

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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Hunger in the Air

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The winter ain't been hard as yet, though the frost was pretty keen.
There's one thing I'll tell you mate, the country's getting lean.
The price of wool is looking up, the harvest ain't been bad,
but for them that's on the wallaby, there's little to be had.

And when sky's are gray above us, its gettin' hard to bear
the feeling that the country has a hunger in the air.

I mind the time when men was pinched and things was pretty blue
for the mortgage-burdened station and the struggling cockatoo.
But if work was hard a gettin' and a fellow had to tramp,
he was pretty sure of tucker and a decent place to camp.

And when sky's are gray above us, its gettin' hard to bear
the feeling that the country has a hunger in the air.

It isn't falling wages that makes a fellow sick.
We've had our turn of fairish times and there ain't no cause to pick.
The drink that's cursed the most of us helped pay the country's way.
But there's thousands tramping on the roads that do no work today.

And when sky's are gray above us, its gettin' hard to bear
the feeling that the country has a hunger in the air.

The rabbit or digger-cove will stand a bloke a feed.
The poor man helps the poor or best in any time of need.
But cockatoos with decent homes and firesides warm and bright
will send the starving fellow man to sleep outside at night.

And when sky's are gray above us, its gettin' hard to bear
the feeling that the country has a hunger in the air.

Well, there ain't much use in talkin', I'd best hump my bluey on.
There'll be good men and meanish men when we're all dead and gone.
I'd be happy as a skylark if I dropped across a job,
but as for saving money, well, it's hard to earn a bob.

And when sky's are gray above us, its gettin' hard to bear
the feeling that the country has a hunger in the air.

RECORDINGS:

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TERMS AND NOTES: Phil Garland is a NZ folksinger, folklorist and song collector who has recorded many albums for Kiwi-Pacific Records. This is his adaptation of a longer ballad "The Swagger" by David McKee-Wright, first published in the "Otago (NZ) Witness" of 9 July 1896. The sentiments expressed are those of the "Hungry Nineties" as that period in NZ is known.

Bluey, to hump ones: to hike along with ones bedroll (bluey)

Cockatoo: small land-owner/farmer

Cove: a supervisor or manager of sorts, the man in charge

Digger: miner

Rabbiter: rabbit trapper

Station: ranch

Tucker: food

Wallaby Track, on the: unemployed and on the road searching for work

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