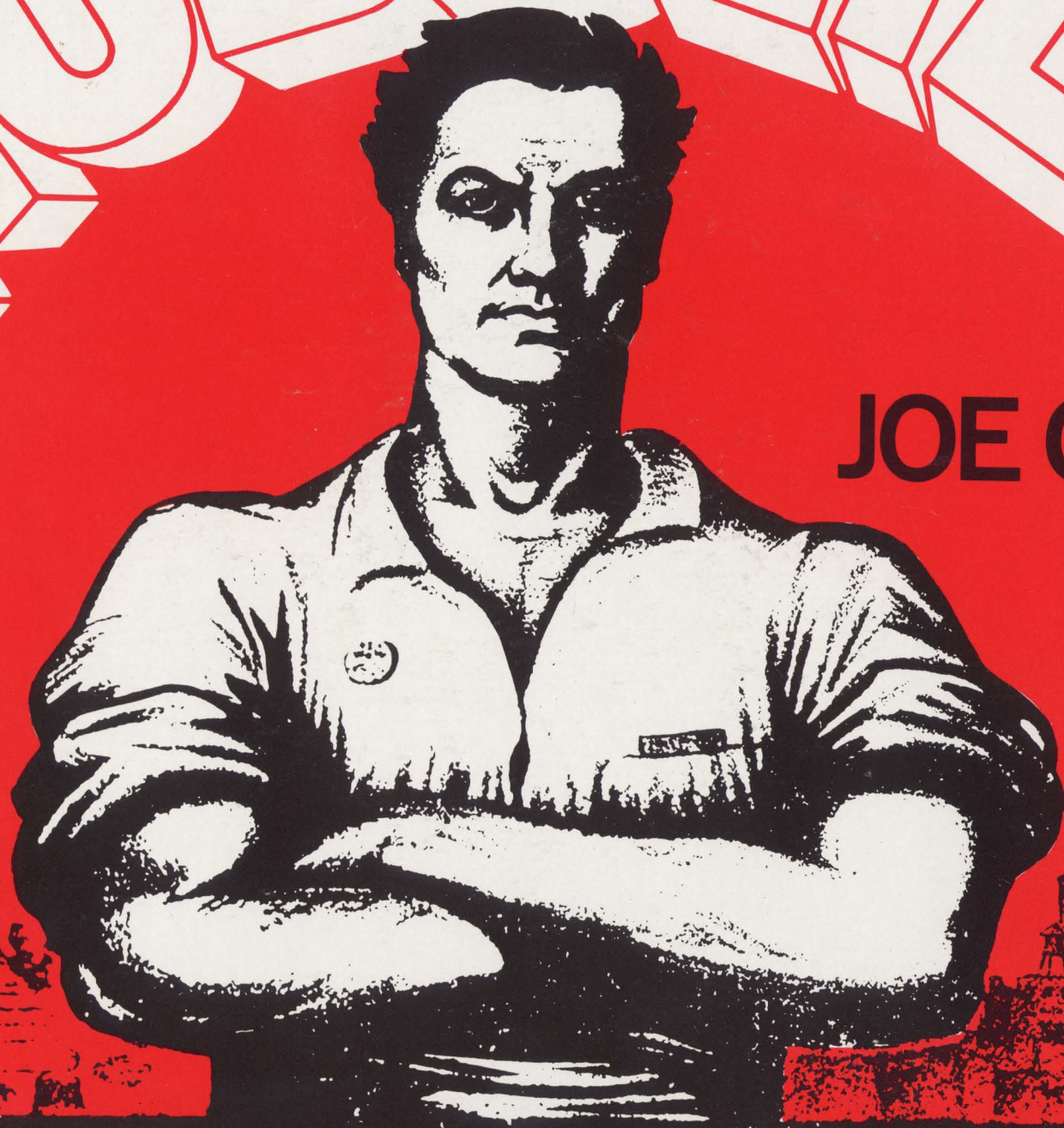


Songs of the

NOBBLES



JOE GLAZER

Collector Records 1927

I WILL WIN

Songs of the WOBBLIES Sung by JOE GLAZER

On the cover of the Little Red Song Book of the IWW—the Industrial Workers of the World—appears this slogan: "IWW SONGS . . . TO FAN THE FLAMES OF DISCONTENT." Yet during most of the years that the IWW was active (1905-1920's) it was hardly necessary to "fan the flames of discontent" with militant songs and stirring music.

Large numbers of men, women and children worked under miserable conditions in factory, field and mine. The government was inevitably on the side of the employer. The right to organize had to be fought out on bloodied picket lines.

Skilled tradesmen found a home in the unions of the American Federation of Labor. But large masses of workers were unorganized and the IWW, or the Wobblies as they were commonly known, tried to bring these workers into the One Big Union—the Industrial Workers of the World. These included immigrant textile workers in the East, tough lumber-jacks in the Northwest, migratory workers who followed the crops, and many others.

To these exploited groups the IWW offered hope of a better and brighter tomorrow. The IWW sang of the day "when the earth is owned by labor and there's joy and peace for all in the Commonwealth of Toil that is to be." The Wobblies stirred the blood with revolutionary rhetoric:

There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production and abolish the wage system.

Wobbly songs mocked the church and "pie-in-the-sky" preachers but Wobbly music was most often borrowed from the church—for the IWW was a peculiar, devout religion of labor with a mixed army of crusaders.

The IWW was definitely better at arousing the discontented than it was at building stable, permanent unions. Nevertheless, it made an impact as the champion of the dispossessed and the despised of American industry. Because of its outspoken revolutionary philosophy, the IWW was hated and feared by many elements in the community. And when the Wobblies took a strong anti-war position during World War I, IWW leaders were jailed, their offices and halls raided. They never recovered from these attacks.

The Wobblies still have a small office in Chicago and a few scattered members, including some young recruits. But the colorful tempestuous days are no more because the circumstances which brought them into being are no more.

Remarkably lasting has been the IWW's Little Red Song Book which started out as a leaflet with four songs and became a popular booklet with more than fifty songs. The many editions of the song book carried this message:

Sing and fight! Right was the tyrant king who said:
"Beware of a movement that sings."

Many Wobbly songs sound outmoded today. Take these lines from a verse of *Solidarity Forever*, a verse which is not sung very often these days:

It is we who built the cities
Endless miles of railroad laid,
Now we stand outcast and starving
Mid the wonders we have made

Although deplorable working conditions still exist for farm workers and other unorganized groups, it is hardly accurate to say that American workers today are starving and do not partake of the wonders they have made.

The songs of the Wobblies still have much to offer us. They recapture an important era in American labor history. They are stirring, eloquent, bitter and humorous. They throb with the spirit of solidarity; they cry out against injustice. The old Wobblies are gone but their songs live on.

A longer version of this essay first appeared in a booklet which accompanied a 10-inch LP (that record, like this one, was called *Songs of the Wobblies*) published by Labor Arts in 1953, with Joe Glazer and Bill Friedland as the recording artists.

Ralph Chaplin—the man who wrote *Solidarity Forever*

It was March 10, 1960 and I was scheduled to sing at a convention of the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) in Portland, Oregon. At the suggestion of folklorist Archie Green I had invited the old Wobbly writer Ralph Chaplin, who was living nearby in semi-retirement.

When he knocked on my hotel door, my heart pounded a little. I had been singing his song, *Solidarity Forever*, for twenty years. I had read his fascinating autobiography, *Wobbly*, which told of his days as an artist, editor, agitator, song-writer and poet for the Wobblies. There he was, smaller than I had pictured him, but wiry, still standing straight at 73. The face was strikingly similar to the photo of him at 22 in his book—but fifty years older—fifty years of strikes, struggles, poems and dreams of building the One Big Union. Lots of lines in the weatherbeaten face, hair gray and thin now, eyes deep in their sockets, but still burning bright, just like in the old days.

Before I introduced him to the convention I sang some of the old Wobbly songs. He captured the audience with his first sentence. He made them proud of their union and the lumber and sawmill workers who had blazed the trail before them. He urged them not to neglect their trade union heritage, to remember the labor martyrs who had struggled and died for the cause. He received a standing ovation and then we all sang *Solidarity Forever*. I thought I saw a tear in his eye when he told me that he never dreamed that when he wrote *Solidarity Forever* back in 1915, that working men and women would still be singing it, still getting inspiration from it, almost fifty years later.

Fortunately, Chaplin's speech was recorded; excerpts are on Side 2. Chaplin died in 1961, one year after this meeting.



Joe Glazer greets Ralph Chaplin, Wobbly poet and author of *Solidarity Forever*, in Portland, Oregon, 1960.

WOBBLIES TO ARCHIVE
CENTER FOR FOLKLIFE PROGRAMS
AND CULTURAL STUDIES
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Joe Glazer

Side One

1. THE COMMONWEALTH OF TOIL (2:48)
2. MR. BLOCK (2:32)
3. 50,000 LUMBERJACKS (2:33)
4. PIE IN THE SKY (2:45)
5. WORKINGMEN UNITE (2:03)
6. DUMP THE BOSSES OFF YOUR BACK (2:27)
7. JOE HILL (2:30)

Side Two

1. HALLELUJAH, I'M A BUM (1:56)
2. THE REBEL GIRL (2:53)
3. THERE IS POWER IN A UNION (2:30)
4. BOOM WENT THE BOOM (2:17)
5. RALPH CHAPLIN SPEAKS (8:15)
6. SOLIDARITY FOREVER (2:24)

NOTES: *Mr. Block*, *Pie in the Sky*, *The Rebel Girl* and *There is Power in a Union* were composed by the best known Wobbly songwriter, Joe Hill, who was executed in 1915 in Salt Lake City, by the state of Utah. *Joe Hill*, by Earl Robinson and Alfred Hayes, is not a Wobbly song, but it has become the best known song about a famous Wobbly, so it is included here. Ralph Chaplin wrote *The Commonwealth of Toil* and *Solidarity Forever*. The latter has become the unofficial anthem of the American labor movement. Chaplin is also represented with excerpts from a speech to a Woodworkers convention in 1960. *Fifty thousand Lumberjacks* was written in 1917 during a major IWW strike in the Northwest lumbercamps. *Workingmen Unite* was composed by E.S. Nelson in 1908 to the tune of *Redwing*. *Dump the Bosses off Your Back* by John Brill is sung to the hymn, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*. Many IWW songs are sardonic parodies of hymns and are attacks on what the Wobblies called "pie-in-the-sky preachers." But times change. Cesar Chavez, head of the National Farm Workers Union which organizes migratory workers, as did the Wobblies, has received tremendous support from all kinds of religious groups. *Hallelujah I'm a Bum* was written by Harry McClintock in 1897. *Boom Went the Boom* is a song about the great depression of 1929-32.

Where did the word "Wobbly" come from? One story has the nickname originating with a Chinese cook on a railroad gang. When he was signed up during an IWW drive, he proudly proclaimed his membership in the organization. But when he spoke the initials, they came out: "I Wobbly Wobbly." This story of the word origin has had more circulation in IWW circles than any other. For more information on the Wobblies see: *We Shall Be All* by Melvyn Dubofsky, *Joe Hill* by Gibb Smith, *Wobbly* by Ralph Chaplin, *Rebel Voices* by Joyce Kornbluh and *The IWW—Its First 70 Years* by Fred Thompson.

The Performers

JOE GLAZER has long been known as "Labor's Troubadour." His most recent albums for COLLECTOR RECORDS include *Labor Songs*; *Textile Voices*; *Down in a Coal Mine*; *Union Train*. ALAN BENNETT, banjo, is a folk and jazz musician in the Washington, D.C. area. He produced the album for Collector Records. MIKE AULDRIDGE, dobro, plays regularly with the bluegrass group, *The Seldom Scene* and records solo for Flying Fish Label. Also: Tom Gray and Joe Storch on bass; Allan Oresky, fiddle and mandolin; Mike Shapiro, guitar; back-up voices by Bruce Hartley, Vince Santoro and Robert Stevens. Thanks for special help to Harold Closter, Daniel Glazer, and Archie Green. BILL McELROY was the engineer.

STEREO

Jacket Design By DOROTHY FALL

COLLECTOR RECORDS



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