

songs of
working
people
Seattle Labor Chorus

In May 1997, a nervous, exhilarated bunch of amateur singers mounted an outdoor stage at Seattle's popular Northwest Folklife Festival. Facing a huge late afternoon audience, backing up folk legend Pete Seeger, the Seattle Labor Chorus began more than a decade of spirited, thought-provoking performances.

A lot has changed in that time, except for the continuing guidance of music director Janet Stecher (of the respected folk duo Rebel Voices). Folks have joined, left and sometimes returned. A skilled crew now provides music sheets with polished, computer-aided arrangements. We improve our collective sound through formal training, practice and choral exchanges. But what's kept us singing is the satisfaction of what's been called "having buckets of fun using music to wake the sleeping giant of the American conscience." At countless union meetings, rallies, marches and picketline demonstrations, the chorus has inspired workers with songs of beauty, rage and humor.

Striving to reflect current issues, we've built a large and varied repertoire enriched by the work of gifted contemporary artists. Some milestones in our history: our tenth Folklife Festival performance this year; singing down the barriers of the "no protest zone" as we rallied against the World Trade Organization; performing in concert with Utah Phillips, Charlie King and Linda Allen; our Vancouver Folk Music Festival debut; wowing crowds at the Washington, D.C. Great Labor Arts Exchange; a musical memorial to the immortal Paul Robeson at the Canadian border; our now-annual public singalong; and even our Best Chorus trophy from Seattle's annual street-corner caroling contest. We're ever busier because people are increasingly eager for our message promoting social and economic justice, and the right to organize to secure a living wage.

We're now professional rabble-rousers, working even harder to support hope in these hard times, because you, our audience, deserve the best. We hope you enjoy what we share with you here, and carry along our message.





WELCOME UNION MEMBERS

Traditional African-American gospel song learned from
Elise Bryant of the DC Labor Chorus

Adapted by Suzy Mayberry

Modified and arranged by SLC and Earle Peach

*Every time we perform for a union, we open with
this greeting, honoring those whose lives and work inspire
us to sing.*

Welcome union members, we are in your presence
Hand in hand together, the union makes us strong

We are filled with power, mobilized to organize
When we stand together, we shall not be moved

Welcome union members, we are in your presence
Hand in hand together, we make the union strong

* Author's lyrics, sung differently by SLC

*Photos from SLC archives, taken by Ivan King,
Martha Cohen and others*

THERE IS POWER IN A UNION

Music from "Rally Round the Flag," a U.S. Civil War tune

Words by Billy Bragg, modified by SLC

Arranged by Jane Edwardson

The title says it all!

There is power in the factory, there's power in the land
Oh, power in the hands of the worker
But it all amounts to nothing if together we don't stand
There is power in a union.

Now the lessons of the past were all learned with workers' blood
The mistakes of the bosses we must pay for
From the cities and the farmland to the trenches full of mud *
War has been the bosses' way sir.

The union forever, defending our rights
Down with the blackleg, all workers unite
With our sisters and our brothers in many far off lands
There is power in a union.

Now I long for the morning when they realize
Oh unjust laws cannot defeat us
But who'll defend the workers who cannot organize
When the bosses send their lackeys out to cheat us.



NO SWEAT

Words and Music by Bev Grant and Pat Humphries
Arranged by Earle Peach • © 1997 Bev Grant/Pat Humphries

*Why care where our clothes are made? We should all be working
toward the day when sweatshops are only museum exhibits. To
move us toward that end, songwriters Bev Grant and Pat Humphries
rhythmically educate us about how people in third world nations are
economically exploited, forced to work under miserable conditions, and
generally sacrificed for profit.*

We sew the clothes, the clothes that you buy.
We can't afford them for ourselves. The price is too high.
Our families need food. We don't need name brands.
We'd just like a fair share of the money
That's made off of our working hands.

We need the right to organize- no sweat!
No forced overtime- no sweat!
Clean drinking water- no sweat! Clean air to breathe.
No bosses screaming, no forced pregnancy tests,
The right to speak and be heard.

We are workers spreading the word- no sweat!

There's lint in the air. Our lungs are on fire.
We work behind tall cement walls, topped with barbed wire.
We don't have a voice, so we can't complain.
They just kick us out whenever we shout or cry out in pain.
They call us sweatshop workers.
We live from hand to mouth.
We took the jobs you lost up north
When the company moved south.
We don't have a union. We barely get by.
We need your support. We need you to join in
When you hear our cry, No Sweat!

Our wages are low. Our hours are long.*
They dock our pay, if we do anything they say is wrong.
They hire us girls, They think we'll obey.
But we feel the power when we work together
And when we say...
NO SWEAT!

FREEDOM IS COMING

Traditional South African song
Arranged by NYC Labor Chorus

A classic from the South African freedom movement, with our union verse added.

Freedom is coming, freedom is coming
Freedom is coming, oh yes I know
Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom
Freedom is coming, oh yes I know
Oh yes I know, Oh yes I know, Oh yes I know
Freedom is coming, oh yes I know
We'll organize, we'll organize, we'll organize
We'll build a union, we'll organize
Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom
Freedom is coming, oh yes I know



MAYN RUE PLATZ

Words and Music by Morris Rosenfeld
Arranged by SLC

This bittersweet Depression-era Yiddish love song is also an ode of solidarity to the workers' struggle, forsaking the beauty beyond the sweatshop window to lie finally where the need is greatest: "Don't look for me where myrtles grow, where birds sing or fountains splash; you will not find me there, my love. Where lives wither at machines, where tears flow and spirits fail: there is my resting place, mayn rue platz."

Nit zukh mikh vu di mirtn grin
Gefinst mikh dortn nit mayn shatz.
Vu lebens velkn bay mashinen,
Dortn iz mayn rue platz;
Dortn iz mayn rue platz.

Nit zukh mikh vu di feigl zingen
Gefinst mikh dortn nit mayn shatz.
A schklaf bin ich vu kaytn klingen,
Dortn iz mayn rue platz;
Dortn iz mayn rue platz.

Nit zukh mikh vu fontanen shpritzn
Gefinst mikh dortn nit mayn shatz.
Vu trern rinen tzeiner kritzen,
Dortn iz mayn rue platz;
Dortn iz mayn rue platz.

Un libst du mikh mit varer libe,
Zo kum tzu mir mayn guter shatz.
Un hayter oyf mayn hartz dos tribe,
Und makh mir zees mayn rue platz;
Makh mir zees mayn rue platz.



BREAD AND ROSES

Music by James Oppenheim • Words by Caroline Kohlsaet
Arranged by Neil Komedal

In Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912, more than a third of its 86,000 residents worked for the mills. On January 11, due to a pay cut caused by a shortened work week (54 hours for women and children), weavers shut down the Everett Cotton Mill. Within 10 days, 22,000 mill workers had left their jobs. Ten weeks later, a united workforce representing 27 ethnic groups had won important concessions for themselves and the 250,000 textile workers throughout New England.

On one of the many marches held during the strike, a group carried a banner reading, "We want bread and we want roses too," Rose Schneiderman's slogan from the 1909 shirtwaist workers' strike. Her poignant cry inspired James Oppenheim's timeless song.

As we come marching, marching, in the beauty of the day
A million darkened kitchens, a thousand mill lofts gray
Are touched with all the radiance that a sudden sun discloses
For the people hear us singing: Bread and Roses, Bread and Roses.

As we come marching, marching, we battle too for men
For they are women's children and we mother them again
Our lives shall not be sweated from birth until life closes
Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses.

As we come marching, marching, unnumbered women dead
Are crying through our singing their ancient cry for bread
Small art and love and beauty their drudging spirits knew
Yes, it is bread we fight for, but we fight for roses too!

As we come marching, marching, we bring the greater days
The rising of the women means the rising of the race
No more the drudge and idler; ten that toil while one reposes
But a sharing of life's glories; bread and roses, bread and roses.



NURSING

Words and music by Joan Hill • © 1993 Joan Hill

Speed-up has long been a favored strategy used by corporate management to squeeze extra work (and thus profits) out of its workers. Originating on industrial assembly lines, it has gradually moved into a wide variety of workplaces. Joan Hill, a registered nurse who lives in Seattle, wrote this humorous look at the serious consequences of the deliberate short-staffing occurring at many hospitals.

We're nursing as fast as we can.
We're running with bandages and bedpans.
Oh, the patients are sicker, and the discharges quicker, and the Reasons are slicker why they can't afford more nurses who are Nursing as fast as we can. And more cuts in nursing are planned. Though the loads don't get lighter, and the staffing is tighter, And we're nursing as fast as we can.

Your anxiety's legitimate, I'll grant.
You've been admitted for a liver transplant.
You see the nurses scurry, everybody's in a hurry and you've just begun to worry that we won't have time for you.
Our time is limited, you understand.
We can't do right by you within our budget.
Your insurance plan is tight so you can't even spend the night.
We'll just send you home to do the best you can.

Meanwhile, we're nursing as fast as we can.
We're running with bandages and bedpans.
Oh the patients are sicker and the discharges quicker and the Reasons are slicker why they can't afford more nurses who are Nursing as fast as we can. And more cuts in nursing are planned. Though the schedule's obnoxious and the pace is preposterous And we're nursing as fast as we can.

I feel I must apologize to you.
You messed your bed and had to lie in doo-doo.
But I was very busy, I was running in a tizzy, and I Over-optimistically thought I'd get to you in time.
But I had seven other patients too,
And one of them was bleeding in his pillow.
When priorities were reckoned, it was you who came in second,
And first was all that I had time to do.

Because we're nursing as fast as we can.
We're running with bandages and bedpans.
Oh the patients are sicker and the discharges quicker and the Reasons are slicker why they can't afford more nurses who are Nursing as fast as we can. And more cuts in nursing are planned. Though infections are spreading and mistakes we are dreading And we're nursing as fast as we can.

We worry for our patients, yes we do.
They come to us much sicker than they used to.
We know they need trained nurses
But the bosses watch their purses,
When it's patient safety versus profit,
We know what they'll do.
Nurses who are registered must go
'Cause nurses aides are cheaper than real nurses.*
They should know for patients' sake,
That this could be a "grave" mistake,
But it's a chance they'll take to save a little dough.

And we are nursing as fast as we can.
We're running with bandages and bedpans.
Oh the patients are sicker and the discharges quicker and the Reasons are slicker why they can't afford more nurses who are Nursing as fast as we can.
And more cuts in nursing are planned.
Though the patients are complaining
And the overtime is draining.*
And we're nursing as fast as we can.

We're nursing as fast as we can
We're running with bandages and bedpans.
And what's in them is stinking just like management's thinking,
As our standards are sinking and the risks we take are rising,
Just like salaries for those at the top.
This misallocation must stop.
Our superfluous superiors sit upon their posteriors
In the comfy interiors of their offices and lounges
While we're nursing as fast as we can.
And more cuts in nursing are planned.*
Yes the budget cuts are sweeping,
Though the dressings are seeping,
And the nurses are weeping for the patients we can't get to,
While we're nursing as fast as we can.*
We must find a way to demand
That the patients won't be dying
While the corporation's trying
To cut nursing as fast as they can.



WE WERE THERE

Words and Music by Bev Grant

Arranged by SLC

© 1997 Beverly Grant

“Look at my arm!” abolitionist Sojourner Truth told the 2nd Annual Women’s Suffrage Convention in 1852. “I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns...And ain’t I a woman?” Songwriter Bev Grant gathered that spirit in her arms 145 years later on International Women’s Day, inspired “by the heroines I have grown to love and respect...singing the old songs and becoming familiar with the history they represent.” We women were there, we’re still here, and we continue to fight for justice.

We have ploughed and we have planted
We have gathered into barns
Done the same work as the men
With babies in our arms
But you won’t find our stories
In most history books you read
We were there, we’re still here
Fighting for what we need.

We were there in the factories*
We were there in the mills
We were there in the mines
And came home to fix the meals
We were there on the picket line
We raised our voices loud
It makes me proud
Just knowin’ we were there.

From the textile mills in Lawrence
To the sweatshops in New York
From the fields in California
Where our children had to work
We fought to make a living
Bread and roses was our cry
Though they jailed
And beat our bodies
Our spirit never died.

We were Polish, we were Irish
We were African and Jew
Italian and Latina
Chinese and Russian too
They tried to use our differences
To split us all apart
But the pain we felt together
Touched the bottom of our hearts.

We are teachers, we are doctors
We are cooks and engineers
Letter carriers, truck drivers
Conductors and cashiers
We operate machinery
We fly the big airplanes
And we help to build our union
We’ve got struggle in our veins.

NO MORE FISH, NO FISHERMEN

Arrangement by Ann Downey, Sheldon Posen and Ian Robb
(Finest Kind)

Lyrics by Sheldon Posen, © 1996 I. Sheldon Posen

WELL DONE MUSIC BMI

*In the decade after 1992, 50,000 people left Newfoundland when its 500-year-old cod fishery collapsed. Sheldon Posen’s lyrics recall the anger and despair at that loss, and it reminds us of the risks to our Pacific Northwest fishing industry as salmon runs decline. The tune comes from **Amid the Winter’s Snow**, an English carol.*

Out along the harbour reach
Boats stand dried up on the beach
Ghostlike in the early dawn
Empty now the fish are gone.
What will become of people now?
Try to build a life somehow
Hard, hard times are back again
No more fish, no fishermen.

No more shoppers in the stores
Since the fish plant closed its doors
Men who walked a trawler’s decks
Now line up for welfare checks.
There’s big “For Sale” signs everywhere
Pockets empty, cupboards bare
See it on the news at ten
No more fish, no fishermen.

Once from ship cove to Cape Race
Port aux Basques to Harbour Grace
Newfoundlanders fished for cod
Owing merchants, trusting God.
They filled their dories twice a day
They fished their poor sweet lives away
They could not imagine then
No more fish, no fishermen.

Back before the Second War
We could catch our fish inshore
Boats were small and gear was rough
We caught fish but left enough.
And now there’s no more fish because
The trawler fleets took all there was
We could see it coming then
No more fish, no fishermen.

Farewell now to stage and flake
Get out for the children’s sake
Leave all friends and kin behind
Take whatever job you find.
There’s some that say things aren’t so black
They say the fish will all come back
Who’ll be here to catch them then?
No more fish, no fishermen.

HOLD THE FORT

Music by Philip P. Bliss

Words by the British Transport Workers' Union

Arranged by SLC

*Civil War troops trapped in a fort near Atlanta welcomed a message signaled by flags from mountain to mountain: "Hold fast, we are coming!" Despite heavy attack, they held the fort until rescued. The story inspired a hymn, adapted by the Knights of Labor and the British Transport Workers Union. After the Wobblies adopted it in the early 1900s, **Hold The Fort** became a rousing labor standard. It is said to have been sung from the MV Verona's deck as she sailed into Everett, Washington with a group of Wobblies coming to support the 1916 shingleweavers' strike. The ship was fired on by sheriff's deputies, killing eleven men in what came to be known as the Everett Massacre.*

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 hearts be strong.
Side by side we'll battle onward,
Victory will come.

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

Fierce and long the battle rages,
But we will not fear.
Help will come whenever it's needed.
Cheer, my comrades, cheer.

TORN SCREEN DOOR

Words and Music by David Francey

Additional arrangement by Earle Peach

David Francey, an award-winning Canadian songwriter and performer, paints a haunting picture of a home abandoned by farmers who left reluctantly. They were part of a modern Dustbowl that has forced farmers to leave the life they love, sacrificing another family farm to big agribusiness and another old house to the wind and rain.

Late summer day and my love and I went walkin'
Over hills and fields we walked laughin' and talkin'
Came across an old farmhouse standin' broken & bare
It used to be someone's home now no-one lives there.

There's a red barn standing held together with nails & dust
And a tired old Massey Harris all wires & rust
Weeds overgrown and a garden sown with care *
It used to be someone's home now no-one lives there.

Through the crack in the window pane
I hear the sound of the fallin' rain
Another farm bein' left run down
Another fam'ly moved into town.

Had a life that they tried to save
But the banks took it all away
Hung a sign on the torn screen door
"Nobody lives here no more."

They worked their fingers to the bone
Nothin' left they could call their own
Packed it in under leaden skies
With just the wheat wavin' them goodbye.*

FAIR TRADE COFFEE

Music for "Java Jive" by Milton Drake

Words by Ben Oakland • Arranged by Kirby Shaw

Words for "Fair Trade Coffee" by Lou Truskoff

© "Java Jive" 1940 Warner Bros. Inc. and Sony Tunes Inc. (renewed)

*The Ink Spots introduced the tune to this song as **Java Jive** in 1940, when a cup of coffee cost a nickel and was just that - coffee. You still get a lot for your money when you're drinking fairly-traded java and other products purchased directly from producers at a fair price that enables them to trade globally. SLC's Lou Truskoff updated the song in the name of family farmers in developing countries. Jive along while enjoying your double mocha macchiato.*

I love coffee, I love tea
Fair traded coffee it's the one for me
A price that's fair, 'cause we're consumers who care
A cup, a cup, a cup, a cup, a cup, aah!

I love java, sweet and hot
But the growers of this coffee don't get paid a lot
They deserve a fair price, wouldn't that be nice
A cup, a cup, a cup, a cup, a cup.

Well, they cut out the middleman and pay a fair price
The producers earn a living, so now take my advice
Fair-traded coffee, it's a good cup o' joe
Takin' it slow, waiter, waiter, make it fair-traded.

I love coffee, I love tea

Fair traded coffee it's the one for me
Support fair trade, you've got it made in the shade
A cup, a cup, a cup, a cup, a cup, aah!

You got your latte, cappuccino
You got your double tall mocha, frappachino
But for your daily espresso take our lead
It's got to be a fairly traded bean. Yeah!

I love coffee, I love tea

Fair traded coffee it's the one for me
Support fair trade, you've got it made in the shade
A cup, a cup, a cup, a cup. Yeah!



WHOEVER INVENTED THE FISHFINGER

Words and Music by Leon Rosselson • Arranged by SLC

From the tortured flesh in a simple fish stick (fishfinger), to the many everyday disasters caused by human occupation of the planet, this solemn tune sends a stern, timely message: We can bend nature to our will only so far in the name of progress.

Whoever invented the fishfinger ought to be transmogrified.
Skinned, mashed and boxed into uniform blocks,
Then covered with breadcrumbs from collar to socks,
Then frozen and finally fried.

Because who'd do that to a fish? Finning its way through the seas.*
Colours in harmony, perfectly poised, riding its flying trapeze?
And progress is all very well, but not when it chops up our dreams.
And it's hard to feel at ease in the world when nothing is what it seems.

Whoever invented the Daily News ought to be cut down to size.*
Pulped and reduced to a nauseous juice,
And dried out and flattened till ready for use,
Then covered with newsprint and lies.

Because who'd do that to a tree? Raising its head to the sky.
Rooted in centuries, telling tall tales, breathing a green lullaby?*

And progress is all very well, but not when it chops down our dreams.
And it's hard to feel at ease in the world when nothing is what it seems.

Whoever invented the foot soldier ought to be licked into shape.
Toughened and trained till the body's a cane,
Till the arms are a chain, till the nerves feel no pain,
Till obedience rules and encircles the brain,
With walls so he'll never escape.

Because who'd do that to a child? Jumping with joy and desire.*
Floating in fantasies drowning in dreams, brimming with feelings of fire.*
And progress is all very well, but not when it locks up our dreams.
And it's hard to feel at ease in the world when nothing is what it seems.



SONG OF PEACE

Music from "Finlandia" by Jean Sibelius

Words by Lloyd Stone

© 1934, renewed 1962 by Lorenz Publishing Company.

HYMN FOR NATIONS

Music by Ludwig van Beethoven

Words by Josephine Daskam Bacon / Don West / SLC

With beautiful harmonies and soaring melody, Finnish composer Jean Sibelius gives voice to his people's longing to throw off the heavy yoke of faraway Imperial Russia and just live in peace and freedom in their beloved homeland. Lloyd Stone's lyric broadens the vision to include us all. With simple words he shows us how to love our homeland without the need to beat drums and build cannons. We sing this song, alongside Beethoven's Ode To Joy, because the worker always bears the heaviest burden in war.

This is my song, O God of all the nations
A song of peace, for lands afar and mine
This is my home, the country where my heart is
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine
But other hearts in other lands are beating
With hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.

My country's skies are bluer than the ocean
And sunlight beams on clover leaf and pine
But other lands have sunlight too, and clover
And skies are everywhere as blue as mine
Oh hear my song, thou God of all the nations
A song of peace, for their land and for mine.

Some might sing their country's anthem,
Sing their land's undying fame,
Light the wondrous tale of nations,
With their people's golden name.

Come and tell your parent's story,
Come and share your people's pride.
Sing in our united glory,
Come and lift your voice with mine.

Build the road of peace before us,
Build it wide and deep and long,
Stop the warfare,
Feed the children,
Build the houses stout and strong.

None shall push aside another,
None shall let another fall.
Work together Sisters, Brothers,
Build a better world for all.

None shall push aside another,
None shall let another fall.
Work together Sisters, Brothers,
All for one and one for all.

HAIL-A-UNION

Music by George Frideric Handel • Words by Paul McKenna

*In addition to being a masterful writer of song parodies, Paul McKenna is an organizer with the Oregon Public Employees Union (an affiliate of SEIU). Lacking access to a choral group that might sing this rendition, Paul has sometimes surprised audiences with a modified solo performance! We've given his work, based on the **Hallelujah Chorus** from Handel's **Messiah**, the full choral treatment.*

Join the Union! Join the Union!
Join the Union! Join the Union!
Join SEIU.
Get a contract, a union contract.
Join the Union! Join the Union!
Join SEIU.

Win job security and fair wages.
Join the union. Join the union.
Join the union. Join the union.
What they've been paying us is outrageous.
Join the union. Join the union.
Join the union. Join the union.

If we're to stay in line with inflation
We need effective representation
Backed by a mighty organization
Like SEIU!

In union there is strength, in unity.
Together we'll achieve industrial democracy.
Get on the road to fair compensation.
Eliminate unjust termination.
Improve your daily work situation.
Sign up for union representation.

All for one – together, forever.
And one for all – together, forever.
All for one, and one for all.
Come on out and heed the call.
And we shall stand together forever.
And we shall stand together forever and ever.
All for one and one for all.
United we stand, divided we fall.

And when we've won we'll sing with joy and elation. Together, forever, together, forever.
Join the Union! Join the Union!
Join the Union! Join the Union!
SEIU!

