



A line or two from poet Joe Smythe—Picture JOHN HOLLAND

# Union's aid for Joe the rail poet

POET Joe Smythe is on the right lines as far as the National Union of Railwaymen is concerned.

For the largest of the rail unions paid Joe's wages for three months so he could have time off from his job as a train guard to write his latest book of verse.

The union did this as a way of marking the Great Railway Exposition, which opens at Liverpool Road Station, Manchester, next Saturday for six weeks.

Joe, of Redmere Road, Fallowfield, has been writing verse for 25 years.

He has been a guard working out of Newton Heath depot, mainly on goods trains, any where between Llandudno and York for the past 11 years.

The British Rail Board allowed 46-year-old Joe special sabbatical leave without pay so he could pen his verse for the book, *The People's Road*.

And the NUR then stepped in and agreed to pay Joe's wages of about £50 a week.

It is believed to be the first time in history that a trade unionist has been supported in this way by his union for purely creative work.

Joe said the whole scheme had been organised by Josephine Burns, of the North West Arts Council.

Though he had time off

for writing the book, he was often burning the midnight oil.

He said: "I am so used to getting home in the early hours then writing for about four or five hours that for most of the time I was off I was sleeping during the day, anyway."

The book, which retails for 95p and is published by the NUR, will be going on sale today at railway book-stalls and newsagents throughout the city. And Joe was at BR headquarters in Manchester for the launching. Its initial print is 3,000 copies.

As can be imagined, Joe's verse strongly reflects railway scenes. Titles include *First Shunt*, *Victoria Station 1900* and *Mancunian Man*.