on. I'll show you how to do it.

(HUNTER moves to the mixing barrel when he suddenly notices PHILPOT's humming. He looks around for the source of the offending noise.)

HUNTER

What's that noise? Singing? Do you allow singing?

CRASS

No sir, certainly not, sir.

HUNTER

You carry on, I'll find out who it is.

CRASS

Yes, sir.

(HUNTER exits, patrolling the house in search of the mystery singer-hummer.)

HARLOW

Owen, I don't know, mate. I think we're lucky.

OWEN

Yes, compared to most people we are. But don't you think we ought to arrange things so that we are not being alternately starved or worked to death?

HARLOW

I don't know. We can't make work, can we? If the people what's got the money won't spend it, we can't make them, can we?

OWEN

If you go on living like this, you'll die before your time, or if you don't, when you're too old to work, you'll be put into a workhouse and treated like a criminal.

(HUNTER reappears. His search has been fruitless. The humming is still audible. He concentrates on LINDEN.)

HUNTER

Linden, how much longer are you going to be messing about with them doors?

LINDEN

I must clean the work down, sir, before I goes on painting.

HUNTER

I don't want no backchat from you! There's younger and better men than you walking about. Move it quicker, or you'll be sorry.

(LINDEN resumes work. HUNTER pulls the tarp away from PHILPOT.)

HUNTER

Philpot, I don't like for a man to be hiding away like that. It makes me think he's having a mike.

PHILPOT

Yes, Mr. Hunter, sir. It's all the same t'me sir. Whatever you say, sir.

(The men continue to work in silence.

HUNTER steps DS of the house. He addresses the audience, the tableau of men working behind him.)

HUNTER

They calls me "Nimrod", "Misery" and "Pontius Pilate", but my real name is Hunter. I am a good Christian and a firm taskmaster. I'm the foreman

for Rushton & Company, the firm what's contracted for this job. Mayor Oyley Sweater just bought this house. He calls it "The Cave". Why, I don't know. Fifteen years ago Rushton started this firm, and I started with him as foreman. He offered me two pounds a week and two and one half percent of all profits of all work done. At two and one half percent above my regular salary, I've been able to put away a little savings over the years. All gold coins. I don't trust banks. Them savings is all I got to show for working and I add to them every way I can. I estimates on a job, then I cuts corners on the work – mud for mortar, boiled oil in place of varnish, one coat of paint instead of three. Then I drives the men harder and trim back on wages. It's not that I want to do it, I have to. Don't give me that look. You would do the same thing in my place. I'm always looking for new ways to make money. Besides doing painting and decorating work, the firm also furnishes funerals. That's a steady income when business is slow but it's not enough. Doing funerals was my idea, but Rushton damn near gets all the benefit. Fifteen years, there he is and here I am. It's not enough. Two and one half percent is not enough...

(HUNTER is interrupted by EASTON, who has entered during HUNTER's speech.)

EASTON

Good morning, Mr. Hunter, sir. Any chance of a job, sir?

HUNTER

'Fraid not, Easton, 'bout full up.

(Whistle blown by CRASS, who shouts, "Tea time!" The men leave their tasks and gather about for tea.)

EASTON

Things have been pretty bad this past season, sir. We've had a rough time of it. It's been a whole month since I finished up my last job with Smeeriton & Leevit, and I've been walking about ever since. We haven't been able to pay off any of our debts since last winter. I should be very glad for a start, sir. Even if it were only for a day or two.

HUNTER

I believe I might be able to make room for one more man, Easton, but you're such an uncertain sort of chap. You don't seem to care whether you work or not. The last time you were with us, you were too independent, you know. One can't say two words but you needs must clear off. If we were to encourage men of your stamp, we should never know where we were.

EASTON

I'm sorry about last time, Mr. Hunter, sir. I wouldn't let happen again, sir.

HUNTER

I might perhaps, let you have a week or two. You can come over to this job we're doing here at Mayor Sweater's new house. He calls it "The Cave". You know the figure?

EASTON

Six and a half an hour, sir.

HUNTER

Five and a half. Business is bad. We can't go on paying full price to every man, or we shan't be able to stay in business at all. There's the work, and that's the figure. If you'd like to start, you can come over this morning. Will you be coming or not?

EASTON

Yes sir.

HUNTER

Alright. Go home and get your kit and come right back. You can tell Crass I started you.

EASTON

Yes sir. Thank you sir.

(EASTON hurries off. HUNTER exits in the other direction. While the other men are involved with their food and tea, OWEN comes DS and sets up a makeshift podium. He covers the top with a red bandana. On the bandana he places three pieces of bread, three bread knives, and three pennies. As he works, he talks.)

OWEN

Alright. You say you don't make enough money. You give it to the little woman on Saturday and it's all gone on Monday and you don't know where it's gone to. You never have enough. And yet, there are people who actually seem to have some secret power to make money. The great financiers, captains of industry, successful businessmen – without lifting a finger they become richer than old King Midas overnight, every night! How do they do it? My friends, it's easy once you know the secret of The Great Money Trick. What is this secret? The jealously guarded key to success of The Sacred Few since the beginnings of man, right down to the present day? Nebuchdenezzar knew this secret. Lord Rothschild knows it, Sir Lipton knows it, Mayor Sweater knows it and now, I'm going to show it to you! I am going to show you how to become rich! Rich for the rest of your life! Rich without doing a single bit of work! All I need to do this trick are a few volunteers and a little bit of money. (To PHILPOT.) You sir! You look like an intelligent man. Would you like to make millions? Own your own pub? Drink beer with the King?

PHILPOT

Don't mind if I do.

OWEN

You are the most fortunate of men, sir. You are going to learn right now, in one quick and easy lesson, the ancient art of money making. Do you have any money? It takes money to make money. A few sovereigns will do.

PHILPOT

Sorry, old chap. I left me purse on the grand pianner.

OWEN

A penny then. You don't have a penny?

PHILPOT

Nothin'.

OWEN

Well, you're in luck. It just so happens I have three pennies. I can make these pennies grow in value a million fold if you like, right before your very eyes! Now I need two more British workmen to help me. (To HARLOW and ALF.) You sir, and you, young man. Step right up, don't be shy. I am about to show you all how to get rich. Before each one of you there is a slice of bread and a knife. This bread represents the raw materials of the earth that have been placed in the earth by God for everybody.

HARLOW

How did you get them?

OWEN

My dad left them to me in his will.

HARLOW

Fair enough.

OWEN

Now I am a capitalist. These knives are my machinery of production. And these three pennies are my money capital. Now I want each one of you to process this raw material by cutting each slice of bread into three pieces. (The men dive into their work.) Look at them go! Turning raw materials into the Necessaries of Life! Now, give me back the finished product, and I will pay each of you, for this little bit of work, one penny apiece. You each have one penny and I have nine pieces of bread. And I suppose you're hungry?

PHILPOT

I could do with something to eat.

ALF

Me too.

OWEN

You're in luck my lad. I'll sell you each a bit of bread for one penny apiece.
(OWEN distributes the pieces of bread and the others pay him.)

Bread....Bread.....Bread....

OTHERS

Penny....Penny....Penny.....

OWEN

That gives me six pieces of bread and three pennies. What do you have?

HARLOW

Nothing. I ate mine.

PHILPOT

I'm still hungry.

ALF

Me too.

OWEN

Back to work!

(Once again the men plunge into the task.)

Industry marches on. Labor and management, hands and brains. Work together and count the gains! I get the processed raw materials and you get your money. And since you work so that you may eat, I'll sell you again a bit of bread. Bread....Bread.....Bread.....

OTHERS

Penny....Penny....Penny.....

OWEN

Now I have twelve pieces of bread and three pennies. I'm three times as rich as when I started. What do you have?

HARLOW

Same as before, nothing.

PHILPOT

I'm still hungry.

ALF

Me too.

OWEN

I'll be glad to sell you as much as you want.

PHILPOT

Back to work!

OWEN

Sorry, my friends. There is no work. I have to close down for a while. There's a glut on the market.

PHILPOT

How're we supposed to eat? We ain't got no bleeding money!

OWEN

None of my business, is it? You should have been thrifty, like me. Look how I got by being thrifty. Come around in about six months and I'll see what I can do for you.

PHILPOT

Look, mate. If you won't sell them to us on credit or give us our jobs back, we'll bloody well take'm!

OWEN

You can't do that. That's dishonest. I'll call the police. It's not my fault. It's foreign competition.

HARLOW

Well this don't half take the bloody bisquit, don't it?

ALF

He has everything and we have nothing.

OWEN

And that, my friends, is the great money trick!

(The other men laugh at the plight of the "unemployed".)

PHILPOT

There's only one thing for it, we has to have a procession in aid of the unemployed.

HARLOW

That's the idea. But to get anywhere with this lot, we'll have to entertain them.

ALF

What'll we give'm?

PHILPOT

"Let My Lower Light Be Burning". That's the one to make them part up.
(PHILPOT, HARLOW and ALF sing.)

TRIM YOUR FEEBLE LAMP, MY BRETHREN.
SOME POOR SAILOR, TEMPEST-TOSSED,
STRUGGLING HARD TO SAVE THE HARBOR,
IN THE DARKNESS MAY BE LOST.
SO LET MY LOWER LIGHT BE BURNING,
SEND HER GLEAM ACROSS THE WAVE,
SOME POOR SHIPWRECKED STRUGGLING SEAMAN
YOU MAY RESCUE, YOU MAY SAVE.

(PHILPOT hold his hat for alms. ALF and HARLOW hum “Rule Britannia” as he makes his pitch.)

PHILPOT

Kind friends, we’re all honest British workingmen. We do not rob, we do not rape, we do not commit crimes. We do not want to frighten you, but we’ve been out of work for the last twenty years on account of overproduction and foreign competition. We’re quite willing to work. That’s all we want – plenty of work. We’d be perfectly happy to work our bloody guts out for the rest of our lives. – But as there is no work, we’re forced to come here and ask you if you can spare a few coppers towards a piece of bread and a night’s lodging.

(PHILPOT has no luck with his begging. The others throw bits of trash into his hat and make appropriate remarks. OWEN however, in his role as Capitalist, takes pity on them and drops a penny into the hat.)

PHILPOT

Look friends, just when we’d given up hope, the kind-hearted capitalist give us a quid.

OWEN

I’m always good for charity.

PHILPOT

Alright men, let's eat!

(PHILPOT pays the penny to OWEN, who divides one bit of bread among the three of them. They sing boisterously.)

FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW!
FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW!
FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW---

LINDEN

WSSST! Someone coming up the back path!

CRASS

Who is it?

LINDEN

Don't know. It might be Hunter, or the Bloke himself!

CRASS

Back to work!

(Except for OWEN, the men rush about in silent pandemonium. EASTON enters, carrying his kit.)

EASTON

Hello mates.

CRASS

Easton! You gave us a start. What the hell are you doing here?

EASTON

Hunter put me on.

(EASTON comes DS and addresses the audience. His remarks are animated by the

workers behind him as the work day progresses.)

That was it. My first day on the job after three weeks of walking about. You almost forget how hard it is. It seems hard enough to kill you sometimes. There's this one old bloke, Linden his name is. He cut his hand setting some tiles. Laid it open like a slab of meat. Crass was watching him, so he couldn't take the time to fix it proper – So he just sticks his hand into a bucket of turpentine. ---

(CRASS blows his whistle, cries Alright, that's it, go home!)

-- After we knocked off, I took the tram home. I was too tired to walk. But that's not what gets me down. What gets me down is buggers like Crass. He's a bloody toe rag, but he's the foreman on the job so everybody toadies up to him. A year ago I'd've knocked him flat for saying two words, but now I've got a family, so I buys him drinks instead. Another thing is standing in front of a swine like Hunter and telling him that five and a half is as good as six and a half. I was on a job last winter – we found out one of the lads was taking less while full-priced men was walking about. We made him sorry for that, I can tell you. So now I've taken less. I keep my mouth shut about it. Now I'm going home and tell lies to the woman. See, it gets me down, work does. I mean, you can't make a living without being a bloody liar.

(End I-4.)

(The home of WILLIAM and RUTH EASTON. A kitchen table, one chair, a baby rocker. RUTH is setting the table for one. EASTON enters.)

RUTH

So tell me what happened. You came back in such a rush this morning, I had no chance to ask you anything.

EASTON

Well, I run into Rushton's foreman, Hunter, over at Mayor Sweater's new house. He wasn't half glad to see me. Said as how they couldn't make no profit at all with the unskilled men, It took them twice as long to do anything at all... (He looks into the cradle.)There's something wrong with him.

RUTH

It's his teeth. He hasn't slept at all today. He's just quieting down now.

EASTON

Has he been eating?

RUTH

He had an egg this morning, and at dinnertime I gave him a whole saucer full of fried potatoes with little bits of bacon in it.

EASTON

He's not getting thin?

RUTH

It's his teeth. He don't get no rest at all with them.

EASTON

Well, let's have some tea.

RUTH

I couldn't think of what to give you tonight, so I toasted up some bread and

cheese by the fire. Is that nice?

EASTON

Yes. You won't be having any?

RUTH

I had some before you came.

EASTON

Think I'll go up to bed. Give us the clock. Hope it doesn't stop in the night. Stops three or four times a day now. Next thing we'll have to buy a new one.

RUTH

Will, I promised the collector we'd pay two weeks rent next week. We're four weeks behind right now, and he's getting quite nasty about it.

EASTON

I suppose we'll just have to pay it then, that's all.

RUTH

I've been trying to do some figuring today. How much will you have on payday?

EASTON

I don't know. Today's a back day, that goes into next week. Say five days – about nineteen shillings, I suppose. If we pay the two weeks rent, that will leave us about seven shillings to live on.

RUTH

Are you sure it's only nineteen shillings? Even if you only worked forty hours this week, forty hours at six and a half, that would make.....

EASTON

I know what that would make, Ruth. See, things are pretty bad with Rushton and Company, according to Hunter. He said as how they have a hard time making any profit at all, and they couldn't pay no more than five and a half,

for a week or so, anyway. I said that would be alright, temporary like.

RUTH

Five and a half is laborer's pay. You're a painter. Six and a half is the wage set by the Painter's Society. You shouldn't ought to take less.

EASTON

I shouldn't ought to have a family now, should I? See, the thing is, you can't manage things properly. That's your trouble. You take money in your hand with no idea what to do with it. You come home with next to nothing to show for it. Look at this blasted fancy rug. Would've been better to wait until we had the cash to pay for it, but no, you had to have your way. Now I've got this bloody payment thing dragging on me for months. Before the damn thing's paid for, It'll be all wore out.

RUTH

I do the best I can with the money. And you needn't be blaming me for the rug. You usen't to talk to me this way. You know as well as I do that we couldn't be living here without the rug, what with the wind coming up through the floorboards. Even now, of a wintry day I sit here and watch it moving up and down. If we didn't have it, we'd all be sick, the two of us as well as poor Freddy.

EASTON

I'm sorry. I didn't mean what I said. I know you do your best. I don't do enough to help you. Look, let's make a list of everything we owe. We'll figure things together. Then we'll know where we stand.

RUTH

Alright.

(EASTON takes pencil and paper.)

EASTON

Now then, rent?

RUTH

Four weeks.

EASTON

Four sixes, twenty-four, one pound four. Next?

RUTH

Butcher, twelve shillings.

EASTON

Twelve shillings.

RUTH

Milkman, four weeks, tuppence a day.

EASTON

Four and eight, Next?

RUTH

Five shillings, greengrocer, oil and cabbage. Hundredweight of coal, one and six.

EASTON

Adding that all up makes....

RUTH

Two pound, four shillings, one penny.

EASTON

Well, let me do it.

RUTH

It's not enough, Will. Nineteen shillings is not enough.

EASTON

It's just for this week. We could pawn my black coat and vest. We might get

something for that.

RUTH

We could take in a lodger for that room upstairs. If we could let that room, we'd have money every week, regular. Mrs. Crass has two lodgers in one room. They pay her twelve shillings a week each. You ask the men tomorrow if they know of anyone....

EASTON

We're not taking in any bloody lodger! I can take care of my family without someone else's help!

RUTH

I don't think you can, Will.

EASTON

What do you mean?

(RUTH withdraws three letters from her apron pocket and hands them to EASTON.)

RUTH

There's these.

(RUTH takes the baby and exits. EASTON reads. VOICES are heard in the darkness.)

VOICE ONE

"Corporation of Mugsborough, General District and Special Rates, final notice. The amount due, in respect of the above rates, has not been paid. Please pay same within 14 days or legal action will be taken. By order of the Council, Number Two District."

VOICE TWO

"Assistant Overseer of the Poor, final notice. One pound fivepence 'apenny poor rate in fourteen days. Legal action in default. By order of the Overseers."

VOICE THREE

“J. Didlum & C., Limited, Complete House Furnishers, Quality Street, Mugsborough. Mr. W. Easton, Sir: Twelve shillings monthly past due. Request payment by return of post. Each fourth Saturday. Avoid unpleasantness. J. Didlum & Co. Ltd.”

EASTON

Jesus Christ!

(End I-5.)

(BLACKOUT on EASTON's. ALF appears in the street, carrying a pole. Atop the pole is a sign illuminated by a lantern. The sign reads, "GOD IS NOT MOCKED!")

ALF

Jesus says God is our father and all the people are his children. But the Vicar says He didn't mean it that way. Jesus said, "Don't think of tomorrow but help those in need." But the Vicar says that's all nonsense.

(Enter a group of religious street singers. SLYME is among them. HUNTER enters, drawn on a wheeled platform with a sign reading, "SHINING LIGHT MISSION".)

SLYME

My dear friends, I thank God I can stand here tonight and say as all my sins is under the blood tonight. What He has done for me He can do for you. Oh, my dear friends, don't go putting it off to some more convenient time, because you may not have another chance. Him that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck and shall be suddenly cut off, and that without a remedy. Oh, come to Him tonight for His name's sake and to Him we'll give all the glory, amen!

HUNTER

It's the only way! Thank you, Brother Slyme!

(Reciting.)

DON'T GO OUT TONIGHT DEAR FATHER,
DON'T REFUSE THIS ONCE I PRAY!

SLYME

THE BOY STOOD ON THE BURNING DECK,
HIS FEET WAS FULL OF BLISTERS.
HIS FATHER STOOD IN THE CORNER SALOON,
THE BEER RUNNING DOWN HIS WHISKERS!

Not tonight, dear father!

HUNTER

(SINGERS sing, HUNTER and SLYME are recitative.)

HUNTER

Refuse to have another beer!

SINGERS

DON'T GO OUT TONIGHT
DEAR FATHER, DON'T REFUSE....

THIS ONCE I PRAY. TELL YOUR
COMRADES MOTHER'S DYING,
SOON HER SOUL WILL PASS AWAY.

SLYME

The mother of your children
languages away and you are
drinking the Devil's cheer!

TELL THEM TOO OF DARLING
WILLIE, HIM WE ALL SO MUCH DO
LOVE, HOW HIS LITTLE FORM IS
DROOPING, SOON TO BLOOM
AGAIN ABOVE....

HUNTER

The children! With their feet
full of blisters! And you,
with your beer full of whiskers!

DON'T GO OUT DEAR FATHER,
THINK O THINK HOW SAD 'TWILL
BE; WHEN THE ANGELS COME
TO TAKE HER, PAPA WON'T BE
THERE TO SEE.....

Leave that saloon! Leave
that den of iniquity!
Not tonight, Dear Father!

(Enter BERTIE and two housewifey
lumpen types – men in drag. They sing
and dance.)

BERTIE & GIRLS
BEER, BEER, GLORIOUS BEER!
GLORIOUS, GLORIOUS BEER!....

HUNTER

....And these signs shall follow them that do believe – They shall heal the sick! They shall cast out devils! They shall pick up snakes! And if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not harm them!

BERTIE

Glory! Glory! Jesus save me!....Your Worship, I heard as how you said that them that believes can heal the sick?

CHORUS (Chord, etc.)

THAT'S SO!

BERTIE

And cast out devils?

CHORUS

THAT'S RIGHT!

BERTIE

And pick up snakes?

CHORUS (Triumphantly.)

AMEN!!

BERTIE

And – if they drinks any deadly thing, it shall not harm them?

HUNTER

That's true.

BERTIE

Save me, Your Honor!

I can't stand me sins!
Get'em off me!
Gin and beer has knocked me
out into outer darkness and
it all blacketh out
with a mighty blackness!
I wants the light, Your Honor!
I am in the dark
and I wants the light!
I loves the light and tonight,
I sees the light!
Ah, look at'em! They is all
angels of light, an half an hour
before the last trump! Save me,
Your Honor! I wants to be saved!

CHORUS

GLORY! GLORY! GLORY!
I HEARD THE VOICE OF JESUS
SAY, "STOOP DOWN AND DRINK
AND LIVE.....

THE LIVING WATER, THIRSTY
ONE, STOOP DOWN AND DRINK
AND LIVE!"

MY THIRST WAS QUENCHED,
MY SOUL REVIVED, AND NOW
I LIVE IN HIM!

(Music stops.)

BERTIE (Offering a flask to HUNTER.)

Squire, you say as how a true believer can drink any deadly thing and it shall not harm him. Do this one little thing that I asks, I'll believe you. Drink this.

HUNTER

What is it?

BERTIE

Turpentine! Look, I'm a believer –

(BERTIE puts the flask to his mouth and takes a brave swallow. He chokes. He offers the flask again to HUNTER.)

You're believer. Drink this.

LUMPEN LADY

C'mon, get it across your chest!

HUNTER

Now if you will allow me, I will explain what the verse means, within the meaning of the context.....

BERTIE

Are you going to drink it or not?

(Pause. HUNTER is silent. BERTIE at last withdraws his offer and smugly returns the flask to his pocket. He strolls back to the LUMPEN LADIES, in control of the situation. At his signal, he and the LUMPEN LADIES sing. The Shining Light Singers quickly follow. It is a "sing-off".)

BERTIE & LADIES
GLORIOUS BEER, BEER,
GLORIOUS, GLORIOUS
BEER....

MY SOUL REVIVED AND NOW
I LIVE IN BEER!

CHORUS
I HEARD THE VOICE OF JESUS
SAY, "STOOP DOWN AND DRINK
AND LIVE." MY THIRST WAS
QUENCHED,
MY SOUL REVIVED AND NOW
I LIVE IN HIM!

(All exit but ALF.)

ALF

Jesus says to forgive those who injure you. But the Vicar says put them in prison, hang them and starve their families. And if they come from a foreign country, the Vicar says, take guns and knives, kill them and burn their houses. The Vicar says we should never get on in the world if we did everything that Jesus says.

(Exit ALF. End I-6.)

(Very early the next morning. Street in darkness. EASTON is on the street with his alarm clock. The bright light of a policeman's torch hits him in the face. He stops in his tracks. A voice behind the light.)

VOICE

You're about very early.

EASTON

What time is it? I've got to get to work at seven. My clock's stopped.

VOICE

Where do you work?

EASTON

At the Mayor's new house, the one they call "The Cave", on Elmere Road, near the old toll gate.

VOICE

Who are you working for?

EASTON

Rushton & Company.

VOICE

What do you do?

EASTON

Laborer.

VOICE

Where do you live?

EASTON

Number ten, Bottom Road, Windley.

VOICE

What is your name?

EASTON

William Easton.

VOICE

You're lying.

EASTON

No I'm not, honest. My name is William Easton.

VOICE

It's three quarters of an hour's walk from here to Elmere Road. You say you have to be there at seven, yet it's only a quarter past four.

EASTON

But my clock has stopped and I thought.....

VOICE

Turn right 'round, my man, and don't leave your house until the proper time. And buy yourself a proper clock, or you'll go to gaol.

EASTON (Exiting.)

Yes sir, thank you, sir.

(EASTON is gone. The light turns to illuminate the face of the VOICE's owner from beneath. It is BERTIE.)

BERTIE

Hello. It's me again. You like this torch? Nipped off a lorry last Tuesday. Thought it might come in handy. Never know who you might run into at night, do you? Of course, I don't mind this area, really. I mean, it's so

poor and so frightening, you'll never see a copper 'round here after dark. You know, living as I do, seeing the things I see, I'm beginning to develop a social conscience. I believe I'm becoming a Bolshevik. I hear as how the Reds is going to take over some day. They don't tell nobody nothing and they meets in secret, and they is always making plots. Just a little while ago, I was in another part of town, peeking through a window, and I seen a bunch of them meeting in secret. And they was making plots and plots and plots....

(BERTIE flashes the light on the DSL area. We see GRINDER, RUSHTON, DIDLUM, SWEATER and SIR GRABALL D'EN-CLOSELAND gathered about a conference table, in conclave in RUSHTON's office.)

(End I-7.)

(As before, RUSHTON's office. BERTIE
has exited SR.)

GRINDER

Rushton, buying the Electric Light Company was the worst mistake we ever made in business, We're bankrupt now, and the longer we wait, the worse off we'll be.

RUSHTON

Drink, Didlum?

DIDLUM

I don't suppose no one will be coming in? I'm a teetotaler, you know. If we could supply electric light at the same price as gas...

RUSHTON

But we can't do it.

DIDLUM

But we can't do it.

RUSHTON

The machinery we got is too small, and it's all wore out.

GRINDER

Since the gas company moved their works over the borough boundry to avoid paying the coal tax we passed, we haven't had a chance. There's only one thing to do. Go into liquidation.

GRABALL

Hear, hear! The Graball Family say hear, hear!

SWEATER

I don't see it.

GRINDER

What do you say then, Mayor Sweater? Buy all new machinery and start fresh? Not me, old chap. You won't catch me throwing good money after bad in that fashion.

RUSHTON

Nor me neither.

DIDLUM

Dead off!

SWEATER

I say we sell out.

GRINDER

Sell out? Who's going to buy shares of a corporation what's bankrupt and never paid a dividend?

DIDLUM

I've tried to sell mine lots of times, nobody won't touch'em.

SWEATER

I know how to get a buyer.

RUSHTON

How?

SWEATER

First. At the next annual meeting of the shareholders of the Electric Light Company, which is us, we declares a dividend of fifteen percent. Then. We goes around town, in a quiet and judicious way, of course, bragging about what a good deal we got with our Electric Light shares and saying that we don't mean to sell, that we're just beginning to realize a profit from our enterprise and so forth, and then – at the next meeting of the City Council, a quorum of the members, which is us, in order to ease the tax burden on the poorer ratepayers of the town, out of the goodness of our hearts, we offers to sell the Electric Light Company to the City!

(The others are overwhelmed and excited by the boldness of the scheme.)

RUSHTON

Why didn't I think of that? But gentlemen, why should we bother with all of that declaring a dividend or anything else? We've got the game in our pockets as it is.

GRINDER

No, Rushton. Mayor Sweater is right. We've got to do this on the up and up. What I like about this here is, when the ratepayers kick up a row about how much money they're losing with the Electric Light Company, we tells them, "Well, that's Socialism!"

GRABALL

Hip, hip.....

ALL

Hooray!

SWEATER

And then – with the money we gets from selling the Electric Light shares to the city, we buy shares in.....

ALL

The Gas Company!

SWEATER

We're all agreed, then?

GRABALL

Hip, hip.....

ALL

Hooray!

Hip, hip....
GRABALL

Hooray!
ALL

Hip, hip.....
GRABALL

Hooray!!
ALL

(Led by GRABALL, the others break into song, a barbershop harmony, a capello.)

ALL LEVEL-HEADED BUSINESSMEN
OF PRACTICED SENSIBILITY,
MINDING AFFAIRS OF STATE,
BURDENED WITH GRAVE RESPONSIBILITY
REFLECT UPON THEIR FATE.
WHY, DEAR LORD, ARE WE CALLED
UPON TO SERVE?
THE ANSWER'S SADLY PLAIN –
THE DULLARDS WORK WITH BACKS AND SWEAT,
BUT WE, DEAR FRIENDS, HAVE BRAINS!

To Socialism!
SWEATER (Raising his glass.)

To Socialism!
ALL

(CURTAIN. End Act I.)

(Music. BERTIE before The Cave.)

BERTIE

Happy New Year everyone! As part of your New Year's entertainment, I am proud to present to your notice me very own seasonal concoction, "Bertie's Little Melodramas" as exhibited before all the crowned heads of Europe, England, Ireland, Scotland and including North America and Wales. The style of the decorations is – Neo-Romanesque! To go with each scene, the band will play a suitable selection of expropriated music, and the audience is kindly invited to join in the chorus –

(BLACKOUT. Lights up. The Cave. It is the morning after the last scene of Act One. Men working. CRASS mixing paint in a barrel. Mayor SWEATER enters. CRASS fawns all over him.)

CRASS

Why, what a pleasant surprise, Mr. Sweater, sir! Beautiful weather we're having, ain't it, sir?

SWEATER

Yes. I arranged to meet Mr Rushton here at eleven. He'll be here presently, I suppose. I'll just take a look 'round 'til he gets here.

CRASS

My name's Crass. I'm the foreman here, sir. I was afraid as how we might not have everything ready for you on time, sir, but everything's going along just fine now, sir. Almost all the painted rooms on the inside is going to be nice and dry when we gets done with'm sir, except for the ones in the basement sir, but that's always the case, sir, them rooms being underground, sir.

(HARLOW, aside to CRASS.)

HARLOW

I think we should take this present tuneropity to touch the gentleman for an allowance.

CRASS

It looks like a frost, mate. He's a red-hot teetotaler.

HARLOW

That don't matter. If he gives us the money, how's he to know that we buys beer with it?

CRASS

Right. We might have tea, or ginger ale, or lime juice, or glycerin, for all he knows...

SWEATER

I've got some of that beastly paint on my sleeve!

(HARLOW leaps forward obsequiously. He and CRASS are looking for a tip from SWEATER.)

HARLOW

That's nothing, sir! Have it off in half a mo'.

(He rubs SWEATER's sleeve with a rag.)

See, it's off now, sir!

(SWEATER resumes wandering about, ignoring them.)

CRASS

There's a bleeder for you. And after we took the trouble to clean his coat.

HARLOW

We have make it plainer. Let's try again.

(Song and dance. SWEATER, CRASS and HARLOW.)

CRASS & HARLOW
MISTER SWEATER, SIR.
A PLEASANT SURPRISE, SIR.

SWEATER
YES?

CRASS & HARLOW
I FEARED THAT I WOULDN'T HAVE
EVERYTHING READY IN TIME, SIR.

SWEATER
MMMMMM?

CRASS & HARLOW
BUT IN THE FINAL RESULT THE TRUTH
YOU WILL FIND, SIR THE WORK WILL BE
FINISHED PRECISELY ON TIME SIR.

SWEATER
WHAT HAVE I GOT ON MY SLEEVE?

CRASS & HARLOW
SIR? I WOULD DESCRIBE IT AS PAINT, SIR.
THE PAINT IS WET BUT THE PAINTERS IS DRY...

SWEATER
THAT SKIRTING IS NEW?

CRASS & HARLOW
SIR. DRY ROT, SIR. I FEEL AS IF I HAD
A TOUCH OF THE DRY ROT MYSELF, SIR.

CRASS
I guess we'll have to draw him a map. What do you say, Harlow, old chap?

CRASS & HARLOW
IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT A PENNY,
AN 'APENNY'LL DO!
IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT AN 'APENNY,
THEN....