

CLASSIC LABOR SONGS

from SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage 750 9th St NW Smithsonian Institution Washington, DC 20560-0953
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Compiled and annotated by Jeff Place and Joe Glazer
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- 1. Joe Hill** Paul Robeson 3:01
(Earl Robinson—Alfred Hayes / Universal—MCA Publishing, ASCAP)
- 2. Bread and Roses** Bobbie McGee 2:30
(James Oppenheim—Caroline Kohlsaatt)
- 3. Casey Jones (Union Scab)** Pete Seeger and the Almanac Singers 1:55
(Joe Hill—E. W. Newton)
- 4. We Shall Not Be Moved/Roll the Union On** Joe Glazer 2:23
(John Handcox)
- 5. Roll the Union On** John Handcox 1:07
(John Handcox)
- 6. Cotton Mill Colic** Mike Seeger 2:38
(David McCarn)
- 7. The Mill Was Made of Marble** Joe Glazer 3:59
(Joe Glazer)
- 8. Aragon Mill** Peggy Seeger 3:09
(Si Kahn / Joe Hill Music, ASCAP)
- 9. Talking Union** Almanac Singers 3:02
(Lampell—Hays—Seeger / Stormking Music Inc., BMI)
- 10. 1913 Massacre** Woody Guthrie 3:36
(Woody Guthrie / Sanga Music Inc., BMI)
- 11. The Preacher and the Slave** Utah Phillips 2:19
(Joe Hill)
- 12a. Which Side are You On?** Florence Reece
(Florence Reece / Stormking Music, BMI)
- 12b. Which Side Are You On?** Almanac Singers 2:35
(Florence Reece / Stormking Music, BMI)
- 13. Hold the Fort** Joe Uehlein 3:58
- 14. Union Maid** New Harmony Sisterhood Band 3:06
(Woody Guthrie / TRO—Ludlow Music Inc., BMI)
- 15. Too Old to Work** Joe Glazer 2:51
(Joe Glazer)
- 16. Black Lung** Hazel Dickens 3:22
(Hazel Dickens / Happy Valley Music, BMI)
- 17. Been Rolling So Long** Larry Penn 4:00
(Larry Penn/Cookie Man Music, BMI)
- 18. VDT** Tom Juravich 1:56
(Tom Juravich)
- 19. Automation** Joe Glazer 2:34
(Joe Glazer)
- 20. I'm Union and I'm Proud** Eddie Starr 2:57
(Eddie Starr)
- 21. I'm a Union Card** Kenny Winfree 2:27
(Kenny Winfree)
- 22. Carpal Tunnel** John O'Connor 2:37
(John O'Connor)
- 23. We Just Come to Work Here, We Don't Come to Die** Anne Feeney 2:49
(Harry Stamper)
- 24. One Day More** Elaine Purkey 3:38
(Elaine Purkey)
- 25. We Do the Work** Jon Fromer 2:41
(Jon Fromer)
- 26. De Colores** Baldemar Velásquez and Aguila Negra 2:59
- 27. Solidarity Forever** Joe Glazer 2:28
(Ralph Chaplin)

A NOTE FROM JOE GLAZER

When we were putting together this collection of labor songs, we could choose from dozens of records, cassettes, and CDs. In fact, we had enough good labor songs for two CDs, and perhaps Smithsonian Folkways will issue a second CD of classic labor songs in the near future.

It was a different story in 1950. When I made my first record of labor songs, you had to search long and hard to find union or labor songs on a record. But there were a few choice items available. Pete Seeger and the Almanac Singers put out an outstanding album called *Talking Union* in the 1940s, and three of the songs on that album (“Talking Union,” “Which Side are You On,” and “Union Maid”) are included on this CD. Two of the songs on my first record (“The Mill Was Made of Marble” and “Too Old to Work”) are also included.

The eccentric, idealistic Moe Asch, who ran Folkways Records specialized in general folk and ethnic records, but he also produced some important labor records by Pete Seeger, Woody

Guthrie, and others. In 1954, when I had the idea of producing a record of songs by the Wobbly labor martyr, Joe Hill, Moe Asch ran with the idea and wasted no time in pressing the record.

In 1970, I established Collector Records, with special emphasis on labor and union songs. My first catalog was a one-page sheet promoting four of my own records. In a few years, I began recording other labor singers, especially those who had never been recorded. Some of these singers—Bobbie McGee, Kenny Winfree, Larry Penn, Eddie Starr, John O'Connor—are included on this CD.

Today we have a growing list of labor and union singers who are making CDs of their own. I added them to my catalog, and by the 1990s I had listed more than 100 CDs and cassettes.

In 1978, I was one of the founders of the Labor Heritage Foundation, and I have served as its chair since then. The foundation has nurtured labor artists and promoted the use of labor music and the arts to help build solidarity in the labor



movement. It has taken over the distribution of recordings of labor music.

I have heard it said many times: “They don’t sing anymore in the labor movement.” The implication is that in the old, hard days, trade unionists were always marching and singing, but in these modern times, labor music is dead. This is a romantic but inaccurate picture of the role of labor songs in the American labor movement.

There are probably more labor songs being sung and recorded than ever before. Union singers, folksingers, and others are writing and recording all kinds of songs about working

conditions, safety on the job, discrimination, unemployment, and other issues. Because of the relative ease and low cost of CD production, we are sure to get many union songs to help tell labor’s story and to lift the spirits of working men and women. In the year 2006, the labor movement can truly use such a musical uplift.

Joe Glazer, January 2006

INTRODUCTION

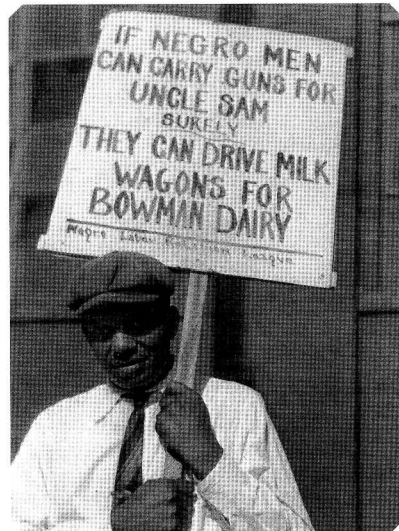
In 2002, Smithsonian Folkways released a collection called *Classic Bluegrass from Smithsonian Folkways* (SFW 40092). It was well received, and the label decided to go back into its vaults to craft other “Classic” releases, intended to be doors into a larger world. If you hear singers or musicians you particularly like, explore them further. This recording investigates some of the best of the American labor songs in the Smithsonian Folkways collection. This recording is intended as an introduction to many of these recordings on the label and others, and a chance for listeners to experience them perhaps again, or for the first time.

This release, *Classic Labor Songs from Smithsonian Folkways*, celebrates the addition of Joe Glazer’s Collector Records label to the Smithsonian Folkways family of labels. The Glazer family donated the label’s recordings to the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage in 2006.

Joe Glazer (1918–), “Labor’s Troubadour,”

has spent a lifetime as one of America’s noted historians of labor song. He and his guitar have performed for millions of workers, strikers, and students. He is the author of several significant labor songs, notably “The Mill Was Made of Marble.” Over his career, in addition to his performing, he was employed by the United Rubber Workers, the Textile Workers Union of America, and the United States Information Agency. He founded Collector Records in 1970 to distribute his own recordings of labor songs and those of other younger and newer performers that he had met through his work. Many of these artists he met through the Labor Heritage Foundation, which he founded in 1978, and its yearly Great Labor Arts Exchange. He had been frustrated that his early recordings were for labels that had either gone out of business or dropped the titles. Having his own label gave him control: “I was more interested in keeping the music alive than making money” (Glazer 2001:279).

Joe Glazer has been involved in writing songs



to accompany election campaigns. He worked for the 1960 Hubert H. Humphrey and John F. Kennedy campaigns, and subsequently recorded many of these songs.

This collection draws from the recordings on Collector Records, which includes Glazer’s own recordings and those of other artists whom Joe has helped champion. The collection also draws from older historical recordings in the Ralph

Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections at the Smithsonian and its Folkways Records, Paredon Records, and Smithsonian Folklife Festival collections.

Over the years, Folkways Records (now Smithsonian Folkways), has produced and distributed high-quality recordings of American folk music. Folkways founder Moses Asch made a commitment to artists that their Folkways recordings would never go out of print. The Smithsonian keeps that tradition alive.

I will not go into great detail about the history of the American labor movement, various strikes, and/or these particular labor songs. I suggest you consult Joe Glazer’s important work on the subject, listed in the bibliography. Joe Glazer, on his own and with Edith Fowke, goes into detail about most of these songs, reflecting deep research into the backgrounds of the events and people involved. These liner notes are in debt to these sources.

In 1987, Ralph Rinzler (1934–1994), folk musician, record producer, and talent scout for the Newport Folk Festival, then Assistant Secretary for Public Service at the Smithsonian Institution, negotiated the donation of the Folkways label to the museum. The following year, the Smithsonian Folkways record label was founded. Rinzler had been involved in earlier Folkways albums and knew the value of the collection. From its beginnings, Smithsonian Folkways has set out to reissue material from its archives with expanded



liner notes and updated sound. The Smithsonian has since acquired other smaller like-minded record companies: Cook, Paredon, Dyer-Bennet, Fast Folk Musical Magazine, Monitor, Collector, and MORE. These labels comprise what is called the Smithsonian Folkways Collection, and they include folk recordings in their catalogs. More than 3000 titles are available through the Smithsonian on on-demand compact disc. To understand the breadth of the collection, please explore the Smithsonian Folkways website, where short audio examples exist for all 40,000 tracks. In addition, visit the Smithsonian Global Sound website, where all these tracks are available for

download. In addition, all the original liner notes can be viewed free. If you like a track, we suggest you learn more about the rest of the recording that it came from.

Jeff Place, January 2006

The following notes include bibliographic citations, listed in the bibliography at the end. Consult the bibliography for complete titles. By consulting these sources, you can find lyrics and additional information. Lyrics for this recording can be found on the Smithsonian Folkways website.

SONGS

1. JOE HILL

Paul Robeson

Paul Robeson, vocal (From *Favorite Songs* Monitor 580)

This song, about the great labor songwriter, Joe Hill, was composed by Earl Robinson and Alfred Hayes. Joe Hill (1879–1915) was a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (the I.W.W., better known as the Wobblies) and was their most important songwriter. The Wobblies, through their publication *The Little Red Songbook*, used music extensively and were the great singing union. Hill wrote “The Preacher and the Slave,” “Casey Jones, the Union Scab,” “The Rebel Girl,” and other songs during this time. He was born Joel Hagglund in Gavle, Sweden. At age 23, he moved to the United States, where he joined the Wobblies. He was accused, tried, and convicted of murder in Salt Lake City in 1915, and was subsequently executed by firing squad. There has been disagreement over the years whether he was really guilty. Many modern music fans know “Joe

Hill” through the performance of this song in the movie and on the recordings from the Woodstock Music and Arts Fair in 1969. It is a good guess that many of these listeners do not know Hill’s history, and have never heard of the “Wobblies.”

Paul Robeson (1898–1976) was one of the great figures of the 20th-century. He was an accomplished singer, actor, and athlete, and a champion of civil rights. A graduate of Columbia University Law School and the owner of more than a dozen varsity letters in sports (Baggalaar 1976:320), he was not content to be accorded the status of second-class citizen. After spending the 1930s living abroad to escape the social conditions in the United States, he became deeply involved in politics and the fight for progressive causes. During the 1950s, he suffered persecution at the hands of the House Un-American Activities Committee, and the government took his passport away from him. At the end of the decade, he received it back, and he left for England, where he remained until 1963, when

he returned to Harlem. It has only been in recent years that he has started to achieve the historical recognition he has long deserved.

Blood and Patterson 1992:256; Fowke and Glazer 1960:20–21; Glazer 2001:195; Silber 1953:37.

2. BREAD AND ROSES

Bobbie McGee

Bobbie McGee, guitar and vocal (From *Bread and Raises: Songs of Working Women* Collector 1933, 1981)

This is a song inspired by a textile worker strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1912. Woolen mills there employed some 20,000 workers. In a parade during the strike, young girls carried a banner with the slogan *We Want Bread And Roses Too*. Poet James Oppenheim wrote this poem, which was subsequently put to music by Caroline Kohlsaar (Glazer 2001:24).

Bobbie McGee, now known as Barbara Wren, is a labor singer who performed at union meetings and rallies, colleges and universities, folk clubs, and folk festivals. She has also performed at demonstrations for the women's movement, and for the farm workers and other worthy causes (from the notes to CL-1933, 1981). She lives in New Jersey.

Blood and Patterson 1992:245; Fowke and Glazer 1960:70–71; Friedman 1935:43; Glazer 2001:24; Silber 1953:32.

3. CASEY JONES (THE UNION SCAB)

Pete Seeger and the Almanac Singers

Pete Seeger, banjo and vocal (From *The Original Talking Union and Other Union Songs* Folkways 5285, 1955)

This is another song by the great songwriter Joe Hill, and one from the I.W.W. (Industrial Workers of the World) *Little Red Songbook*. Hill adapted the popular vaudeville song about railroad engineer Casey Jones by Eddie Newton and Lawrence Seibert and published in 1909. When interviewed, Seibert and Newton stated that they got the song from an “old Negro song, started by a roundhouse worker named Wallace Saunders” (Cohen 2000:140). Hill's song is still frequently performed today. “SP” refers to the Southern Pacific Railroad.

Pete Seeger (b. 1919) is the dean of 20th-century folksingers. As of this writing, he has been performing and lending his energies to causes he believes in for more than sixty years. Born to a musical family, he grew up surrounded by music: his father was the eminent musicologist Charles Seeger, and his mother, Constance, was a concert violinist; in addition, his siblings Mike, Peggy, and Penny and various cousins and relatives by marriage have had successful recording careers.

Pete began to record for Moses Asch and Folkways Records in 1943. In the next 40 years, he recorded more than five dozen albums for Asch. Seeger is a fine interpreter and presenter of traditional folksong and an important composer

of topical songs. During the folksong revival, he was one of its major figures and a major influence on many other musicians. Much like Woody Guthrie, he believes in the use of his music for the betterment of mankind. He still performs, well into his eighties.

The Almanac Singers were a musical collective of politically active singers and songwriters who were based in New York City in the 1940s. They lived communally and performed at rallies, picket lines, and labor hootenannies. They once had a chapter of members in Detroit. At various times, membership included Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Bess Lomax Hawes, Butch Hawes, Lee Hays, Millard Lampell, Sis Cunningham, and Arthur Stern. They recorded for Keynote and General Records. Seeger and Hays would later go on to form the Weavers, a popular singing group.

Blood and Patterson 1992:253; Fowke and Glazer 1960:43; Friedman 1935:58; Lomax, Guthrie, and Seeger 1967:92–93; Silber 1953:35.

4. WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED / ROLL THE UNION ON (ORGANIZING MEDLEY)

Joe Glazer

Joe Glazer, vocal and guitar; backup from the Seldom Scene, Joe Uehlein, Laurel Blaydes, and Magpie. (From *Joe Glazer Sings Labor Songs* Collector 1918, 1971)

In 1931, striking coal miners in the Kanawha Valley in West Virginia modified the old

Christian hymn “I Shall Not Be Moved” into one of the most important labor songs, “We Shall Not Be Moved.” The song lends itself perfectly to the insertion of topical references. For example, the West Virginia strikers began to sing in one verse, “Frank Keeney is my captain; we shall not be moved” in honor of their leader (Glazer 2001:32).

For information about Joe Glazer, see the introduction.

Commentary about the song “Roll the Union On” can be found in the next track.

Blood and Patterson 1992:260; Fowke and Glazer 1960:38–39; Friedman 1935:20; Glazer 2001:32; Lomax, Guthrie, and Seeger 1967:348–349.

5. ROLL THE UNION ON

John Handcox

John Handcox, vocals

(From *The Smithsonian Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections*, aluminum disc 30, recorded 9 March 1937 by Charles Seeger and Sidney Robertson Cowell)

John L. Handcox (1904–1992), an organizer for the Southern Tenant Farmer's Union, was a sharecropper from Arkansas during the 1930s. The STFU argued for better conditions for the tenant farmers, who worked the land for the property owner and frequently had to give up to half of the members' profits to the owner. During the Great Depression, life became very rough



for these farmers. The STFU was an integrated union, and this fact, coupled with their agitation for better working conditions, created a violent backlash on the part of many other locals (Mark Allan Jackson, notes to *John Handcox: Songs, Stories and Poems of the Southern Tenant Farmer's Union*, p. 2). Handcox wrote several songs for the union, including the classics "Roll the Union On" and "Raggedy Raggedy." He was forced out of Arkansas by fear of lynching and organized for the STFU outside the state through the 1930s until the end of the Depression. He then was inactive until the 1980s, when he again began to appear at union gatherings, including the Great Labor Arts Exchange.

"Roll the Union On" uses the melody of the

gospel song "Roll the Chariot On" (Jackson 2004:16). It has become a classic labor song, and is another song that easily lends itself to improvisation.

Blood and Patterson 1992:258; Fowke and Glazer 1960:44–45; Glazer 2001:13; Lomax, Guthrie, and Seeger 1967:268–269.

6. COTTON MILL COLIC

Mike Seeger

Mike Seeger, vocal, guitar and harmonica (From *Tipple, Loom and Rail: Songs of the Industrialization of the South Folkways* 5273, 1966)

David McCarn (1905–1964), a textile mill worker in Gastonia, North Carolina, composed this song in 1926 and recorded it for Victor in 1930. He became a textile worker and a proficient guitarist at an early age. He sang the song during textile strikes in the late 1920s, but after the murder of Gastonia union organizer Ella May Wiggins in 1929, he left North Carolina. He found himself in Memphis in 1930, just in time for the Victor recording session where he recorded "Cotton Mill Colic" (Charles Wolfe, www.countryworks.com).

Alan Lomax published this song in *Folk Songs of North America*. McCarn later recorded a follow-up, called "Cotton Mill Colic, No. 2." After a brief music career, he went back to work in the mills. Mike Seeger interviewed him in 1961, a few years before his death.

Mike Seeger (b. 1933) is a member of the musical Seeger family, half-brother to Pete and son of Charles and his second wife, Ruth Crawford Seeger. As a musician and a member of the New Lost City Ramblers, Mike Seeger was one of the more prolific recording artists on the Folkways label. He was involved in recording and producing recordings by the McGee Brothers, Kilby Snow, the Stoneman Family, Dock Boggs, Elizabeth Cotten, and others.

He has had a long career as a performer as documenter of American musicians, and has become proficient at numerous instruments in the process. He is one of the nation's authorities on American vernacular music. In recent years, he has again begun to record new collections of his music for Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

Glazer 2001:27; Lomax, Guthrie, and Seeger 1967:120–122.

7. THE MILL WAS MADE OF MARBLE

Joe Glazer

Joe Glazer, guitar and vocal; with backup by the Seldom Scene, Magpie, and Laurel Blaydes (From *Joe Glazer Sings Labor Songs* Collector 1918, 1971)

In 1947, while working for the Textile Workers Union of America, Joe Glazer came across an eight-line poem and thought it had the "makings of a good labor song." He added music and a few more verses (Glazer 2001:48–50). With one

modification, he has been singing it ever since. It has become one of the labor movement's most popular songs. It has been translated into several languages and sung worldwide.

For information on Joe Glazer, see the introduction.

Blood and Patterson 1992:256; Fowke and Glazer 1960:76–77; Glazer 2001:48–54.

8. ARAGON MILL

Peggy Seeger

Peggy Seeger, vocal and guitar; Calum MacColl, guitar (From *From Where I Stand: Topical Songs from America and England* Folkways 8563, 1982)

Peggy Seeger (b. 1935) was born in New York to a musical family; her father, Charles, and mother, Ruth Crawford Seeger, were eminent musicologists, and Pete is her half-brother. During her childhood, her parents worked at creating anthologies of folksongs, so she was exposed to countless tunes. Starting with piano, she gradually learned to play a host of folk instruments—guitar, banjo, Appalachian dulcimer, autoharp, and concertina. In 1956, she traveled to England to perform in a television production of *Dark of the Moon*. While there, she joined the folk group the Ramblers, which included Ewan MacColl. The two started performing as a duo and were married two years later. Central figures in the British folksong revival, they were involved in many

projects, including the beloved British radio series *The Radio Ballads* (with Charles Parker).

Peggy has written and performed many songs and recorded dozens of albums—solo, with Ewan, and with others. Since the early 1990s, she has sung with Irene Scott and has continued to tour and sing. She currently lives in Asheville,



North Carolina.

Si Kahn (b. 1944), an important American labor songwriter, has worked as an organizer and composed many songs about Southern workers (Glazer 2001:232). He has written songs like this one about working conditions and mill hands' lives in the textile plants of the South. One worker laid off by a shut-down mill once told him, "It's so quiet, I can't sleep"—which was the inspiration for this song (Glazer 2001:234).

Blood and Patterson 1992:252; Glazer 2001:234.

9. TALKING UNION

The Almanac Singers

The Almanac Singers: Pete Seeger, vocal and guitar
(From *The Original Talking Union and Other Union Songs*
Folkways 5285, 1955)

Pete Seeger once wrote that when he and the Almanac Singers met Woody Guthrie, they were "mightily impressed with his 'Talking Blues' form: two lines that rhyme, two more that rhyme, then two or three irregular, free form lines following as a comment, before the next stanza" (*Talkin' Union* 6 [April 1983]; Guy Logsdon, notes to SFW 40100). The musical style of "the talking blues" as used by Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, and others lends itself perfectly to humorous social commentary. It is a style dating back to Chris Bouchillion, a country-music novelty artist who recorded in the 1920s. Apparently, he was not much of a singer, and his producer suggested he try talking his way through a song. His performance of "The Talking Blues" (the "Original Talking Blues") was recorded in April 1926 and became very popular. Singer Robert Lunn adopted Bouchillion's style and performed many of Bouchillion's pieces. Woody Guthrie learned the style from Lunn, and subsequently Bob Dylan learned it from Guthrie.

For information about Pete Seeger and the Almanacs, see track 3.

Fowke and Glazer 1960:22–24.



10. 1913 MASSACRE

Woody Guthrie

Woody Guthrie, guitar and vocals
(From *Struggle* Folkways 2485, 1976/Smithsonian Folkways
40025, 1990)

In 1913, the Western Federation of Miners struck against the copper-mine owners in Calumet, Michigan, seeking safer working conditions. On Christmas eve of that year, company strikebreakers arrived at the miners' Christmas party. They barred the doors and yelled "fire!"; in the panic that followed, 73 children were smothered or trampled to death (Logsdon, notes to SFW 40102, 1998).

The classic image of a folksinger with a harmonica rack and a guitar slung over his shoulder is the image of Woody Guthrie. Guthrie (1912–1967) was a prolific songwriter, author,

and artist. He composed more than 2,000 songs, including the American classics "This Land Is Your Land" and "So Long, Its Been Good to Know You." He made the vast majority of his recordings for Moses Asch in Asch's cramped little New York studio, but even they constituted only about one-tenth of the songs he composed. He was a fine interpreter of traditional American folksongs and country songs and a marvelous composer of topical songs, commenting on the political issues of the times.

11. THE PREACHER AND THE SLAVE

Utah Phillips

Utah Phillips, guitar and vocal, with Saul Brody and other members of the chorus. (Also known as "Pie in the Sky" and "Longhaired Preachers"; from the 1971 Festival of American Folklife, archive reel FP-1971-7RR-0029; recorded 3 July 1971)

This is another song from the Industrial Workers of the World, with lyrics written by Joe Hill. The melody is the evangelical Protestant song "Sweet Bye-and-Bye," copyrighted by S. Fillmore Bennett and J. P. Webster in 1868. The Wobblies were interested in receiving their just rewards for their labors while still on earth, and were not impressed by the pie-in-the-sky preachers they encountered in many of the down-and-out neighborhoods in which they lived (Fowke and Glazer 1960:157). A number of similar hymns were modified into Wobbly songs, including this one.

A forty-year member of the Industrial Workers of the World, singer, songwriter, and storyteller Utah Phillips (b. 1935) has been using his talents for political causes for many years. Coming out of the great folk revival of the 1960s, he has spent his life writing about the workers and the hardscrabble characters of the West. He “retired” from performing in 1996, but has continued to release collections of his music, sometimes collaborating with Mark Ross, Rosalie Sorrels, or Ani DiFranco. He lives in Nevada City, California. This recording comes from his appearance at the 1971 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, in a program on Working Americans.

Blood and Patterson 1992:184; Fowke and Glazer 1960:155–157; Friedman 1935:54; Lomax, Guthrie, and Seeger 1967:88–89.

12A. WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?

Florence Reece

Florence Reece, vocals (From the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, archive reel, FP-1971-7RR-0067, recorded 3 July 1971)

12B. WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?

The Almanac Singers

The Almanac Singers: Pete Seeger, Lee Hays, Millard Lampell, et al., vocals and instruments (From *The Original Talking Union and Other Union Songs* Folkways 5285, 1955)

Florence Reece (1900–1986) was from Harlan County, Kentucky. In 1931, the coal miners went on strike in Harlan, and armed company deputies roamed the countryside terrorizing the mining communities and looking for union leaders. Reece’s husband, Sam, was one of the leaders. A group of men led by Sheriff J. H. Blair came to her house looking for him while he was out. They ransacked the house and waited to shoot him if he returned. Affected by this experience, Florence Reece wrote the words to “Which Side Are You On?” on a wall-calendar (Fowke and Glazer 1960:55). It has become one of the true standards in labor song.

This recording comes from Reece’s appearance at the 1971 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife. It is followed by a rendition by the Almanac Singers.

Blood and Patterson 1992:260; Fowke and Glazer 1960: 54–55; Glazer 2001: 82–85; Lomax, Guthrie, and Seeger 1967:176–177; Reece, Rounder 4025 (CD); Silber 1953:40.

13. HOLD THE FORT

Joe Uehlein

Joe Uehlein, vocal and guitar; Laurel Blaydes and Tom Moran, vocals and mandolin; John Gower, banjo (From *Two Roads—28 Years by Joe Uehlein*, 2002; recorded 19 September 1991)

“Hold the Fort” began its life as a gospel hymn written in 1870 by Phillip Bliss (1838–1876),



who was inspired by a story about the bravery of Union troops defending a fort near Atlanta, Georgia in 1864. In 1873, the evangelical singer Ira David Sankey (1840–1908) took the hymn to England on one of his revival tours, and some years later the British Transport Workers parodied it and used it in their struggles. In the United States, the Knights of Labor also used the song, and it continued to evolve. The Wobblies began to use it in the early 20th-century, and it has also become a labor standard (Fowke and Glazer 1960:33). The Almanac Singers used it as a war song during World War II. In this version, sung at a huge Solidarity Day rally in Washington, D.C., in 1981, Uehlein has substituted the phrase “Union workers be strong” for “Union men be strong” to give recognition to the important roles

women are now playing in the labor movement.

Joe Uehlein (b. 1953), a labor activist from Maryland, helped Joe Glazer organize the Labor Arts Foundation. In the 1990s, he formed the labor rock group The Bones of Contention, which performed at rallies and labor conventions (Glazer 2001:277). He currently leads a roots-rock band called the U-Liners, which plays at many union functions.

Fowke and Glazer 1960:32; Glazer 2001:182; Silber 1953:82.

14. UNION MAID

The New Harmony Sisterhood Band

The New Harmony Sisterhood Band: Deborah Silverstein, vocal and guitar; Kendall Hale, vocal and fiddle; Katie Tolles, vocal and fiddle; Marcia Deihl, vocal and mandolin; Pat Ouellette, bass (From *and Ain't I a Woman* Paredon 1038, 1977)

The New Harmony Sisterhood is made up of five Boston-area women, many of whom met in a feminist-studies course at the Goddard-Cambridge Graduate School for Social Change in 1973–1974. The group was a musical entity and a collective that used music to work toward their shared political goals. Barbara Dane and Irwin Silber recorded the group for their Paredon Record label.

“Union Maid” is one of the best known of Woody Guthrie’s songs. While attending a union

meeting in 1940 in Oklahoma City, Guthrie and Pete Seeger were asked to sing for a group of striking oil workers. It was there that Guthrie wrote "Union Maid," put to the melody of the old popular song "Red Wing." The New Harmony Sisterhood sings an updated version (last verse), which gives proper credit to the thousands of active women trade unionists in the American labor movement.

Blood and Patterson 1992:259; Fowke and Glazer 1960:17–19; Glazer 2001:225; Lomax, Guthrie, and Seeger 1967:324–325.

15. TOO OLD TO WORK

Joe Glazer

Joe Glazer, guitar and vocal (From *Joe Glazer Sings Labor Songs* Collector 1918, 1971)

The issue of company-paid pensions has been a big issue in the labor movement. Joe Glazer wrote this song after hearing a speech by United Auto Workers President Walter Reuther blasting the double standard of employers who blasted pensions as "creeping socialism" while defending their own company pensions (Fowke and Glazer 1960:145).

For information on Joe Glazer, see the Introduction.

Blood and Patterson 1992:259; Fowke and Patterson 1960:143–145; Glazer 2001:63.

16. BLACK LUNG

Hazel Dickens

Hazel Dickens, vocal (From the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife; archive reel FP-1971-7RR-0028, 3 July 1971)

Hazel Dickens (b. 1935) was born and raised in Mercer County, West Virginia, in coal-mining country. Her father was a minister and banjo player. After moving to Baltimore in the 1950s to find work, she met Alice Gerrard, who had grown up in California. The two shared a love of country and bluegrass music and fell into a group of musicians who performed together locally.

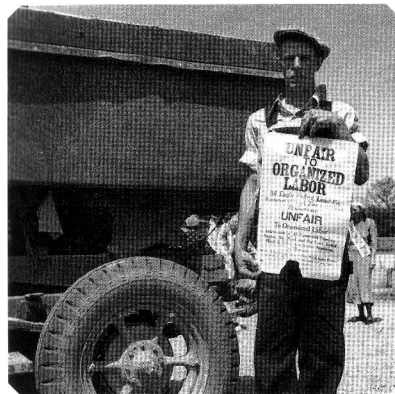
Having grown up in the coal areas of West Virginia, Hazel saw life in the mines firsthand. Not afraid to speak her mind, she has composed a number of important protest songs dealing with the struggles in the mines. Her songs have been featured in the films *Harlan County USA* and *Matewan*, and she can be seen singing "Conversation with Death" in the film *Songcatcher*. Dickens has continued to release solo recordings through Rounder Records. She currently lives in Washington, D.C.

Dickens, Rounder 4025 (CD).

17. BEEN ROLLING SO LONG

Larry Penn

Larry Penn, guitar and vocal
(Also called "Truck Driving Man"; from *Still Feel Like Rollin': Songs About Trucks and Trains* Collector 1943, 1987)



Larry Penn retired after forty years driving a truck. He has written a number of songs about his former occupation. He was asked to perform at a union training school at University of Wisconsin-Madison and learned a number of labor songs for the event (Glazer 2001:256). He began to turn his songwriting talents to labor songs, especially about poor working conditions. Another of his interests, railroads, has found its way into his songs.

"Been Rolling So Long" is an autobiographical song about his life on the road. Says Larry, "I've heard lots of songs about trucks written by guys in Nashville who obviously haven't spent much

time behind the wheel" (from the introduction to this song on Collector 1943).

Glazer 2001:256–257.

18. VDT

Tom Juravich

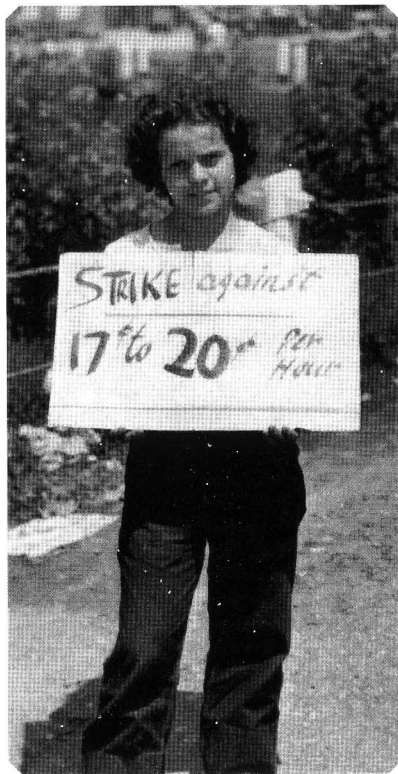
Tom Juravich, vocal and guitar
(From *We Just Came Here to Work Here, We Didn't Come Here To Die* Collector 1953)

Tom Juravich, a professor at University of Massachusetts and director of its Labor Relations and Research Center, is an accomplished labor singer and songwriter. He has sung at hundreds of union rallies, strikes, and conventions. He teaches out in the field for trade-union activists and leaders (Glazer 2001:241). He has recorded two albums for Flying Fish Records.

When it comes to poor working conditions and on-the-job injuries, the modern workplace has new maladies to replace those of yesteryear. Juravich addresses one of these in this song—the plight of the worker who spends all day in a cubicle doing data entry in front of a video-display terminal.

This song comes from the Collector Record's anthology *We Just Came Here to Work Here, We Didn't Come Here To Die*, a recording of newer songs dealing with workplace conditions, safety on the job, and injuries.

Glazer 2001:244.



19. AUTOMATION

Joe Glazer

Joe Glazer, guitar and vocal, Charlie Byrd, guitar
(From *Joe Glazer Sings Labor Songs* Collector 1918, 1971)

"During the 1950s the word *automation* frightened workers." Workers were afraid of losing their jobs and the threat became a topic of conversation at union meetings (Glazer 2001:64). Joe Glazer recognized this concern and chose to address it humorously in this song. Apparently the last verse was too scandalous to a Cleveland radio program director to play, so Joe commented it's the only labor song that ever received an "R" rating (Glazer 2001:65). This song was written in the 1950s before the role of women in industry had been acknowledged. Joe Glazer says that whenever he sings this song nowadays, he makes sure to include plenty of female names.

For information on Joe Glazer, see track 4.

Fowke and Glazer 1960:146–147; Glazer 2001:64–65.

20. I'M UNION AND I'M PROUD

Eddie Starr

Eddie Starr, vocal and guitar with additional instrumentation
(From *We are the Working Class: Songs by Eddie Starr* Collector 1951, 1991)

Eddie Starr (1956–2003) was an Illinois steelworker who used his skills as a songwriter and

rock musician to sing for the cause of labor. He declined a life on the road as a rock musician, and decided to stay home and get a job at the factory to support his family. He performed at numerous union events, rallies, and picket lines. He was a frequent attendee at the Great Labor Arts Exchange.

A third-generation steelworker, Starr frequently performed this song.

Glazer 2001:271.

22. I'M A UNION CARD

Kenny Winfree

Kenny Winfree, vocal and guitar, with Phil Rosenthal and His Bluegrass Boys, banjo, mandolin, and bass (From *Blue Collar Bluegrass* Collector 1949, 1991)

This is an original song by union songwriter Kenny Winfree. At the time of this recording, Winfree lived in Lebanon, Tennessee, and worked as a textile worker. Joe Glazer heard his work and decided it needed wider dissemination (Glazer 2001:274). Two of Winfree's albums were released on Collector. His writes labor songs that are played in a bluegrass style.

Winfree currently works at an aircraft plant in Texas, where he is an active member of UAW Local 848.

Glazer 2001:274.

22. CARPAL TUNNEL

John O'Connor

John O'Connor, guitar and vocal (From *We Just Came Here to Work Here, We Didn't Come Here To Die* Collector 1953)

Joe Glazer writes, "Repetitive motion on the assembly line, in the office, or wherever one happens to be working can cause carpal tunnel syndrome" (Glazer, notes to CL 1953). It's one of the most frequent of modern workplace afflictions, occurring among those who perform a great deal of computer data entry. It causes extreme pain in the hands and arms. Like the protagonist in "VDT" (track 18), this worker is suffering from a modern workplace ailment. In this case, he works in a meat-packing plant, but spends long hours typing on a computer keyboard which is a common cause of carpal-tunnel syndrome among modern workers.

John O'Connor is from around Waterloo, Iowa, which is meat-packing country. After hearing the complaints of neighbors who worked at the plant, he was inspired to write this song. He has recorded albums for Chroma and Flying Fish Records, one with the group Shay's Rebellion. He is a founder of Local 1000 of the American Federation of Musicians. He currently lives in New York, where he is an organizer for the New York State Nurses Association.

Glazer, 2001:248–249.



23. WE JUST COME TO WORK HERE

Anne Feeney

Anne Feeney, vocal and guitar; Michael Organ, drums; Garry Tallent, bass; Danny Torroll, guitar, Tony Bowles, saxophones; Billy Bremner, guitar; Jack Irwin, piano; Nanette Britt, harmony vocal (From the Joe Glazer Collection, compact disc sent by Anne Feeney, *Union Maid*, n.d.)

According to her website (www.annefeeney.com), Feeney is “an activist, organizer, songwriter, folksinger, troublemaker and hell raiser from Pittsburgh, PA.” She has worked as an attorney and president of the Pittsburgh Musician’s Union. She is involved in numerous causes and comments, “If you’re on strike, or in an organizing drive, or doing community organizing for

women’s rights, the environment, human rights, anti-poverty or anti-racist work, I want to be there.” Utah Phillips has called her the best labor singer in America.

This song was composed by Harry Stamper, a Coos Bay, Oregon, longshoreman. He composed it after being ordered to perform a dangerous maneuver to move a large pile of logs in the hold of a freighter and refusing to do it. He was fired, but an arbitrator ruled in his behalf (Glazer 2001:262). He is an accomplished labor songwriter. Ann Feeney has revised and updated some of his lyrics. OSHA is the federal government’s Occupational, Health, and Safety Administration.

Glazer 2001:262–264.

24. ONE DAY MORE

Elaine Purkey

Elaine Purkey, guitar and vocal (From the Ralph Rinzler Memorial Festival, New Market, Tennessee, 9 April 1995)

Elaine Purkey began to compose songs while involved in the Pittston Coal Strike in 1989–1990. She began to perform at festivals in the 1990s and impressed those who heard her, including the great labor songwriter Hazel Dickens.

Elaine was asked to write this song to encourage the strikers at Ravenswood, an aluminum plant in West Virginia. The phrase, coined during the Pittston Coal Strike, means “no matter how long the company or the corporations can stick around, we have enough strength, friendship, and camaraderie about us and enough belief in what we’re doing, we can be there one day more; whatever they do, we’ll be there the day after” (Purkey, spoken introduction to the song, 9 April 1995).

25. WE DO THE WORK

Jon Fromer

Jon Fromer, vocal and guitar; David Fromer, guitar; Reed Fromer, vocal and keyboards; Owen Davis, congas; David Lovel, bass; Michael Spiro, percussion; Alex and Harriet Bagwell, Christine Hauptert-Wemmer, Francisco Herrera, Brenda Savage, Walter Turner, background vocals (From the Joe Glazer Collection, Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections, Smithsonian, Jon Fromer self-produced tape, *We Do the Work*)

Californian Jon Fromer has spent a career working in television and radio. He is an active officer of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists and the Communications Workers of America. He has been involved in composing



songs and participating in drives, strikes, civil rights rallies, and other protest meetings (Glazer 2001:221). He is a member of the Freedom Song Network, an organization of San Francisco-area musicians dedicated to social change.

“We Do the Work” is the theme song of a television program on labor which can be seen around the United States.

Glazer 2001:222.

26. DE COLORES

Baldemar Velasquez

Baldemar Velásquez with Aguila Negra (From the Ralph Rinzler Memorial Festival, New Market, Tennessee, 9 April 1995)

Baldemar Velásquez (b. 1947) is the President of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, based in Toledo, Ohio. He leads the band Aguila Negra, which perform union songs in Spanish (Glazer 2001:277).

“De Colores” is the theme song of the United Farm Workers, for many years led by César Chávez (1927–1993). The UFW continues to fight for the rights of migrant farm laborers in the United States. While the song is sung, the singers hold hands and sway.

Blood 1992:152; Glazer 2001:277.

27. SOLIDARITY FOREVER

Joe Glazer

Joe Glazer, guitar and vocal

(From *I Will Win: Songs of the Wobblies* Collector 1927, 1977)

“Solidarity Forever” is the most popular union song on the North American continent. If a union member knows only one union song, it is almost sure to be this (Fowke and Glazer 1960:13). It was written on 17 January 1915 by the Industrial Workers of the World poet, artist, writer, and organizer, Ralph Chaplin (1887–1961). He was



inspired to write it after helping the coal miners during the great Kanawha Valley Strike (Fowke and Glazer 1960:13). It is still sung at every union rally, and is a fitting song to close out this collection.

For information about Joe Glazer, see the introduction.

Blood and Patterson 1992:218; Fowke and Glazer 1960:12–13; Glazer 2001:280–281; Silber 1953:49.

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Songs of the American labor movement over the 20th century called for just wages, dignity, and a fair shake. They voiced grievances, affirmed the value of the worker to society, and expressed hope for life in a more just world. *Classic Labor Songs from Smithsonian Folkways* is a collage of these voices—champions of the movement, singing songs with a passion and love for their fellow workers that rings just as true today as it did then. Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Joe Glazer, the Almanac Singers, and more chronicle the history of the American labor movement in stirring song. 76 MINUTES, 26-PAGE BOOKLET.

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|---|---|
| 1. Joe Hill Paul Robeson 3:01 | 14. Union Maid New Harmony Sisterhood Band 3:06 |
| 2. Bread and Roses Bobbie McGee 2:30 | 15. Too Old to Work Joe Glazer 2:51 |
| 3. Casey Jones (Union Scab) Pete Seeger and the Almanac Singers 1:55 | 16. Black Lung Hazel Dickens 3:22 |
| 4. We Shall Not Be Moved / Roll the Union On Joe Glazer 2:23 | 17. Been Rolling So Long Larry Penn 4:00 |
| 5. Roll the Union On John Handcox 1:07 | 18. VDT Tom Juravich 1:56 |
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