

## TALKING UNION

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WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED  
 ROLL THE UNION ON  
 CASEY JONES  
 MINER'S LIFEGUARD  
 SOLIDARITY FOREVER  
 YOU'VE GOT TO GO DOWN  
 AND JOIN THE UNION  
 HOLD THE FORT  
 GET THEE BEHIND ME  
 THE UNION MAID  
 ALL I WANT  
 TALKING UNION  
 THE UNION TRAIN  
 WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON

# TALKING UNION

*with the Almanac Singers*

## & other UNION SONGS

*with Pete Seeger and Chorus*

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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FOLKWAYS FH 5285

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# THE ORIGINAL TALKING UNION

*with the Almanac Singers*

*& other* **UNION SONGS**

*with Pete Seeger and Chorus*



## Introductory Notes by PETER SEEGER

Like hymns and patriotic songs, union songs are songs with a message. Tens of thousands of such ballads, anthems, and ditties, have been composed by American union members. Put together, they would tell the history of the American labor movement.

Unlike most hymns and patriotic songs, union songs are usually composed by amateurs to suit a particular occasion, and have a short life. More often than not, they are simply new words to an older melody.

A few of such songs, however, prove worthwhile enough in melody and lyrics to warrant being passed on by one generation of workers to the next. It is our hope that these belong in that category.

## Notes by PHILIP S. FONER

There is a vast body of working class literature in the United States buried away in rare labor newspapers. Among these literary treasures still to be collected are hundreds of songs and ballads composed by bards and minstrels who were themselves workers. These men and women, Negro and white, native-Americans and foreign-born, created their own literature reflecting every aspect of life in the mines, mills, factories, shops and farms where they were forced to labor. They told in their songs of the agony of miserable long hours for pitiful wages, of unsanitary and dangerous working conditions, and of the horrors of unemployment. But equally important, they sang of the fighting spirit of the workers and of their determined struggles to improve their conditions through organization.

The labor songs included in this album are among the finest and most famous in the literature of the American working class. Most of them were written to the tunes of popular songs and hymns. All of them were written in the midst of major struggles, and served as direct weapons in these battles of the American workers.

Hold The Fort was first written in the 1880's at which time it bore the title, "Storm the fort, ye Knights of Labor." At its height in 1886, the Knights of Labor had close to a million members. From these workers rose the militant cry:

"Toiling millions now are waking,  
See them marching on;  
All the tyrants now are shaking,  
Ere their power is gone.

Chorus: "Storm the fort, Ye Knights of Labor,  
Battle for your cause;  
Equal rights for every neighbor,  
Down with tyrant laws!

"Who will dare to shun the conflict?  
Who would be a slave?  
Better die within the trenches,  
Forward, then, ye brave." Chorus.

The song spread to Europe where the Knights of Labor had a number of local assemblies. In England it was changed by the Transport Workers' Union to the song we know as "Hold The Fort." In this form it came back to the United States after the first World War. It was to be sung time and again on thousands of picket lines.

The miners, who occupy a prominent place in the splendid militant tradition of American labor, have contributed hundreds of songs and ballads to the literature of the working class. Miner's Lifeguard written in the 1880's, is one of their most famous songs. It voices, among other things, the miners' long-standing and bitter complaint against the operators' practice of changing the mesh size of the screen always to the disadvantage of the workers. The miner's car of coal was dumped to slide down the screen, and whatever went through the holes he was not paid for. "Keep your eye on the screen," the miners sang, for by making the holes larger, the miners would be paid less.

Which Side Are You On? is a miner's song written in 1932 in the midst of the bitter struggles of the miners in Harlan County, Kentucky. The mine owners, unyielding in their opposition to any unionization of the workers, carried on a campaign of violence and terror to smash the union. At least a dozen miners were killed by deputies hired by the operators, but none of the deputies were indicted. "Which Side Are You On" was written during one of the many terroristic raids by the sheriff and his deputies on the miners' homes. They came to the home of Sam Reece, one of the leaders of the National Miners' Union, but he had been warned in time and escaped. They poked their shotguns everywhere, under the beds and into the closets, even into the piles of dirty linen, searching for the miners' leader. When Reece's young daughters, aged 8 and 11, started crying, one of the deputies laughed and said: "What are you crying for? We don't want you. We're after your old man."

After the deputies had left, Mrs. Florence Reece, wife of the rank and file leader, was seething with indignation. She tore an old calendar off the wall, and on the back side wrote the verses of the great labor song, which she put to the tune of an old Baptist hymn she had known from childhood. The song was immediately picked up by the striking miners after it had been sung at the union hall by Mrs. Reece's two little girls. From Harlan County, it spread throughout the entire labor movement.

A few of the verses of the song were slightly changed later by the Almanac Singers:

"My daddy was a miner, and I'm a miner's son  
And I'll stick with the union until the battle's won."

originally read:

"My daddy was a miner; he's now in the air and <sup>(u)</sup>  
He'll be with you, fellow workers, until this  
battle's won."

The words "he's now in the air and sun" refers to the fact that he was blacklisted from work.

The song All I Want was written shortly after the same strike in Harlan County by Jim Garland, a young miner also blacklisted from the mines.

Casey Jones. Of all the worker-poets in American labor history, the most famous was Joseph Hillstrom (popularly known as "Joe Hill"), the Swedish-born song-writing organizer who emerged from the ranks of the Industrial Workers of the World (I. W. W.) in 1910, wrote many immortal labor songs, and who, at the age of 33 in the year 1915, was executed in Salt Lake City by a firing squad of the mining trusts' state government for a crime he did not commit. Joe Hill's first labor song, composed in 1910, was his great song, "The Preacher and the Slave," written to the tune of the popular Salvation Army gospel hymn, "In the Sweet Bye and Bye." His "Casey Jones" was based on the original railroad ballad, but instead of telling the story of a "brave engineer" who, in the original version, was a heroic figure, Joe Hill describes a wretched and hated figure, "the scab." According to popular history, Hill composed his version of "Casey Jones" during a Southern Pacific strike in 1910, but there is no evidence that a strike of the magnitude described in the song took place in that year. It is most likely that it was written for the strike on the Southern Pacific in 1911. At any rate, it rapidly became the most popular vehicle through which workers expressed in song their hatred of the scab.

Undoubtedly the greatest song in American labor history and one of the finest examples of how this literary form may serve as an organizing weapon is Solidarity Forever, written to the tune of "John Brown's Body" by Ralph Chaplin. Chaplin was one of the early leaders of the I. W. W. and worked closely for a number of years with its great leader, William D. ("Big Bill") Haywood. Soon after his release from prison in 1923, Chaplin expressed regret for his former activities in the labor movement. His song "Solidarity Forever" continued, however, to rally hundreds of thousands to the labor movement after its author had deserted it, and during the rise of the C. I. O., it was a regular feature on scores of picket lines.

The formation of the C. I. O. in 1935 marked the crumbling of a dam that had long been holding back American labor's strength and vigor. When that stream of energy broke through, it smashed overnight the outworn conception that the mass production workers could not be organized. The great strike movements accompanying the upsurge in labor's ranks after 1935 was a manifestation that a new era had been ushered in for American workers. And out of these struggles emerged some of the finest songs in American labor history. Among these included in this album are: Talking Union, Union Maid, Roll the Union On, Got To Join the Union and Union Train.

Talking Union and Get Thee Behind Me Satan were both composed by the Almanac Singers in the spring of 1941 when they were singing for meetings and rallies of the C. I. O. in Detroit, where Ford had just been organized, these and others of their songs were played over sound trucks at mass rallies of the workers.

Union Maid was written by Woody Guthrie, one of America's greatest working class minstrels, in 1940 after he and Pete Seeger had sung at a small meeting in Oklahoma City. During the meeting some men, obviously working for the company, came in and stood in the back of the room, waiting for a signal to break up the gathering. Apparently they were surprised to see that the meeting was like a small family gathering with women and children as well as men present, for they never tried to start anything. Deeply moved by the courage of the women at the meeting, Woody Guthrie sat down after the gathering was over and wrote the song.

Union Train was written by members of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union in the mid-thirties during the drive to organize the sharecroppers and agricultural workers, most of whom were Negroes. All of the union meetings were featured by the singing of hymns -- these workers had been raised from childhood on hymns -- and at one such meeting near Memphis, Tennessee, after the workers had finished singing the spiritual called, "The Old Ship of Zion," a woman in the back of the hall started these new verses to the old tune. Another worker on the other side of the hall caught it up and added a few more verses. Then still others contributed additional verses, and a great labor song emerged.

Roll the Union On is another song which emerged out of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. It was written in 1936 by John Hancock, a Negro tenant farmer who was also a lay preacher and who was then attending classes at Commonwealth College, a school for workers and farmers in the Southwest. Hancock took the tune for the song from the spiritual, "Roll the Chariot On."

Got To Join the Union was written by Woody Guthrie in 1941 during a tour for the C. I. O. It was set to the tune of the famous hymn, "Got to Walk That Lonesome Valley."

## WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED

We shall not, we shall not be moved  
We shall not, we shall not be moved  
Just like a tree that's standing by the water  
We shall not be moved.

The union is behind us, we shall not be moved  
The union is behind us, we shall not be moved  
Just like a tree that's standing by the water  
We shall not be moved.

We shall not, we shall not be moved (etc.)

We will stand and fight together, we shall not...

We shall not, we shall not be moved (etc.)

We are black and white together, we shall not.

## ROLL THE UNION ON

We're going to roll, we're going to roll,  
We're going to roll the union on,  
We're going to roll, we're going to roll,  
We're going to roll the union on.

If the boss gets in the way, we're going to roll  
right over him,  
We're going to roll right over him, we're going  
to roll right over him,  
If the boss gets in the way, we're going to roll  
right over him,  
We're going to roll the union on.

We're going to roll, (etc.)

If the goons get in the way, (etc.)

We're going to roll, (etc.)

If the scabs get in the way, (etc.)

We're going to roll, (etc.)

## CASEY JONES

The workers on the S. P. line to strike sent out a call;  
But Casey Jones, the engineer, he wouldn't strike at all.  
His boiler it was leaking, and its drivers on the bum,  
and the engine and the bearings, they were all out of plumb.

Casey Jones kept his junk pile running;  
Casey Jones was working double time;  
Casey Jones got a wooden medal  
For being good and faithful on the S. P. line.

The workers said to Casey, "Won't you help us win this strike?"  
But Casey said, "Let me alone, you'd better take a hike."  
Then Casey's wheezy engine ran right off the wheezy track,  
And Casey hit the river with an awful smack.

Casey Jones hit the river bottom;  
Casey Jones broke his bloomin' spine;  
Casey Jones turned into an Angel  
He got a trip to heaven on the S. P. line.

When Casey got to heaven up to the Pearly Gate,  
He said, "I'm Casey Jones, the guy that pulled the S. P. freight."  
"You're just the man," said Peter, "Our musicians are on strike;  
You can get a job a-scabbing any time you like."

Casey Jones got a job in heaven;  
Casey Jones was doing mighty fine;  
Casey Jones went scabbing on the angels  
Just like he did to workers on the S. P. line.

The angels got together, and they said it wasn't fair,  
For Casey Jones to go around a-scabbing everywhere.  
The Angels' Union Number 23, they sure were there,  
And they promptly fired Casey down the Golden Stair.

Casey Jones went to Hell a-flying.  
"Casey Jones," the Devil said, "Oh fine!  
Casey Jones get busy shoveling sulphur  
That's what you get for scabbing on the S. P. line."

## MINER'S LIFEGUARD

Miner's life is like a sailor's  
'Board a ship to cross the waves,  
Every day his life's in danger  
Still he ventures being brave.

Watch the rocks, they're falling daily  
Careless miners always fail,  
Keep your hand upon the dollar  
And your eye upon the scale.

Union miners stand together  
Heed no operator's tale,  
Keep your hand upon the dollar  
And your eye upon the scale.

You've been doffed and docked my boys  
You've been loading two for one,  
What have you to show for working  
Since this mining has begun?

Overalls, and cans for rockers  
In your shanties sleep on rails,  
Keep your hand upon the dollar  
And your eye upon the scale.

## Union miners, (etc.)

In conclusion, bear in memory  
Keep the passwords in the mind,  
God provides for every nation  
When in union they combine.

Stand like men, and linked together  
Victory for you'll prevail,  
Keep your hand upon the dollar  
And your eye upon the scale.

## Union miners, (etc.)

## SOLIDARITY FOREVER

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  
But the union makes us strong.

Chorus: Solidarity forever,  
Solidarity forever,  
Solidarity forever  
For the union makes us strong.

It is we who plowed the prairies, built the  
cities where they trade,  
Dug the mines and built the workshops, end-  
less miles of railroad laid,  
Now we stand, outcast and starving, mid the  
wonders we have made  
But the union makes us strong.

## Chorus

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 atoms, magnified a  
thousandfold,  
We can bring to birth a new world from the  
ashes of the old  
For the union makes us strong.

## YOU'VE GOT TO GO DOWN AND JOIN THE UNION

You've got to go down and join the union,  
You've got to join it by yourself;  
Ain't nobody here can join it for you,  
You've got to go down and join the union by your-  
self

Sister's got to go down and join, (etc.)

Papa's got to go down and join, (etc.)

Now though the road be rough and rocky,  
And the hills be steep and high;  
We will sing as we go marching,  
And we'll win that one big union bye and bye.

You got to go down and join the union, (etc.)

## HOLD THE FORT

We meet today in freedom's cause  
And raise our voices high;  
We'll join our hands in union strong  
To battle or to die -

Hold the fort, for we are coming,  
Union men be strong.  
Side by side we battle onward,  
Victory will come.

Look my comrades, see the union,  
Banners waving high;  
Reinforcements now appearing  
Victory is nigh -

Hold the fort, (etc.)

See our numbers still increasing,  
Hear the bugles blow;  
By our union we will triumph  
Over every foe -

Hold the fort, (etc.)

## GET THEE BEHIND ME

Boss comes up to me with a five dollar bill,  
Says, "Get you some whiskey, boy, and drink  
your fill."

Get thee behind me, Satan,  
Travel on down the line.  
I am a union man,  
Gonna leave you behind.



A redheaded woman took me out to dine,  
Says, "Love me baby, leave your union behind."

On the Fourth of July the politicians say,  
"Vote for us and we'll raise your pay."

Oh, then the company union sent out a call, they said  
"Join us in the summer, we'll forget you in the Fall."

If anyone should ask you your union to sell,  
Just tell him where to go, send him back to hell.

#### THE UNION MAID

There once was a union maid, she never was afraid  
Of goons and ginks and company finks  
And the deputy sheriffs who made the raid.

She went to the union hall when a meeting it was called  
And when the Legion boys come round  
She always stood her ground.

Oh you can't scare me, I'm sticking to the union,  
I'm sticking to the union, I'm sticking to the union

Oh you can't scare me, I'm sticking to the union,  
I'm sticking to the union 'til the day I die.

This union maid was wise to the tricks of company spies.  
She couldn't be fooled by a company stool,  
She'd always organize the guys.

She'd always get her way when she struck for better pay  
She'd show her card to the National Guard  
And this is what she'd say.

Oh, you can't scare me, (etc.)

You gals who want to be free, just take a tip from me  
Get you a man who's a union man  
And join the ladies' auxilliary.

Married life ain't hard when you've got a union card,  
A union man has a happy life  
When he's got a union wife.

Chorus: Oh, you can't scare me, (etc.)

#### ALL I WANT

Chorus: I don't want your millions, mister,  
I don't want your diamond rings.  
All I want is the right to live, mister.  
Give me back my job again.

Now I don't want your Rolls-Royce, mister,  
I don't want your pleasure yacht.  
All I want's just food for my babies.  
Give to me my old job back.

We worked to build this country, mister,  
While you enjoyed a life of ease.  
You've stolen all that we built, mister.  
Now our children starve and freeze.

Think me dumb if you wish, mister.  
Call me green or blue or red.  
This one thing I sure know mister  
My hungry babies must be fed.

Take the two old parties, mister,  
No difference in them I can see.  
But with a Farmer-Labor Party  
We could set the people free.

#### TALKING UNION

Now, if you want higher wages let me tell  
you what to do,

You got to talk to the workers in the shop  
with you,

You got to build you a union, got to make it  
strong.

But if you all stick together, boys, it won't  
be long -

You get shorter hours... better working conditions..  
Vacations with pay... take your kids to the seashore..

It ain't quite this simple, so I better explain  
Just why you got to ride on the union train,  
'Cause if you wait for the boss to raise your pay  
We'll all be waiting 'til Judgement Day -

We'll all be buried.... gone to heaven...  
St. Peter'll be the straw boss then...

Now you know you're underpaid but the boss says  
you ain't

He speeds up the work 'til you're about to faint.  
You may be down and out but you ain't beaten,  
You can pass out a leaflet and call a meetin'

Talk it over... speak your mind ...

Decide to do something about it....

Course, the boss may persuade some poor  
damn fool

To go to your meeting and act like a stool.  
But you can always tell a stool, though, that's  
a fact,

He's got a yellow streak running down his  
back -

He doesn't have to stool.... he'll always get  
along...

On what he takes out of blind men's cups....

You got a union now and you're sitting pretty.  
Put some of the boys on the steering  
committee.

The boss won't listen when one guy squawks  
But he's got to listen when the union talks -

He'd better.... be mighty lonely....  
Everybody decided to walk out on him....

Suppose they're working you so hard it's just  
outrageous

And they're paying you all starvation  
wages,

You go to the boss and the boss will yell  
Before I raise your pay I'd see you all in  
hell!

Well, he's puffing a big cigar, feeling mighty  
slick

'Cause he thinks he's got your union licked,  
Well, he looks out the window and what does he see  
But a thousand pickets, and they all agree -

He's a bastard... unfair.... slavedriver...  
Bet he beats his wife...

Now boys, you've come to the hardest time,  
The boss will try to bust your picket line

He'll call out the police, the national guard,  
They'll tell you it's a crime to have a union  
card,

They'll raid your meetings, they'll hit you on the  
head,

They'll call everyone of you a red -  
Unpatriotic... Japanese spies... sabotaging  
national defense...

But out at Ford, here's what they found,  
And out at Vultee, here's what they found,  
And out at Allis-Chalmers, here's what they  
found,

And down at Bethlehem, here's what  
they found,

That if you don't let red-baiting break you up,  
And if you don't let stoolpigeons break you up,  
And if you don't let vigilantes break you up,  
And if you don't let race hatred break you up -

You'll win... what I mean, take it easy, but take it....

#### THE UNION TRAIN

Oh, what is that I see yonder, coming,  
coming, coming,

What is that I see yonder, coming, coming,  
coming,

What is that I see yonder, coming, coming  
coming:

Get on board get on board.

It's that union train a-coming, etc.

It has saved many a thousand, etc.

It will carry us to freedom, etc.

#### WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON

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

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  
'Til 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.