

## THE DEATH OF ALPHONSE THE CAMEL: THE TEXTBOOK VERSION\*

During this period, camels were used as pack animals to make deliveries because of their ability to carry heavy loads and to walk for long distances. Camels did not have a lot of rights, and they were generally considered by society to be selfish and disorganized animals. Around that time, camels were beginning to organize to agitate for increased rights. They were following in the footsteps of horses, who had, in the previous decade, formed several successful unions and improved the quality of work life in their industry. Camel leaders had observed the horses' success, and seeing the low quality of life many of them had (and the number of deaths and injuries as a result of being overloaded and overworked), they began the initial steps toward organizing into the large, well-established camel unions that exist today. However, many of these fledgling unions failed because many camels could not be persuaded that unions were necessary and many also faced pressure from their employers not to unionize.

One camel employed in making deliveries was called Alphonse. Alphonse had severe back problems due to a congenital defect. However, Alphonse was able to overcome many of his disabilities during adolescence, and by adulthood, he could carry as much weight as any other camel. He would often demonstrate this to anyone who doubted him, even when it was unnecessary for him to carry a pack.

Alphonse was employed by a man named Frank, whom some people called "Frank the Camel Killer." When Frank was a child, he was kicked in the face by a camel, and since that time, he mistrusted them. He often loaded his camels with very heavy packs and made them walk longer distances than other deliverymen in the area. Although it was typical for deliverymen to work their camels extremely hard, Frank's treatment was somewhat worse than normal. While his customers knew about Frank's harsh treatment of camels, they were either indifferent to the camels' plight or found it amusing, due to general societal ideas about the use of camels. Frank was particularly against his camels' forming a union. While some of Alphonse's colleagues attempted to organize, there was little support even among the camels, and the idea of a union among Frank's employees fizzled out.

One day, as Frank was loading up Alphonse to make some routine deliveries, Alphonse expressed reluctance to work, claiming his back hurt. Frank ignored Alphonse's complaints, and just before they set off, he tossed the straw he was chewing onto Alphonse's back, causing the camel to collapse and die under the weight.

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