

Solidarity Forever

A Song by Ralph Chaplin

When the union's inspiration
Through the workers' blood shall run
There can be no power greater
Anywhere beneath the sun
Yet what force on earth is weaker
Than the feeble strength of one
For the Union makes us strong

Chorus

Solidarity forever, solidarity forever
Solidarity forever
For the Union makes us strong

They have taken untold millions
That they never toiled to earn
But without our brain and muscle
Not a single wheel can turn
We can break their haughty power
Gain our freedom when we learn
That the Union makes us strong

In our hands is placed a power
Greater than their hoarded gold
Greater than the might of armies
Magnified a thousandfold
We can bring to birth a new world
From the ashes of the old
For the Union makes us strong

Notes

Ralph Chaplin was a poet, artist, writer and organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World. He wrote this song in 1915 just six months before his fellow IWW songwriter Joe Hill was executed.

We Belong to the Union

(You Can't Break Me)

A song by Tim O'Brien ©1998

You can bruise my pride
Bust my face
Scatter my rights
All over the place
You can take the bread
From of my plate
But you can't break me!

Lock us out
Chain the gates
Put black shirts in
With dogs and mace
We'll hold the line
Won't step away
'Cause you can't break me!

Chorus:
I belong
You belong
We belong to the Union

Don't count me out
When I'm on the floor
We'll win again
We've won before
The streets will ring
With a mighty roar
'Cause you can't break me!

Stocks rise up
On workers' backs
Profits soar
While you hand out the sack
And boardroom bullies
Bloated and fat
But you can't break me!

Seen Australia sold
To mates offshore
Backroom deals
And shonky law
The day has come
Say "No more!"
'Cause you can't break me!

Chorus:

We won't turn away
If you dare us to fight
I swear
I'll never lay down and die

I'm in the union mate
Got a right to belong
We'll be back
Millions strong
Women and men
United as one
'Cause you can't break me!

Chorus

Union Songs

Joe Hill

A song by Alfred Hayes

Music by Earl Robinson, ©1938 by Bob Miller, Inc.

I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night
Alive as you or me
Says I, But Joe, you're ten years dead
I never died, says he
I never died, says he

In Salt Lake, Joe, says I to him
Him satndng by my bed
They framed you on a murder charge
Says Joe, But I ain't dead
Says Joe, But I ain't dead

The copper bosses killed you, Joe
They shot you, Joe, says I
Takes more than guns to kill a man
Says Joe, I didn't die
Says Joe, I didn't die

And standing there as big as life
And smiling with his eyes
Joe says, What they forgot to kill
Went on to organize
Went on to organize

Joe Hill ain't dead, he says to me
Joe Hill ain't never died
Where working men are out on strike
Joe Hill is at their side
Joe Hill is at their side

From San Diego up to Maine
In every mine and mill
Where workers strike and organize
Says he, You'll find Joe Hill
Says he, You'll find Joe Hill

I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night
Alive as you or me
Says I, But Joe, you're ten years dead
I never died, says he
I never died, says he

Notes

Joe Hill, a great organizer and poet, was executed in 1915 on a murder charge universally considered to be a frame-up

a selection of songs and poems from Union Songs:
<http://crix.com/muse/unionsong/>

The Cutty Wren

Oh where are you going said Milder to Moulder
Oh we may not tell you said Festel to Fose
We're off to the woods said John the Red Nose
We're off to the woods said John the Red Nose

And what will you do there said Milder to Moulder
We'll shoot the Cutty wren said John the Red Nose
And how will you shoot her said Milder to Moulder
With bows and with arrows said John the Red Nose

Oh that will not do said Milder to Moulder
Oh what will you do then said Festel to Fose
Great guns and great cannon said John the Red Nose
Great guns and great cannon said John the Red Nose

And how will you fetch her said Milder to Moulder
Oh we may not tell you said Festel to Fose
On four strong men's shoulders said John the Red Nose
On four strong men's shoulders said John the Red Nose

Ah that will not do said Milder to Moulder
Oh what will do then said Festel to Fose
Great carts and great wagons said John the Red Nose
Great carts and great wagons said John the Red Nose

Oh how will you cut her up said Milder to Moulder
With knives and with forks said John the Red Nose
Oh that will not do said Milder to Moulder
Great hatchets and cleavers said John the Red Nose

Oh how will you boil her said Milder to Moulder
In pots and in kettles said John the Red Nose
O that will not do said Milder to Moulder
Great pans and large cauldrons said John the Red Nose

Oh who'll get the spare ribs said Milder to Moulder
Oh we may not tell you said Festel to Fose
We'll give 'em all to the poor said John the Red Nose
We'll give 'em all to the poor said John the Red Nose

Notes

An English song that dates from the 1393 Peasant's Revolt. The Cutty Wren represents the feudal landlord who not only owned the land but the peasants who worked it.

The Telephone Tree

A poem by Wendy Lowenstein(c)1998

In the Union rooms
on the night the coppers came
the phones never stopped.
Extraordinary,
a working-class poem.
Wharfies, rally round the telly:
a footy game,
Melbourne vs Collingwood.
And the Magpies won,
against top brass.
A metaphor. Workers
knocking off the ruling class.

Hullo, is that the MUA?
My dad's a copper,
has been called out.
Is that the MUA?
Drinking with a copper mate
he said expect a thousand cops
tonight. All right?
Hullo, is that the MUA?
In Geelong
coppers are away,
will be in town tonight ...
Is that the MUA?
My mate's a copper,
wants to say,
a lot are on your side,
the Union's here to stay.

Quickening, the tree sprouts buds,
flowers, tendrils, weaves a net,
trawls seas and docks,
Brings an Indonesian wharfie
and another from LA
A Japanese bloke yet,
to say, hold the line,
Hands off the MUA.

On the tree,
burgeoning flowers of solidarity,
thorny twigs of resistance,
strong stems of disobedience
and seeds of victory.

Alight with love,
strong in struggle,
two old women (with comrades)
the next and
not-to-be-forgotten day
defeat black cargo,
turn a train away.

Right That Time

A song by Maurie Mulheron ©1998

They speak about it proudly, it's now union folklore
How wharfies wouldn't load any pig-iron for war
Japan was a threat so they walked off the job
They wouldn't help the fascists for old Pig-iron Bob

Chorus:
They were right that time and they're right again now
But the strength of one isn't much of a power
So united they stand against all odds
Fighting for us all against the little tin gods

Indonesia's young and fighting to be free
But the Dutch had different plans for their former colony
When the people rose up with freedom on their lips
The wharfies stopped loading any Dutch bound ships

Korea was in trouble, overrun by the Yanks
Wharfies told to load rifles, guns and tanks
Why get involved in this bloody civil war?
We're not gonna ship any weapons anymore!

Pig-iron Bob's back, says we're off to Vietnam
Tugging his forelocks for good old Uncle Sam
The seamen wouldn't work on the war ship 'Boonaroo'
And the wharfies held the line when they
sacked the ship's crew

The struggle's moved on, Port Melbourne is the site
The union's survival is the heart of the fight
We'll defy your threats, your thugs and court
We're standing united, no wharfie can be bought!

History's on our side, we'll see this battle through
There's too much at stake for the profits of the few
Our fathers, before us, stood on every picket line
Keep their mem'ries alive and we'll win every time.

Last Chorus:
They've been right ev'ry time and they're right again now
But the strength of one isn't much of a power
So united they stand against all odds
Fighting for us all against the little tin gods

The Preacher and the Slave

A Song by Joe Hill

Long-haired preachers come out every night
Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right
But when asked how 'bout something to eat
They will answer with voices so sweet

Chorus
You will eat, bye and bye
In that glorious land above the sky
Work and Pray, live on hay
You'll get pie in the sky when you die

And the starvation army they play
And they sing and they clap and they pray
Till they get all your coin on the drum
Then they tell you when you are on the bum

If you fight hard for children and wife
Try to get something good in this life
You're a sinner and bad man, they tell
When you die you will sure go to hell

Workingmen of all countries unite
Side by side we for freedom will fight
When the world and its wealth we have gained
To the grafters we'll sing this refrain

Last Chorus
You will eat, bye and bye
When you've learned how to cook and to fry
Chop some wood, 'twill do you good
And you'll eat in the sweet bye and bye



Bump me into Parliament

Come listen all kind friends of mine
I want to move a motion
To make an Eldorado here
I've got a bonza notion

Chorus
Bump me into parliament
Bounce me any way at all
Bang me into parliament
On next election day

Some very wealthy friends I know
Declare I am most clever
While some can talk for an hour or so
Why I can talk for ever

I've read my bible ten times o'er
And Jesus justifies me
The man who does not vote for me
By Christ he crucifies me

Oh yes I am a Labor man
I believe in revolution
The quickest way to bring it on
Is talking constitution

I think the worker and the boss
Should keep their present stations
So I will surely pass a bill
'Industrial Relations'

Notes

Written by Bill Casey an Australian member of the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) who later became secretary of the Queensland Branch of the Seamen's Union of Australia.

Florian Geyer

Troops of Geyer clad in black are we
Heia o-ho
And we will stamp out tyranny
Heia o-ho

Chorus
Spearmen ho! Forward go!
On the castle roof let the Red Cock crow
Spearmen ho! Forward go!
On the castle roof let the Red Cock crow

When Adam dug and Eve did toil
Heia o-ho
No princes trespassed on their soil
Heia o-ho

Bold Geyer's men their arrows shoot
The knights are laid low
His banner bears a peasant's boot
To stamp out the foe

The noble's only God is pride
Heia o-ho
The Holy Scripture is our guide
Heia o-ho

We're beaten though our cause is right
Heia o-ho
Our sons will carry on the fight
Heia o-ho

With These Arms

A song by Tim O'Brien ©1998

The deal was done behind a coward's door
they came in darkness, shadows on the shore
the snarl of dogs sent shivers through the night
as union men were thrown outside the wire

They locked the gates hanging them in chains
they gloated seeing working men in pain
We watched and saw a veil of darkness fall
with working men and women we heard the call

And with these arms we held the line
with these arms our strength combined
and with these arms made our demand
and with these arms we made a stand
And with these arms
- arms that held a baby held the line

They'd break the union with one deadly blow
If you're MUA - they said - you'd have to go
fifteen hundred men cast aside
their crime - being union - had them fired

Hundreds grew to thousands through those nights
faces glowed defiant for workers' rights
Police moved in, building workers moved behind
and mothers, sisters, brothers held the line

And with these arms we held the line
with these arms our strength combined
with these arms we turned them back
and with these arms took up the tracks
And with these arms
- arms more used to papers held the line

From Little Things Big Things Grow

A Song By Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody ©1992

Gather round people and I'll tell you a story
An eight year long story of power and pride
British Lord Vestey and Vincent Lingiari
Were opposite men on opposite sides

Vestey was fat with money and muscle
Beef was his business, broad was his door
Vincent was lean and spoke very little
He had no bank balance, hard dirt was his floor

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

Gurindji were working for nothing but rations
Where once they had gathered the wealth of the land
Daily the pressure got tighter and tighter
Gurindju decided they must make a stand

They picked up their swags and started off walking
At Wattie Creek they sat themselves down
Now it don't sound like much but it sure got tongues talking
Back at the homestead and then in the town

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

Vestey man said "I'll double your wages
Eighteen quid a week you'll have in your hand"
Vincent said "uhuh we're not talking about wages
We're sitting right here till we get our land"

Vestey man roared and Vestey man thundered
"You don't stand the chance of a cinder in snow"
Vince said "If we fall others are rising"

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

Then Vincent Lingiari boarded an aeroplane
Landed in Sydney, big city of lights
And daily he went round softly speaking his story
To all kinds of men from all walks of life

And Vincent sat down with big politicians
"This affair" they told him "Is a matter of state
Let us sort it out, your people are hungry"
Vincent said "No thanks, we know how to wait"

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

Then Vincent Lingiari returned in an aeroplane
Back to his country once more to sit down
And he told his people "Let the stars keep on turning
We have friends in the south, in the cities and towns"

Eight years went by, eight long years of waiting
Till one day a tall stranger appeared in the land
And he came with lawyers and he came with great ceremony
And through Vincent's fingers poured a handful of sand

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

That was the story of Vincent Lingiari
But this is the story of something much more
How power and privilege can not move a people
Who know where they stand and stand in the law

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

Notes

The eight year strike of Aboriginal stockmen and their families at Lord Vestey's enormous Wave Hill Station in Australia's Northern Territory began in 1966. Author Frank Hardy who wrote a book about the strike, "The Unlucky Australians", was told:
"We want them Vestey mob all go away from here. Wave Hill Aboriginal people bin called Gurindji. We bin here long time before them Vestey mob. This is ourcountry, all this bin Gurindji country. Wave Hill bin our country. We want this land; we strike for that."



The coalowner and the pitman's wife

A Song by William Hornsby (1844)

A dialogue I'll tell you as true as my life
Between a coal owner and a poor pitman's wife
As she was a walkin all on the highway
She met a coal owner and this she did say
Derry down, down, down derry down

Good morning Lord Firedamp, this woman she said
I'll do you no harm, Sir, so don't be afraid
If you'd been where I've been the most of my life
You wouldn't turn pale at a poor pitman's wife
Derry down, down, down derry down

Then where do you come from, the owner he cries
I come from Hell, the woman replies
If you come from hell, then come tell me right plain
How you contrived to get out again
Derry down, down, down derry down

Aye the way I got out, the truth I will tell
They're turning the poor folk all out of hell
This is to make room for the rich wicked race
For there is a great number of them in that place
Derry down, down, down derry down

And the coal owners is the next on command
To arrive in hell, as I understand
For I heard the old devil say as I came out
The coal-owners all had received their rout
Derry down, down, down derry down

Then how does the old devil behave in that place
Oh sir, he is cruel to the rich wicked race
He is far more crueller than you could suppose
He's like a mad bull with a ring through his nose
Derry down, down, down derry down

If you be a coal owner, sir, take my advice
And agree with your men and give them a fair price
For if and you do not, I know very well
You'll be in great danger of going to hell
Derry down, down, down derry down

For all you coalowners great fortunes has made
By those jovial men that works in the coal trade
Now how can you think to prosper and thrive
By wanting to starve your poor workmen alive
Derry down, down, down derry down

So come ye poor pitmen and join heart and hand
For when you're of work all trade's at a stand
In the town of Newcastle all cry out amain
Oh gin the pits were at work once again
Derry down, down, down derry down

Which Side Are You On?

A Song by Florence Patton Reese

Come all of you good workers
Good news to you I'll tell
Of how that good old union
Has come in here to dwell

Chorus
Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?

My daddy was a miner
And I'm a miner's son
And I'll stick with the union
Till every battle's won

They say in Harlan County
There are no neutrals there
You'll either be a union man
Or a thug for J.H. Blair

Oh, workers can you stand it?
Oh, tell me how you can
Will you be a lousy scab
Or will you be a man?

Don't scab for the bosses
Don't listen to their lies
Us poor folks haven't got a chance
Unless we organize

Foster's Mill

Come all you croppers stout and bold
Let your faith grow stronger still
Oh the cropper lads in the County of York
They broke the shears at Foster's Mill

The wind it blew the sparks they flew
Which alarmed the town full soon
And out of bed poor people did creep
And run by the light of the moon

Around and around they all did stand
And solemnly did swear
Neither bucket nor kit nor any such thing
Should be of assistane there

Around and around we all will stand
And sternly swear we will
We'll break the shears and the windows too
And set fire to the tazzling mill

Shores of Botany Bay

Oh I'm on my way down to the quay
Where a big ship now does lie
For to take a gang of navvies
I was told to engage
But I thought I would call in for a while
Before I went away
For to take a trip in an emigrant ship
To the shores of Botany Bay

Chorus
Fairwell to your bricks and mortar
Fairwell to your dirty lime
Fairwell to your gangway and gang planks
And to hell with your overtime
For the good ship Ragamuffin
Is lying at the quay
For to take old Pat with a shovel on his back
To the shores of Botany Bay

The best years of our life we spend
At working on the docks
Building mighty wharves and quays
Of earth and ballast rocks
Our pensions keep our lives secure
But I'll not rue the day
When I take a trip on an emigrant ship
To the shores of Botany Bay

For the boss came up this morning
And he said "Well Pat hello
If you do not mix that mortar fast
Be sure you'll have to go"
Of course he did insult me
I demanded of my pay
And I told him straight I was going to emigrate
To the shores of Botany Bay

And when I reach Australia
I'll go and look for gold
Sure there's plenty there for the digging
Or so I have been told
Or I might go back into my trade
Eight hundred bricks I'll lay
In an eight hour day for eight bob pay
On the shores of Botany Bay

Angel Of Freedom

A song by Phil Cohen ©1996

Chorus:
We are the children of the angel of freedom
We are the soldiers of the good fight
In unions across this land that we live in
We are the workers joined by UNITE

We make the products that America runs on
The yarn and the cloth and the clothes that you wear
For so many years we were taken for granted
"Till we stood together to get out fair share

You know that our struggle it never comes easy
You'd never guess all the scars that we bear
We live in a land where the law's stacked against us
But the law ain't as strong as our faith and our prayers

I remember the days when we started our union
Our power was hope and their weapon despair
They did all they could to hurt and divide us
All we wanted was justice and a wage that was fair

We stood at the gate when the rain was a'freezin'
We were lied to and fired, sometimes we were scared
But we never backed down, we just kept a'commin'
And our contract bears witness to all that we dared

View from a Wooden Chair

A song by Lachlan Hurse and Sue Monk
(c)1996 Lachlan Hurse and Sue Monk

Young girls play hopscotch on a broken path
Ageing soot blackens old brick walls
Old car tyre leans at the corner
Stray dog barks at grim passer-by

Bicycles line up at the local store
Factories crumble behind rusting iron
Graffiti grows on the railway bridge
Worker in overalls walks on home

A derelict house slumps to one side
Poster peels on a bolted gate
Its faded but not forgotten
"An injury to one is an injury to all"

Car rattles along with broken exhaust
Clouds hurry past in the driving wind
"Is this all there is?" asks the passer-by
"No" said the worker
"Its just a view from a wooden chair"