

# Unholy Gospel

The Radical Songs Of The Industrial Workers Of The World

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*For Anthony and Nancy Fortun,  
True Working Class Heroes  
Who have sacrificed for the success of their children*

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Ben Fortun  
 Professor Matthew Connelly  
 Senior Thesis Seminar

*Unholy Gospel:*

*The Songs Of The IWW*

“A pamphlet, no matter how good, is never read more than once, but a song is learned by heart and repeated over and over. And I maintain that if a person can put a few common sense facts into a song and dress them up in a cloak of humor, he will succeed in reaching a great number of workers who are too unintelligent or too indifferent to read.”<sup>1</sup>-Joe Hill

“Any song a wobbly sings is a wobbly song, hell it could be ‘Jingle Bells’!”<sup>2</sup>-Utah Phillips

“I was robbed! I was robbed!” a man screams in the middle of a crowded square in Spokane Washington. An anxious and curious crowd gathers to see what the matter is. The man continues screaming, “I was robbed! I was robbed—by the capitalist system!” The man is an orator for the Industrial Workers Of The World (IWW), and proceeds to lecture the growing crowd on the ills of capitalism. Following his speech, a motley orchestra of Wobblies, a term IWW members self-ascribed, begin singing songs of protest, anger, and hope to cajole the audience to join the ranks of the IWW and fight back against the ruling class.<sup>3</sup> For the IWW, singing was a unique weapon to gain the attention of an otherwise disinterested crowd, sway the opinion of an apolitical laborer, or re-solidify the rank and file of the union. It is in the IWW’s music that they honed their

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<sup>1</sup> Hill, Joe. *Letter to the editor of Solidarity, November 29, 1914* Letter. From Tamiment Library. *Elizabeth Gurley Flynn: Joe Hill Case Materials Tam.529*.

<sup>2</sup> Utah Phillips, “Union Burying Ground,” recorded 1983. Track 14 on *We Have Fed You All A Thousand Years* Rounder Records, streaming.

<sup>3</sup> The term “Wobbly” is, according to IWW myth, supposedly derived from a Chinese cook’s mispronunciation of the letter ‘W’. When serving members of the union in his popular restaurant, he would ask patrons if they were part of the “I-wobble-wobble”, ‘wobble’ being the mispronunciation of ‘double u’. IWW members found it endearing and decided to use it as a nickname.

proletarian vision of a world without the wage system, without clerical dictatorship, without haughty bosses, and, sometimes, without work at all.

The IWW was known for their singing and boisterous anthems of protest. While labor songs and protest songs were not unique to the IWW, they served a distinct purpose in communicating the IWW's agenda to the public. The IWW proudly accepted their melodious moniker of "Singing Socialists", and their strategically organizational use of music aided in their promotion of working class liberation. The IWW published thousands of copies of their *Little Red Songbook*; thirty-six editions between 1909 and 1995. The book contained songs that called for the overthrow of corporate bosses and promoted worker solidarity, celebration of being a 'bum' and depicting hedonistic utopias, to criticizing religion. The book contained original melodies and parodies of famous hymns, comical songs and sad ballads, songs of strife and songs of hope. Printed under the book's title is the slogan "songs to fan the flames of discontent", which the songs most certainly did.

According to Fred W. Thompson, the IWW's Secretary Treasurer and Historian during the 1930's, the IWW's use of music stems from the first ever American socialist songbook that was published almost a full decade before the IWW's creation of the *Little Red Songbook* (Hereon referred to as LRS).<sup>4</sup> Charles Kerr, a socialist publisher, compiled *Socialist Songs With Music*, to aid the growing Socialist Party commandeered by Eugene V. Debs. It consisted of songs mostly taken from *Chants Of Labor*, a British songbook that had originated in 1888. *Socialist Songs With Music* offered a "challenge to the political supremacy of Standard Oil, the big mine operators, lumber barons and

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<sup>4</sup> Fred W. Thompson "Charles H. Kerr & Americas First Socialist Song Book" *The Big Red Songbook* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016) 198

railroad magnates.”<sup>5</sup> *Socialist Songs With Music* is a definite precursor to the IWW’s use of music. As many socialists joined the IWW upon its inception, it is probable that they brought their tradition of music with them.

In a 1908 article that predates the LRS, the *Industrial Worker*, the official paper of the IWW, published a story entitled “The Value Of Music In IWW Meetings” by James Wilson, member of Local No. 22 in Spokane Washington. Wilson discusses his amazement at the popularity and usefulness of music in IWW organizing tactics, “It is really surprising how soon a crowd will form in the street to hear a song in the interest of the working class, familiar as they are with the maudlin sentimental music of the various religionists.”<sup>6</sup> It is reports from members like Wilson that give evidence to their use and acclaim.

This thesis explores the IWW’s use of music as a tool to make the tenets of industrial unionism accessible to the public, the union’s exploitation of its musicians as propagandists, and the parallels of these songs’ lyrics to the ideology of the union. It claims the music of the IWW to be an expression of the Marxian ideology so closely tied to the union’s platform. I argue that IWW music aimed to eliminate the false consciousness provided by the capitalist, the craft unions, the clergy, and was the main “weapon” to mobilize an industrial army of itinerant workers it hoped to deploy. These tactics would effectively create a culture unique to the IWW and propel it to its status as an iconoclastic mainstay of labor history. The music of the IWW created one of the first

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> James Wilson “The Value Of Music In IWW Meetings” *The Industrial Union Bulletin* (Washington) May 23, 1908.

countercultures in American history, attracting laborers throughout the nation and the world.

While many sources exist on the history of the IWW and its famous luminaries and happenings, there is little literature on their music. The two major books compiled on the IWW are Philip S. Foner's *Industrial Workers Of The World: 1905-1917*, and Melvyn Dubofsky's *We Shall Be All: A History Of The Industrial Workers Of The World*.

Foner's account of the IWW mainly focuses on the organization as a whole, compiling a history from the "birth of the IWW" to its future "wartime repression."<sup>7</sup> His book does contain a chapter entitled "Ideology And Tactics" which refers to the songs of the IWW, but mainly their history of adaptation into the union and a highlighting of the major songs that were popular among Wobblies. Dubofsky's book, though deriving its title from a verse of the IWW's version of the song "The International", contains only scatterings of IWW songs and lyrics. Though Dubofsky's chapter "Ideology and Utopia: The Syndicalism of the IWW" discusses the beliefs of the IWW, it makes no connection between the vast library of IWW music and its radical ideology.

There does exist one book that attempts to give a history to the songs of the IWW. *The Big Red Songbook* by Archie Green is a compilation of every published IWW song since the inception of the LRS. Green, who states his career as primarily a shipbuilder, does offer some insight into the use and importance of IWW songs, but without much citation or adherence to academic standards. His book is mostly a collection of songs, with supplemental articles written by fans and members of the IWW. While mostly a piece of modern IWW propaganda, it does offer some information regarding the history

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<sup>7</sup>Philip S. Foner, *The Industrial Workers Of The World: 1905-1917* (New York: International Publications, 1980) 10

of the LRS that I have used as a “jumping off point” into finding primary source documents.

IWW songs make occasional cameos of interest in various folklore and music journals. The most helpful article in understanding where IWW music is situated in the importance of its organizing is in the 1987 article by David King Dunaway entitled “Music And Politics In The United States” in the *Folk Music Journal*. Dunaway writes that the IWW’s music was central to its existence, as union meetings opened with singing, and its sales of the LRS helped aid the union treasury. Dunaway proclaims that the IWW’s music aided future generations of protest music and crafted a tradition of offering song “as a front-line device for building morale, recruiting new members, and garnering publicity.”<sup>8</sup> Dunaway goes on to claim that the IWW’s music “also functioned as a continuing oral history: many of their major strikes, campaigns, and martyrs were recorded in song.”<sup>9</sup> The topical song library of the IWW was as much an organizing tool as their speeches or cartoons.

There also exists a few biographies of Joe Hill, the union’s most famous songwriter. Gibbs M. Smith’s *Joe Hill: Labor Martyr* is one of the first academic biographies to be compiled on the IWW’s main musical contributor. While Smith gives some history behind Joe Hill the songwriter, the book mainly focuses on Joe Hill the perhaps wrongly accused criminal. Smith goes into great detail discussing Hill’s execution at the hands of the Government of Utah for his accused robbery of a store and murder of its owner. However, Smith does dedicate a chapter to discussing some of Hill’s songs. On Hill’s lasting influence as a symbol of the IWW, Smith states that Hill was

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<sup>8</sup>David King Dunaway “Music And Politics In The United States” *Folk Music Journal* 5, no. 3 (1987) 283

<sup>9</sup> Ibid



“translator and scribe for the migrant workers and hobos of America, turning into lyrical expression their everyday experience of disillusionment, hardship, bitterness and injustice.”<sup>10</sup> Smith rightly asserts that Hill’s importance as a songwriter is predicated on his ability to write for and about an audience of itinerant workers, but also compose them in a way that would cement them as perennials of folk music.

Philip Foner’s *The Letters Of Joe Hill*, a collection of Hill’s correspondences during his internment in the Utah State Prison, explicates that the popularity of Hill’s songs are due to their being formed out of actual struggles and working conditions of the workers he was writing for. Hill was no charlatan, his songs were written from experience and thus invoked truth and honesty that made his music intimate and invaluable for the workers of the West.<sup>11</sup>

Though music is a characteristic trait of the IWW that no historian of the union ignores, there is a consistent lack of discussion regarding the magnitude of these songs’ influence, and how these songs contributed to the IWW’s ideology and strategy of industrial unionism and syndicalism. While both Foner and Dubofsky discuss the IWW’s stance against organized religion, their promotion of education among its members, and their advocating for direct action, they fail to discuss how IWW songwriting was a central tool in implementing these tactics. This paper explores the history and meanings behind the IWW’s most famous songs and songsters, but it is important to first examine how the IWW was organized.

Public memory seems to have labeled the IWW as a cohesive whole, an entity that is seemingly universal and unified. In reality, the IWW is and was a split

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<sup>10</sup> Gibbs M. Smith, *Labor Martyr Joe Hill* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1969) 15

<sup>11</sup> Joe Hill, *The Letters Of Joe Hill*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: Oak Publications, 1965) 8

organization of many different leaderships, ideologies, and structures. The IWW faced a few schisms in its history, from its initial split in 1906 due to sitting president Charles O. Sherman's purported corrupt pocket-lining, to the 1908 split over the argument to partake or refrain from political action which led to Daniel De Leon's departure from the union, to its final split in 1924 over the debate of whether or not the IWW should support or denounce Bolshevism.<sup>12</sup> Coupled with these ideological splits, the IWW's inherent philosophy of individualistic leadership, and the differences of geographically influenced Eastern IWW and Western IWW, using the label of IWW as a catch-all is misleading. Therefore, this essay uses the IWW as a term to refer to the collective individuals who consider themselves to be members of the Industrial Workers of The World in whatever form. This essay is more focused on the musical influence on the rank and file members of the IWW who, in contrast to IWW central leadership, were less interested in the ideological shifts of the IWW, and instead more interested in the idea of industrial unionization.

Yet, the IWW was not an idiosyncratic organization that emerged from the ether of the Progressive Era, it has its roots in the traditions of earlier labor unions of the West. Primarily emerging out of the groundwork of the Western Federation Of Miners (WFM) and the Western Labor Union/American Labor Union (WLU), and sharing an organizational strategy with that of the Knights Of Labor, the IWW pieced together a nexus of ideologies, strategies, and rhetoric that created the culture of the Wobblies.

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<sup>12</sup> Melvyn Dubofsky *We Shall Be All: A History Of The Industrial Workers Of The World* (Baltimore: University Of Illinois Press, 200) 60; Philip Foner, *History Of the Labor Union In the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1991) 103

Melvyn Dubofsky's article "The Origins Of Working Class Radicalism, 1890-1905", pieces together a history of the IWW's birth from the radical currents of the West. Dubofsky propounds that the IWW lives up to Friedrich Engels' prophetic statement that "the fatal hour of capitalism will have struck as soon as a native American working class will have replaced a working class composed in its majority by foreign immigrants."<sup>13</sup> Dubofsky states that the IWW, in his words, "the most radical working-class movement in American history", came from a native revolutionary population.<sup>14</sup> Though radicalism in American culture during this era would be depicted as an infiltration of European socialists and anarchists, Dubofsky states that the IWW's radicalism was a product of conditions in the American West.

Contingent on the rapid change in social and economic conditions that were way more drastic than in the East, a less ethnically divided work force, geographic isolation from Eastern metropole, and corporate reliance on state sponsored quelling of labor unrest, Western laborers were far more radical and militant than their Eastern counterparts.<sup>15</sup>

The IWW as a "Western organization" is an important classification in relation to its musical output as the IWW borrowed from previous Western tradition. Its ideological ancestor the Knights Of Labor utilized song in its ceremonies, though not in its organizing strategy, and the rural expanse of the West necessitated a way to convey the IWW's message through a medium that would reach the characteristic itinerancy of the Western laborer. Song was imperative in cultivating the culture of the IWW and

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<sup>13</sup> Melvyn Dubofsky "The Origins Of Working Class Radicalism. 1890-1905" *Labor History* 74, no. 2 (1966) 131-154

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 151

formulating a mobilized working class. They were sung in jail cells to the annoyance of wardens, belted out on street corners in defiance of Salvation Army bands, and, most importantly, written by their own rank and file, a collection of itinerant workers who roamed the Western United States reflecting on their personal experiences and echoing a message that would mobilize a radical American labor movement.

I intend to divide this thesis into three chapters, each detailing a musical organizational tactic of the Union. The first chapter “For The Union Makes Us Strong” will focus on the IWW’s Western origins and the union’s attempt at creating an anthem for its rank and file. Ralph Chaplin’s ballad “Solidarity Forever” became the unofficial anthem of the labor movement, and closely echoes the preamble of the IWW. This chapter discusses how the IWW’s Western identity gave birth to its unique aesthetic. It also investigates how the IWW attempted to use songs as propaganda to educate workers on class-consciousness through an entertaining medium, rather than promoting complicated explanations on the teachings of Marx.

The second chapter “Hobo Hymnody” is an investigation into how the IWW mobilized itinerant workers in the West into a singing industrial army, spreading the IWW’s message of class-consciousness across the United States. This chapter will explore how the IWW viewed itinerant workers, and how they aimed to convince them of joining the union. As the IWW was essentially a Western union, it targeted the West’s abundant itinerant population and organized them when other unions refused to. It analyzes the “Red Special”, a group of itinerant workers from Spokane Washington who hopped freight trains to the 1908 IWW convention and expelled the Eastern Socialist Party members from its leadership. It argues that the *Little Red Songbook* was the IWW’s

best tool in educating workers across the United States, as traveling Wobblies utilized the simplicity of music to educate workers throughout their travels. It also explores how IWW leadership wanted to commandeer a massive itinerant organizing force, and how songs specifically for itinerant workers helped create “hobo” culture and built a romanticized identity for the hobo. This chapter will focus on the songs “Hallelujah! I’m A Bum” by Harry McClintock and the myth of IWW itinerant T-Bone Slim.

The third chapter “Preachers And Slaves” discusses the origins of the *Little Red Songbook* and the initial use of IWW songs as criticisms of religion. This chapter will focus extensively on famed IWW bard Joe Hill, especially his song “Preacher And The Slave” and its hypercritical attack on organized religion. I will argue that the IWW attempted to disparage any forms of organized religion to eradicate the false consciousness of its members potential associations with religion. I argue that, though the IWW attacked religion, they simultaneously adopted many religious aspects of their own, and incorporated them into an industrialist cultural belief system, hallmarked by utilizing Joe Hill’s death as their own version of martyrdom.

Joe Hill makes an appearance in most every chapter as he is elemental to the history of IWW songwriting, therefore his biography must be discussed in some detail, as his mythologized life, and the utilization of it by the IWW, will be explored in the final chapter. It is not my intention to make this essay a biographical analysis of Hill’s life but without proper introduction to the IWW’s most famous member this essay would fail to be the critical investigation into the IWW’s musical strategy that it is.

### **“For The Union Makes Us Strong”**

“Tonight I am going to speak on the class struggle and I am going to make it so plain that even a lawyer can understand it.”-“Big” Bill Haywood

“Trade unions have had a fair trial, and it has been clearly demonstrated that they are unable to protect their members”-Eugene V. Debs

On March 16, 1911, the bustling streets of New York City were embroiled in the common cacophony of people moving through the arteries of America’s largest city. It was a Thursday, a work day, and hundreds of textile workers, Bowery bar-hands, hotel workers, and craftsmen, were headed to an auditorium to hear a Western cowboy turned union leader speak about industrial unionism. William “Big Bill” Haywood spoke to a crowd of interested and eager workers about the tenets of the Industrial Workers Of The World.

Haywood’s booming voice and expert oratory skills—which probably helped justify the moniker of “Big” Bill—spoke admiringly about the French Commune, using it as an example of what the IWW wished to accomplish with their idea of a communal society of industrial workers. Haywood summarized the history succinctly, and quickly got to the point of the meeting,

I must admit to you that I am not well posted on the theories advanced by Jaures, Vandervelde, Kautsky, and others who write and speak about the general strike. But I am not here to theorize, not here to talk in the abstract, but to get down to the concrete subject whether or not the general strike is an effective weapon for the working class.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> William Haywood “The General Strike” *The Industrial Workers Of The World* 1911(Charles H. Kerr Press: IL, June 1946 ) Archive.org <https://archive.org/details/HaywoodTheGeneralStrike> (accessed Feb. 11, 2018)

Haywood's deference to the working-class audience and his admitted lack of knowledge on the "theories" of labor was not Western humility (Haywood was well read in much of the contemporary literature on labor), but rather an appeal to the ideals of the IWW's promotion of simplified revolution.

*Below Image: "Big" Bill Haywood. (Source: IWW.org)*



Haywood continued by promoting the lofty aims of Industrial Unionism: the reduction of working hours, the increase of wages, the eventual seizure of the means of production, and the IWW's favored strategy of general strikes. Haywood began his speech by harking back to the historical significance of the

French Commune, but ended his oratory advocating a radical militaristic unionism born out of the American West. Haywood's lecture that night outlined a strategy of unionization that was in stark contrast to the older and established American Federation Of Labor (AFL). The New York workers in the audience were perhaps dazzled by Haywood's oratory skills, character, and persona, but they were left somewhat confused by the ideals of the IWW.

One member of the audience asked Haywood at the end of his speech, "Don't you think there is a lot of waste involved in the general strike in that the sufferers would be

the workers in larger portion than the capitalists?”<sup>17</sup> This was a genuine concern considering that the unions that were active in 1911 were wary to go on strike and, with the memories of the violent Haymarket Strike of 1886 still in somewhat recent memory, favored using it only as a last resort. Another audience member stated his concern that associating with the IWW would certainly get him expelled from both his job and the AFL.<sup>18</sup> The fear was real, joining this “Industrial Union” would not only make one a target for expulsion by their bosses, but also a pariah to the pragmatic and conservative AFL.

While compared to the AFL, the IWW was a minor labor movement that posed no real threat to craft unionism, the cultural influence the IWW propagated through the radical identity it manufactured fostered a new culture in the labor movement. The IWW was a product of the West and though the “frontier” was officially closed in 1890, the intangible spirit of its perceived ruggedness lived on into the formation of the IWW. In Frederick Jackson Turner’s *The Significance Of The Frontier In American History*, he characterizes the West as

That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and evil...<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 8

<sup>19</sup> Turner, Frederick Jackson. *The Significance of the Frontier In American History* (Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company: NY, 1920) p



The IWW, whether conscientiously or not, would live up to this poetic definition. Nobly working for the rights of the workingperson while violently sabotaging factories and private homes, espousing Marxist determinism as the progress of history yet vehemently opposed to faith and providence, and crafting crudely written songs and cartoons that were of great effect and popularity. All of these incongruities fit in well with Turner's definition of frontier values. The IWW's brazen spirit of frontier ruggedness would make both friends and enemies, primarily amongst both businessmen and labor leaders.

Though Turner's flowery denotation of the West serves as a contemporaneous interpretation of Western culture, it is again Melvyn Dubofsky's article on Western radicalism that makes a more cogent definition. Dubofsky rightly states that the IWW's culture is an amalgamation of the pre-existing radical groups of the West. As Dubofsky states, the IWW was a product of the Populist Movement transitioning to socialism through the evolution of various labor unions, "just as Populism gave way to socialism and the Western Labor Union to the American Labor Union, socialism was to give way to syndicalism and the American Labor Union to the IWW."<sup>20</sup> The IWW traces its history through the Knights of Labor, Western Federation Of Miners (WFM), the Western Labor Union (WLU), and the American Labor Union (ALU).

While the regional radical movements of the WFM, the WLU, and the ALU were undoubtedly the precursors to the IWW's preferred methods of direct action, general strikes, and socialist sympathy, the Knights Of Labor shares the closest organizational characteristics. The Knights Of Labor was founded in 1869 by Uriah Smith Stephens as a

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<sup>20</sup> Melvyn Dubofsky "The Origins Of Working Class Radicalism. 1890-1905" *Labor History* 74, no. 2 (1966) 136

secret society of tailors that probably functioned much like a craft guild. Yet, in these clandestine meetings, a dialogue was fostered that aimed to abolish child labor, an establishment of an eight-hour day, equality of income between the sexes, and promote anti-racism.<sup>21</sup> Stephens was eventually replaced by Terence Powderly, a teetotaling Catholic progressive, who aimed to bring these progressive ideals under the banner of a national union and transform the secret society into a national movement.

Powderly famously crafted a membership requirement that necessitated Knights be “producers”, shunning anyone who did not fit this description, which, in Powderly’s philosophy, were bankers, stockbrokers, lawyers, liquor dealers, and gamblers.<sup>22</sup> This seems to be an early incantation of the IWW’s famed preamble introduction that “the working class and the employing class have nothing in common.” The Knights also adhered to a constitution that held aims such as “The establishment of co-operative institutions, productive and distributive”, “The prohibition of the employment of children”, and “The reduction of the hours of labor to eight per day”.<sup>23</sup> Aiming to be a union that promoted the virtuous creed of “an injury to one, is a concern to all” (which is not far off from the IWW’s later maxim of “an injury to one, is an injury to all”), the Knights’ idealistic unionism would be of great inspiration to the founders of the IWW, Bill Haywood having been a member, and Eugene Debs being an initial supporter.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Bruce Laurie, *Artisans Into Workers: Labor in nineteenth-century America* (Chicago: University Of Illinois Press, 1997) 149

<sup>23</sup> “Constitution Of The Knights Of Labor” *Knights Of Labor* <http://sageamericanhistory.net/gildedage/documents/KofLaborConst.html> (Accessed March 1, 2018)

<sup>24</sup> William D. Haywood, *Bill Haywood’s Book* (New York: International Publishers, 1929) 52  
Eugene V. Debs “The Knights Of Labor” *Locomotive Firemen’s Magazine* 30 no.1 (1889): Accessed January 18, 2018 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/debs/works/1889/890100-debs-knightsoflabor.pdf>

Though an ideological ancestor to the IWW, the Knights' are also associated with music. Robert E. Weir's book *Beyond Labors Veil: The culture of the Knights Of Labor*, discusses the use of song within the organization, "Knights Of Labor music developed along with the Order, and was central to its oral culture during early days in which many Knights were barely literate. Like ritual, music could be memorized and no meeting was complete without several flights into song."<sup>25</sup> These songs consisted of mainly Civil War era ballads re-purposed into songs that lacked much of the vitriol of the IWW's ballads, but did act to unify members in song. The Knights produced the noteworthy and often covered song "Hold The Fort", a reworked Civil War ballad,

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.

Chorus:  
 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.

See our numbers still increasing;  
 Hear the bugle blow.  
 By our union we shall triumph  
 Over every foe.  
 Fierce and long the battle rages  
 But we will not fear.  
 Help will come whene'er it's needed.  
 Cheer, my comrades, cheer.

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<sup>25</sup> Robert E. Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil: The culture of the Knight's of Labor* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) 104

While the song outlived the Knights and became a popular song of later labor movements, Weir is quick to point out that these songs were not performed in public. These songs were solely performed in labor halls, which were secretive, while IWW songs were used in public protests and organizing events.

The IWW also seems to have adapted much of the religious-like qualities of the Knights. The Knights were not officially affiliated with any religion but held a majority Catholic membership and incorporated Mason-like traditions. The initiation ceremony into the Knights was of “high drama”, consisting of a symbolic death from pre-Knighthood and rebirth into Knighthood, secret handshakes, an act of glory to god, the singing of songs, and mysterious chants and code words.<sup>26</sup> Weir interprets this reliance on ritual not as a desire for “costumed drama”, but rather the belief that “Knights Of Labor ritual taught values.”<sup>27</sup> Much like the IWW’s use of ritual and symbolism, the IWW’s culture crafted a value system rooted in its cultural practices—a tradition blatantly borrowed from the Knights. Dubofsky even points out that many of the Western laborers at the time “remained at heart Knights.”<sup>28</sup>

As the power and popularity of the Knights Of Labor waned, a new labor group occupied the vacuum it left. Yet, instead of a national organization born out of the East, a regional union was tailored out of the skeleton of the Knights Of Labor’s presence in the West—The Western Federation Of Miners (WFM) would hold the popular idealism of the Knights’ creed of “unity of all workers” but take it to much more radical levels.

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<sup>26</sup> *Adelphion Kruptos: The Secret Ritual Of The Knights Of Labor* (Philadelphia: Ezra Cook, 1886) *Knights of Labor Miscellaneous Publications on Microfilm, 1885-1900*, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, reel 5466

<sup>27</sup> Robert E. Weir, *Beyond Labor’s Veil*: (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) 104.

<sup>28</sup> Melvyn Dubofsky “The Origins Of Working Class Radicalism. 1890-1905” *Labor History* 74, no. 2 (1966) 136

The WFM was founded in 1893 from a coalition of various miners' unions in and around Montana, Idaho, Colorado, and Utah. IWW historian and member Fred Thompson recalls that the WFM "was frontier unionism", branding it as a radical counter to "back-east absentee ownership" of both mines and unions.<sup>29</sup> The WFM would establish the West as a bastion of radicalism. The open expanse of the West, its comparative lack of metropolitan areas of the East, and its eclectic population of self-reliant opportunists, fostered an arduous culture of resilience.

The initial goals of the WFM were to establish an eight-hour day and a wage increase, but once mine owners began to quell the union's activities, the WFM began to radicalize itself. Emerging as the leader of this radicalized union, Bill Haywood would introduce the concept of collective ownership to the union's strategy, as he declared that mine owner's "did not find the gold, they did not mine the gold, they did not mill the gold, but by some weird alchemy all the gold belonged to them!"<sup>30</sup> Employing the same dynamite they used to bore through mine shafts, miners began to sabotage the properties of both the mines and the mine owners. They were accused of being anarchists, saboteurs, and firebrands, labels that would later be applied to the IWW as well.<sup>31</sup>

It would be this violent use of dynamite that led to the demise of the WFM. *The Austin Statesman* reported the story of Colorado in a "state of anarchy", and the placement of "two-hundred pounds of dynamite" under a railroad platform that killed twelve people in Cripple Creek Colorado, followed by a shootout between soldiers and

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<sup>29</sup> Fred Thompson, *The IWW: Its first seventy years 1905-1975* (Chicago: International Workers Of The World, 1976) 9

<sup>30</sup> William D. Haywood *Bill Haywood's Book* (New York: International Publishers, 1929) 316

<sup>31</sup> Eric L. Clements "Pragmatic Revolutionaries?: Tactics, Ideologies, and the Western Federation Of Miners In the Progressive Era" *Western Historical Quarterly* Vol. 40, No. 4, (2009) 443-460

miners, and a storming of the union's hall.<sup>32</sup> Though it is still unsure whether or not those saboteurs were WFM members or not, the events in Cripple Creek led to the union being blacklisted in virtually all of Colorado. It was then that the leaders of the WFM began to turn towards an idea of expanding their field of view to incorporate all workers; If their values promoting the collective ownership of the means of production was to be realized, they would need to work past their position as a negatively connoted, minority union. A core group of WFM members would do just that, but under the title of a new union.

Splintering from the WFM's failures during their violent strikes, the Western Labor Union (WLU) was formed to create a radical union in the vein of the WFM but expanding its membership to include trades other than mining. Incorporating hotel workers, grocers, laundry workers, and other "unskilled" workers that the American Federation Of Labor (AFL) and WFM would ignore, the WLU would be an experimental attempt to organize a tangible socialist labor movement. Aided in its founding by Eugene V. Debs, he did not wish to necessarily oppose the craft unionism of the AFL. He urged his membership to endorse and commend the "trades-union movement...but stopping there."<sup>33</sup> Its inception was short lived and only reached a peak membership of 43,000 laborers, but its ideals of organizing the unskilled would be a precursor to the founding ideals of the IWW's constitution.

Samuel Gompers' American Federation Of Labor (AFL) was founded in 1886 in the hopes of cultivating a union specifically tailored to the needs of craft workers.

Gompers, a cigar smoking, whiskey drinking, English immigrant, commandeered what

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<sup>32</sup> "Railroad Depot Destroyed By Explosion Of Dynamite" *Austin Statesman* (Austin: TX, June 7, 1904)

<sup>33</sup> Eugene V. Debs "The Western Labor Movement" *International Socialist Review*, 3 no. 5. (1902): Accessed February 6, 2018 <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/spusa/1902/1100-debs-westernlabor.pdf>

would become the largest confederation of labor unions. Though Gompers would associate with the Socialist Party in his early labor days in the United States, he would later earn the ire of his former compatriots. Bruce Laurie's *Artisans Into Workers* rightfully contends that Gompers' AFL "scorned social reform for the here and now, and sought to better conditions in the workplace within the framework of the existing order."<sup>34</sup> Gompers was suspicious of strikes, avoided organizing unskilled labor, actively campaigned against immigration, and kept a careful eye on the labor radicals of the West.

Gompers' suspicions of the labor unions of the West became apparent once the WFM decided to leave the AFL. In an emotionally charged letter to president of the miners Edward Boyce, Gompers ridicules the idea of using strikes as a bargaining tool. He also discusses Boyce's distrust of the East,

"I do not wish to discuss the proposition that 'the men of the East are one hundred years behind their Western brothers.' I do not think so and I think you will admit that the pressure of industrialism and commercialism and the evils resulting from our present false economic conditions are much severer and bear much more heavily upon the workers of the East and the North than in the West."<sup>35</sup>

Gompers ends the letter with a final plea asking Boyce to reconsider the AFL and "unite and solidify the forces of labor of our country and fight".<sup>36</sup> Gompers' letter would be in vain, Boyce criticized Gompers and the AFL of "Fool[ing] away time in adopting

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<sup>34</sup> Bruce Laurie, *Artisans Into Workers* (Chicago: University Of Illinois Press, 1997) 177

<sup>35</sup> Samuel Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers: Volume 4, a national labor movement takes shape 1895-1898* ed. Stuart B. Kaufman, Peter J. Albert, and Grace Palladino. (Chicago: University Of Illinois Press, 1991) 310

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 312

resolutions, indorsing [*sic*] labels and boycotts?”<sup>37</sup> Boyce would leave the AFL and continue radicalizing the WFM, ushering in the advance of Western borne unionism.

The AFL would prove to be much more resilient to the challenges that faced organized labor in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Knights Of Labor, the WLU, and the WLU, would all dwindle into a fading memory, and the WFM would face near extinction. If the radical progress that the WFM produced, and its brand of collective ownership was to survive, *another* drastic reorganization of its membership was needed.

On June 27, 1905 the city of Chicago housed a meeting of the United States’ most affluent socialist and leftist intellectuals in Brand’s Hall. The meeting was called by William “Big Bill” Haywood, the second in command of the Western Federation Of Miners, and joined by leftist luminaries such as Eugene V. Debs, Mother Jones, Lucy Parsons, and Daniel De Leon. The convention lasted for eleven days, during which the constitution of a worldwide union of industrial workers was drafted and an initial ideology was formed. The attendees of the inaugural meeting were searching for a solution to what they perceived as a lack of unionism that aimed to “put the working class in possession of the economic power, the means of life, in control of the machinery of production and distribution, without regard to capitalist masters.”<sup>38</sup> This collection of “Industrial Workers of the World” would be the birth of the largest radical labor movement in American history, and they began setting their radical crosshairs on what they deemed a corrupt capitalist system.

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<sup>37</sup> Edward Boyce “Edward Boyce to Samuel Gompers” In *The Samuel Gompers Papers: Vol 4* ed. Stuart B. Kaufman, Peter J. Albert, and Grace Palladino. (Chicago: University Of Illinois Press, 1991) 314

<sup>38</sup> W.E. McDermott *Minutes Of The Founding Convention Of the Industrial Workers Of The World* ed. William Trautman (New York: Labor News Company, 1905) p45



When the IWW was not calling for the end of the wage system, “dumping the boss off your back”, and defying the clergy, they were accusing the AFL of propagating false consciousness. The IWW’s disdain of the AFL derived from the AFL’s policy of not incorporating “unskilled” workers into their labor ranks. In an announcement in 1912 the *Industrial Worker* charged the AFL with disrespecting non-craft union members, “these non-included men, the A.F. of L. regard as scabs.”<sup>39</sup> The IWW was interested in organizing *all* workers, regardless of craft, creed, gender, and color, an antithetical stance to the AFL’s preferred membership of skilled white men.

The IWW’s preamble sets the platform upon which the IWW would build itself. Beginning with the credo “The working class and the employing class have nothing in common” the IWW preamble shunned any cooperation with its employers. It warns that, “Trade unions [craft unions] aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers,” and that “an injury to one is an injury to all.”<sup>40</sup> In contrast, the Gompers intention for the AFL was arbitration with the employer, attempting to make “come let us talk the matter over” into a motto.<sup>41</sup>

The IWW’s brand of unionization led to the writing of songs that would attempt to encapsulate the spirit of the IWW and reiterate its jarring preamble. One of the earliest attempts in crafting a hymn of the industrial worker was borne out of J.H Walsh’s Overalls Brigade. A Swedish national by the name of E.S. Nelson wrote a song entitled

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<sup>39</sup> *Industrial Worker* (Spokane, Washington) April 6, 1912. *Industrial Worker Microform Collection* Columbia University Microfilm Collection, reel 1

<sup>40</sup> “Preamble To IWW Constitution” IWW Ephemera Collection. PE.044 Box 2, Folder 8. Tamiment Library and Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York NY.

<sup>41</sup> Samuel Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers: Volume 4, a national labor movement takes shape 1895-1898* ed. Stuart B. Kaufman, Peter J. Albert, and Grace Palladino. (Chicago: University Of Illinois Press, 1991) 38

“Workingmen Unite!” to the tune of “Red Wing”. Originally published in October 1908 in the *Industrial Union Bulletin* and advertised as being sung by “the Industrial Union Singing Club”, “Workingmen Unite!” is the earliest example of IWW songwriters attempting to create something of an anthem.<sup>42</sup> With lyrics such as, “Workingmen, unite! We must put up a fight, To make us free from slavery, And capitalistic tyranny; This fight is not in vain, We've got a world to gain. Will you be a fool, a capitalist tool, And serve your enemy?” and a chorus that resounds “Shall we still be slaves and work for wages? It is outrageous--has been for ages; This earth by right belongs to toilers, And not to spoilers of liberty,” the song is an example of themes that would become pervasive in the IWW song catalogue: unionization, obtaining class-consciousness, and overthrowing capitalism.

Though the song was popular, its placement as the Wobbly anthem was usurped by Joe Hill’s “There Is Power In A Union” a few years later. It came even closer to encapsulating the ideals of the IWW, with lines such as “Will you have freedom from wage slavery, Then join in the grand Industrial band” and “there is pow’r, there is pow’r, In a band of workingmen, When they stand hand in hand.”<sup>43</sup> Yet, the IWW would find its most popular anthem in Ralph Chaplin’s “Solidarity Forever” in 1915.

Chaplin was an invaluable member of the IWW as he commandeered most of the organization’s interior administration. An excellent editor, thinker, cartoonist and organizer, he also wrote poetry in his spare time. During his involvement in the 1912 Kanawha coal miner’s strike in West Virginia, he witnessed incredible violence at the

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<sup>42</sup> “Music!” *Industrial Union Bulletin* (Chicago: IL) October 26, 1908 *Industrial Union Bulletin Microfilm Collection* Columbia University Microfilm Collection, reel T-2915

hands of mine operators and miners alike. Though the United Mine Workers won the strike, the violence, death toll, and property destruction left Chaplin disillusioned with the labor movement, he began to feel that the union's struggles were insurmountable.<sup>44</sup>

Taking his frustrations to pen and paper, Chaplin scribbled down one day the maxim "solidarity forever!"<sup>45</sup> Soon after this initial line, a song that summarized the ideological grandeur of the union was fully crafted:

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.

Is there aught we hold in common with the greedy parasite,  
Who would lash us into serfdom and would crush us with his might?  
Is there anything left to us but to organize and fight?  
For the union makes us strong.

Chorus

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

Chorus  
All the world that's owned by idle drones is ours and ours alone.  
We have laid the wide foundations; built it skyward stone by stone.  
It is ours, not to slave in, but to master and to own.  
While the union makes us strong.

Chorus

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<sup>44</sup> Ralph Chaplin "Why I Wrote Solidarity Forever" *The Journal Of The American West* 5 no. 1 (1968) 19

<sup>45</sup> Ralph Chaplin *Wobbly: The rough and tumble story of an American radical* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1948) 168

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.

Chorus

In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded gold,  
 Greater than the might of armies, multiplied a thousand-fold.  
 We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old  
 For the union makes us strong.

Sung to the tune of the “Battle Hymn Of The Republic”/“John Brown’s Body”, it is fitting that Chaplin invoked the Civil War songs of The Union, as Chaplin believed the “labor question” of his day to be a continuation for the fight of individual liberty.<sup>46</sup>

According to Chaplin, the song was “designed to meet the needs of a nonconformist, nonpolitical labor organization that was critical of the crudely divided craft unions of the times and practiced voluntary libertarian teamwork at the point of production to obtain its objectives through the ‘One Big Industrial Union’.”<sup>47</sup> Chaplin hoped the song would invoke the spirit of fraternity amongst IWW members, and inspire laborers under the leadership of “labor fakirs” such as Gompers and the AFL to leave their craft union and join the IWW.

Chaplin says that the first time he heard the word “solidarity” was from the “lips of Eugene Victor Debs”.<sup>48</sup> The IWW was an inclusive union, and “Solidarity Forever” made an important contribution to promoting its strategy of “one big union.” It was sung by the hundreds during the Puget Sound loggers strike of 1917.<sup>49</sup> It was translated into

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<sup>46</sup> Ralph Chaplin “Why I Wrote Solidarity Forever” *The Journal Of The American West* 23

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 24

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 21

Spanish and sung during the Spanish Civil War.<sup>50</sup> It was sung in Australia during the IWW's venture in organizing the harbors of Sydney.<sup>51</sup> Its message of a worker's revolution permeated different cultures and catapulted the IWW into artistic stardom.

Its lyrics perfectly re-state the IWW's preamble, and though the preamble was printed in every edition of the *Industrial Worker*, *Industrialist*, *Industrial Union Bulletin*, *Little Red Songbook*, and most every IWW pamphlet, "Solidarity Forever" was perhaps the most effective medium for disseminating the preamble's message. Its second verse poetically re-confirms the relationship of the employer and the employee in harmony as impossible and promotes the IWW's hope of *all* workers joining together to overturn the ruling class.

"Solidarity Forever" marks the end of IWW songwriters' attempts to melodize the preamble. Most every song following its publishing continued to promote the philosophy of the IWW, but never challenged "Solidarity Forever" as the most important Wobbly song. The IWW faced a massive challenge in both opposing the capitalist system of industry, and attempting to challenge the AFL, the largest and most successful union in history. Cultivating a brand to promote itself would be difficult in a period dominated by "prudential" unionism, and the fear of striking. Yet, through celebrating its Western identity, producing popular songs and ballads, and actively advertising their poetic incantations of their preamble, it was able to make a lasting impression on the working class members of American society.

Happy to oblige in celebrating their reputation as the singing union, the IWW began to investigate a way to use these songs to their advantage. While the union did

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<sup>50</sup> John Greenway *American Folksongs Of Protest* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970) 208

<sup>51</sup> Mark Gregory "Joe Hill Centenary and IWW Songs In Australia" *Labour History* No. 109. (2015)

produce essayists, pamphleteers, and orators of high caliber, it would be their musicians who would have the greatest effect in aiding their fight for industrial unionism and fostering the unique culture of the IWW.

### Hobo Hymnody

“Where they hung the jerk that invented work, in the Big Rock Candy Mountains!”- ‘Haywire Mac’ McClintock

“Hallelujah, I’m A Bum!”- ‘Three-Finger’ Ellis

In 1905, a young William Haywood ventured, uninvited, into a room of cowboys in the Adams Hotel in Denver Colorado.<sup>52</sup> His hope was to enter the hotel, give one of his trademark passionate and fiery speeches, and leave with a posse of, what he called, IWW Bronco Busters and Range Riders.<sup>53</sup> Haywood was not a stranger walking into this parlor of seasoned cowhands. It was only a few years before that “Big Bill” himself was a cowboy, riding the ranges of Colorado, Nevada, and Utah. He knew the ins and outs of life as a cowhand, the dirty and dangerous job of breaking horses, castrating bulls, herding cattle, fence posting, all for menial pay. It was these reasons that partially inspired him to unionize cattle workers and band them together against cattle companies. But it was probably more likely that Haywood was trying use the image of the cowboy as an official symbol of the IWW.

Though Haywood entered the room hoping to be welcomed with open ears and as a comrade, his timing could not have been worse. Animatedly announcing that “For this dangerous work you should get at least fifty dollars a day, and much higher wages than you get now while breaking broncos on the ranch,” he did not initially see the champagne bottles, delicate food, and fine dinnerware.<sup>54</sup> The cowboys were in the middle of a free celebratory party in honor of their hard work. Undoubtedly surprised, Haywood was laughed at and booed off stage.

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<sup>52</sup> “Cowboys Invite Haywood To Go” *Denver Republican* (Colorado) September 5, 1905

<sup>53</sup> William D. Haywood, *Bill Haywood’s Book* (New York: International Publishers 1929) 353

<sup>54</sup> “Cowboys Invite Haywood To Go” *Denver Republican* (Colorado) September 5, 1905

While Haywood was never able to commandeer a unionized outfit of class-conscious cowboys, he was able to appeal to another symbol of the free, masculine, adventurous, and romantic Westerner in the unlikely imagery of the American hobo.

The itinerant worker has been romanticized in the culture of the United States. The laughable and lovable “hobo” trope propelled its way from the boxcars and skid rows of America, to movies, children’s books, cartoons, and Halloween costume. Famed novelist Jack London wrote about his exploits as a hobo in *The Road*, depicting it as a life of adventure, hedonism, and leisure. The word “hobo” is potentially derived from the farmhand occupation of a “hoe-boy” referring to the tool, the railroad greeting of “Ho, boy!”, or the portmanteau of “homeward bound”.<sup>55</sup> The term refers only to itinerant workers, as there is a difference between a hobo, a tramp, and a bum. Dr. Ben Reitman, a radical anarchist and physician to the poor, noted that, “A hobo works and wanders, a tramp dreams and wanders, and the bum drinks and wanders.”<sup>56</sup>

However, the life of the itinerant worker was far from London’s whimsical depiction. Harry “Haywire Mac” McClintock, an IWW affiliated vagabond, mentions that “there were times when I fought like a wildcat or ran like a deer to preserve my independence and my virginity”, how he defended himself with a “big barlow knife”, and his injuries from being thrown from moving trains.<sup>57</sup> Itinerant workers often worked physically demanding jobs for meager wages, were frequently arrested on charges of vagrancy, were mostly shunned from communities, and were in constant threat of violence from state police, train operators, and other itinerants. Itinerant workers were

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<sup>55</sup> Todd Depastino, *Citizen Hobo: How a century of homelessness shaped America* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2003) 65

<sup>56</sup> Nels Anderson, *The Hobo: The sociology of the homeless man* (Whitefish: Literary Licensing, 1923) 21

<sup>57</sup> John Greenway, *American Folksongs Of Protest* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970) 201



almost entirely endemic to the Western United States. Mark Wyman discusses this phenomenon in his book *Hoboes: Bindlestiffs, Fruit Tramps, And The Harvesting Of The West*, citing the massive expanse of the West as a problematic issue for a reliable source of labor in the region. Wyman propounds that, while the Eastern and Midwestern farmers were able to rely on their families, neighbors, and friends to gather their crops when harvest time came around, farms in the West were often massive, remote, and dependent on whatever labor showed up to work.<sup>58</sup>

Todd Depastino, in “Citizen Hobo: How a century of homelessness shaped America”, also invokes the myth of Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier. Though the frontier was officially closed, Depastino argues that a “wageworker’s frontier” was opening. Depastino remarks that itinerant workers in the West were apt to self-identify within genres of race, ethnicity, gender, and region. While the majority of itinerants were White men, there existed a community of minority itinerants mainly of Filipino, Mexican, and Chinese descent.<sup>59</sup> In addition, though there are few accounts of female itinerants during this era, women did occasionally employ themselves through migratory labor but, as Depastino points out, were more often constrained to the era’s dominating social norm of the placement of women in the domestic status of a homemaker.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Mark Wyman, *Bindlestiffs, fruit tramps, and the harvesting of the West* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010) 5

<sup>59</sup> Todd Depastino, *Citizen Hobo* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2003) 178

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 26

However, the IWW began to create a culture and identity of the itinerant worker that they hoped would redirect perceptions of itinerant workers. They hoped to unite itinerant workers under the identity of class rather than gender, ethnicity, or religion, and hoped to change the identity of the itinerant worker as lazy, dangerous, roaming vagabonds, into masculine, pioneering, intellectual “hoboes”. Historian Tobias Higbie writes extensively about this phenomenon in his book *Indispensable Outcasts*. Higbie



argues that the definition of identity for the migratory worker changed once the IWW nurtured their culture of defiance.<sup>61</sup> Higbie contends that radicals attempted to cast away the perceptions of the migrant worker as social pariahs through their cartoons, speeches, and memoirs.<sup>62</sup> The IWW often depicted itinerant workers as masculine, toughened, and muscular men, an attempt to pair these workers with positive connotations of the era.

In a 1910 cartoon published on the front page of *Workingman's Paper*, and passed around in prints, a “Blanket Stiff” is depicted in front of a private property sign. A prose poem follows, that explains how he built the road that he must wander on, hungry, tired,

<sup>61</sup> Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo works and community in the American Midwest 1880-1930* (Chicago: University Of Illinois Press, 2003) 20

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 193-195

and constantly looking for work, and lamenting why in “hell” he built the road.<sup>63</sup> It is images like these that Higbie is referring to, and though they helped portray the itinerant worker as a victim of the capitalist system, they functioned as a propaganda tool aimed at a condemning society. It would be the songs of the “modern blanket stiff” that would act as the organizing tool for the migrants of the West.

The IWW was keen on utilizing the jargon of the itinerant worker. On the one hand it ensured the itinerant worker that the IWW was its ally and equal, on the other hand it promoted an exoticism that intrigued and amused the non-initiated. In Marjorie t'Hart's book *Humor And Social Protest*, she writes that, in the early 1900s, protest was often more accepted if veiled in humor. She postulates that the IWW was simultaneously laughing *with* the militant working class while laughing *at* the ruling class. t'Hart also argues that the source for this unique comedy of the IWW was born out of the hobo jungles that dotted Western states.<sup>64</sup>

There is no clear consensus of how many itinerant workers were in the West during this period, though the industries that relied on them—logging, farming, canning, harvesting, oil drilling, mining—employed them by the thousands.<sup>65</sup> Since itinerants filled most of the industrial jobs in the West, the IWW viewed these workers as the key to achieving one of their ideological goals, shutting down the means of production through the individual power of the workingman. The IWW's rank and file began to be populated by itinerant workers, as the IWW was the only union that would include them, as the AFL mostly ignored the plights of “unskilled”, non-craft laborers.

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<sup>63</sup> *Workingman's Paper* (Washington) April 16, 1910. University of Washington Labor Archives Microfilm, reel A-2663

<sup>64</sup> Marjorie t'Hart *Humor And Social Protest* (Cambridge: University Press, 2011) 38-41

<sup>65</sup> Mark Wyman, *Hoboes* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010) 6-7

In April of 1908, during the early days of the IWW's presence in Spokane, an article appeared in *The Industrial Worker* about the development of a new IWW lodge. Its author, J.H. Walsh, called attention to the lack of jobs in the Western states. Though a lack of work meant a lack of income, Walsh describes the idle men in Spokane "have nothing to do but study the question, compose poetry, and word up songs for old tunes."<sup>66</sup> Walsh's article includes the lyrics to one of these new songs, a parody of a popular hymn entitled "Revive Us Again". Walsh finds hope in the new song's lyrics, as well as admiration for the musicians in his lodge, "Among the IWW membership there are a few good members as well as jaw smiths, and their genius has been expressed in the following composition performed at street meetings as well as the hall."<sup>67</sup> The finished product of such "genius" was a song entitled "Hallelujah, I'm A Bum!"

As Walsh notes, "This may not be scientifically revolutionary as some would like." Containing lyrics such as "Hallelujah I'm a bum!/Hallelujah bum again!/ Hallelujah give us a handout to revive us again", the song was not exactly a sophisticated ballad of the workingman such as "The International" or "The Red Flag", but its audience was not the urban factory worker of New York, Lowell, or Chicago—The song was written for-and-by the itinerant workers of the West.

"Hallelujah I'm a Bum!" has a complicated and ambiguous history that lends itself more to folklore and mythology than actual fact. While the version that the IWW sang contains lyrics undoubtedly original, its author, a self-proclaimed hobo by the name of Harry "Haywire Mac" McClintock, probably borrowed the song from a similar popular tune of the late 1800s. Folklorist John Greenway, in his book *American Folk*

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<sup>66</sup> J.H. Walsh "Developments At Spokane" *Industrial Union Bulletin* (Washington) April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1908

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

*Songs Of Protest*, interviews McClintock in length. According to McClintock he penned the song by parodying the gospel hymn “Revive Us Again”, replacing the religious lyrics praising Jesus with lyrics that praised a life of vagrancy. He claims to have written the song while a young teen to perform at army camps for troops being mustered for the Spanish-American War.

Though a doubtful claim, the penmanship of the IWW version of the song was probably McClintock’s work and the union credited it as such. The song would become widely popular within the IWW’s ranks and file and would become the unofficial anthem of the union and a rallying cry for the itinerant worker. Yet the IWW press seemed to be uncomfortable with the songs message of embracing the lifestyle of a “bum”.<sup>68</sup> In an authorless *Industrial Worker* article from 1912, an argument is made that the song is a work of satire and sarcasm. It argues that the “master class” labels IWW workers as tramps, vagabonds, hoboes, and bums, and that real revolutionists “accept the epithets hurled at them by their traducers” as a way to “boomerang” the insult back at them.<sup>69</sup> The IWW was interested in gaining the support of one of the largest labor groups in the West, but was still cautious in associating with the negative image that the public associated them with.

The song was initially sung as an anthem for a group of hoboes that rode train cars from Portland to Chicago in 1908. Comically self-ascribed as the “Overalls Brigade”, a group of IWW affiliated hoboes eager to preach the spirit of revolutionary

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<sup>68</sup> There is no official claim by the IWW that “Hallelujah, I’m A Bum!” is the anthem of the union, though IWW historians, musicians, and folklorists have ascribed it as such. Among them Franklin Rosemont, Carl Sandburg, Pete Seeger, Utah Phillips, Alan Lomax, and George Milburn.

<sup>69</sup> *Industrial Worker* (Spokane: Washington) May 1, 1912

<https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v4n06-w162-may-01-1912-IW.pdf>

unionism on their way to the IWW's Chicago convention. J.H. Walsh, a prominent Wobbly orator in Spokane, organized a gang of about thirty hoboes, dressed them in "black overalls and jumpers, black shirts and red ties," and armed them with IWW buttons on their lapels and a *Little Red Songbook* in their pockets.<sup>70</sup>

Walsh organized this Overalls Brigade to protest the perceived Socialist Party takeover of the union. Daniel De Leon, a Columbia University educated Marxist theoretician, and his Socialist Labor Party (SLP) was poised to make a de facto takeover of the IWW. De Leon and his SLP were critical of itinerant IWW members, proclaiming that they were too crude to understand the "civilized" methods of Industrial Unionism. In support of this power play, fellow SLP member Eugene V. Debs commandeered a locomotive called "The Red Special" to ride to Chicago, giving speeches and promoting the tenets of socialism.

Walsh was eager to band together a group who would represent these "crude" itinerants of the West, and in mocking Debs' "Red Special", took off on the five-week journey to Chicago. Their aim was to promote the ideals of syndicalism instead of socialism, which for this faction of the IWW, meant an absence of political involvement and focused more on direct action in the workplace. The Overalls Brigade slept in "hobo jungles" or itinerant labor encampments, sang songs, provided free food for anyone interested, handed out lyrics, brought over 160 pounds of IWW literature, and sold memberships and songbooks. Walsh's account of the trip recounts singing against the din of Salvation Army bands and putting them "on the bum", and in every leaving a "red

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<sup>70</sup> J.H. Walsh "IWW Red Special Overall Brigade" *Industrial Union Bulletin* (Spokane: Washington) September 19, 1908 *Industrial Union Bulletin Microfilm Collection* Columbia University Microform Library, reel T-2915

streak” in every “jungle” through the singing of songs. They sold over \$175 of literature and \$200 worth of songbooks, roughly \$10,000 dollars in total in today’s value.<sup>71</sup>

Their presence at the convention was duly noted. They hassled De Leon throughout the affair, questioning his credentials, creating disturbances when he spoke, and eventually running him and the SLP out of the IWW altogether.<sup>72</sup> This expulsion made it official; the IWW would be a non-political organization of direct action run by Westerners. A train of overall clad hoboes “bummed” their way from Portland to Chicago, originated the IWW’s musical tradition, and effectively took over the union.

The IWW as a whole eventually fully embraced the itinerant worker due to the desire to increase union membership, the popularity of their songs, and, perhaps most importantly, the itinerant worker’s ability to travel throughout the West and spread the doctrine of industrial unionism. The small size, cheap price, and mass publishing of *The Little Red Songbook* meant that itinerants throughout the West could easily pocket it, learn its contents, and pass it around the “jungles”, or encampments of fellow itinerant workers.

Songs featuring the exploits of itinerant workers became immensely popular, and a romantic depiction of the American hobo was formulated. Within the IWW, no-name vagabond musicians became patronized heroes of the American West. Lyricists such as Joe Hill, Harry McClintock, Jim Seymour, and, the more colorfully named, T-Bone Slim, J.H.B. “The Rambler”, and “The Wooden Shoe Kid”, became celebrities among the radical migrant workers of the West.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Melvin Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A history of the Industrial Workers Of The World* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969) 137

T-Bone Slim is perhaps the best-known “Hobo” songwriter of the IWW, and though Joe Hill fits the description of the IWW’s hobo image as well, he is best remembered as a martyr. T-Bone Slim’s characteristically cryptic life is efficiently pieced together in Franklin Rosemont’s introduction to *Juice Is Stranger Than Fiction: Selected writings of T-Bone Slim*, which serves as a useful biography. T-Bone Slim, born Matti Valentinpoika Huhta in Ashtabula Ohio to Finnish immigrants, was the IWW’s perfect mascot for their rank and file—A quiet, solitary, working man, who was both intellectually well read in radical literature, and creatively artistic in his poems, songs, and stories.<sup>73</sup>

Of his published work, “The Mysteries Of A Hobo’s Life” is his most well known song. Published in the seventeenth edition of *The Little Red Songbook* in 1920, the song tells the, perhaps autobiographical, tale of a worker who leaves his job, unravels the “mysteries of a hobo’s life”, finds the IWW, and proclaims, “To hell with the job I left behind me”.<sup>74</sup> The song builds upon McClintock’s “Hallelujah, I’m A Bum!” and as Higbie states, cultivates the spirit of defiance.

As Joe Hill’s life was caricatured into a heroic narrative for the injustices of the capitalist system, T-Bone Slim was crafted into a hero for itinerant workers. Unlike Hill, there is no known photo of him, no known documents such as birth certificate, death certificate, or membership documents, and no contact with union leadership. His life, as remembered by IWW members, was full of myth-like anecdotes. T-Bone Slim could supposedly go weeks without food, read entire libraries of books, was a genius among

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<sup>73</sup> Terry “T-Bone Slim” Huhta *Juice is stranger than friction: Selected writings of T-Bone Slim* ed. Franklin Rosemont (Chicago: C.H. Kerr, 1992) 7-9



workingmen, was alarmingly quiet, and died a folk hero's death, drowned in the Hudson River, and some IWW members contend that T-Bone Slim never existed at all.<sup>7576</sup>

Whoever Matti "T-Bone Slim" Huhta was, his effect in the union's appeal to itinerant workers was massive. His songs were sung in hobo jungles, his lyrics were scribbled on boxcar walls, and whatever recent his recent work in the *Industrial Union Bulletin* was, was discussed in length.<sup>77</sup> T-Bone Slim's corpus of work comments on almost every facet of IWW ideology. He ridicules religion and moralists, "No, we are not interested in the 'moral plight.' No, we are not concerned about the 'immoral plight.'"<sup>78</sup> He discusses the place of women within the union, "We don't give a damn whether girls are pure or impure. We want to know if they are getting the full value of their toil."<sup>79</sup> He also contributed memorable quips such as "only the poor break laws—the rich evade them."<sup>80</sup> Most importantly, T-Bone Slim gave a voice to the itinerant worker within the IWW. Though J.H. Walsh's Overalls Brigade was able to wrest power away from De Leon's SLP, they ceded leadership to William Haywood to represent them. Actual hoboes were lacking in the IWW's leadership positions.

The IWW successfully capitalized off of their "singing socialists" misnomer and celebrated the songs, poems, and artwork of their lowliest members. The *Little Red*

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<sup>75</sup> Guy B. Askew "Reminiscences of T-Bone Slim" *Rebel Worker* (Chicago: IL) January 7, 1967

<sup>76</sup> "T-Bone Slim The Humorist Passes Away" *Industrial Worker* (Chicago: IL) October 15, 1942 In folk tradition rivers are usually regarded as spiritual entities that can symbolize both birth and death. In the bible, Moses is found as a baby floating in the Nile River. The river Styx is the barrier one must cross before entering Hades. The dual symbolism of rivers is prevalent in American folklore, and Matti Huhta's death on the Hudson adds a mythological twist to his untimely death.

<sup>77</sup> C. L. Decaux and Carl Cowl, *The Living Spirit Of The Wobblies*. (New York: International Publishers, 1978) 17

<sup>78</sup> Terry "T-Bone Slim" Huhta, "Uncommon Sense" in *Juice Is Stranger Than Friction* (Chicago: C.H. Kerr, 1992) 154

<sup>79</sup> Terry "T-Bone Slim" Huhta, "Rights Versus Plights" in *Juice Is Stranger Than Friction* (Chicago: C.H. Kerr, 1992) 5

<sup>80</sup> Terry "T-Bone Slim" Huhta, "Uncommon Sense" in *Juice Is Stranger Than Friction* (Chicago: C.H. Kerr, 1992) 156

*Songbook* was not just an organizational tool that criticized the clergy, promoted the ideals of the IWW preamble, and aided in raising additional funds, it also cultivated an identity and culture for the itinerant worker. Before the IWW, the itinerant worker was a pariah in the West, a virtual outcast and scapegoat for the ills of society, but after the IWW was formed, their perception in society changed. The itinerant worker was celebrated by the IWW and fashioned into a hero and depicted as the embodiment of the American West. In return, the itinerant worker penned the union's most famous songs, spread the doctrine of the union to all corners of the United States, answered the union's call for strike help, and personified the spirit of the union.

## Preachers And Slaves

“Work and Pray, live on hay  
You'll get pie in the sky when you die”- Joe Hill<sup>81</sup>

“I would not be a Moses to lead you into the Promised Land, because if I could lead you into it, someone else could lead you out of it”-Eugene V. Debs<sup>82</sup>

“Brewers on strike in Los Angeles!” “Fake Industrial Workers In Great Falls”  
“Our Fellow Workers, Preston And Smith, Are In Jail!” These are the headlines printed in bold that appeared in the IWW’s weekly newspaper *Industrial Worker* on June 11, 1910. The union’s weekly paper reported on the news of not only the state of labor affairs in the US, but international affairs of fellow workers in other countries. This particular day’s paper was rife with content concerning the numerous confrontations the union was facing at the time, from small strikes in small-scale industries, to a growing free speech fight in Washington State, a reader of the *Industrial Worker* on June 11, 1910 may have missed the small advertisement for “I.W.W. Song Books” on its IWW publication announcement section. Touting “classic songs of the revolution and the songs of the modern blanket stiff” the advertising price of purchasing such a pamphlet was ten cents.<sup>83</sup> While the *Little Red Songbook* ‘s origin dates further back to late 1909, this small announcement is the first time the book was advertised and introduced to workers across the nation.

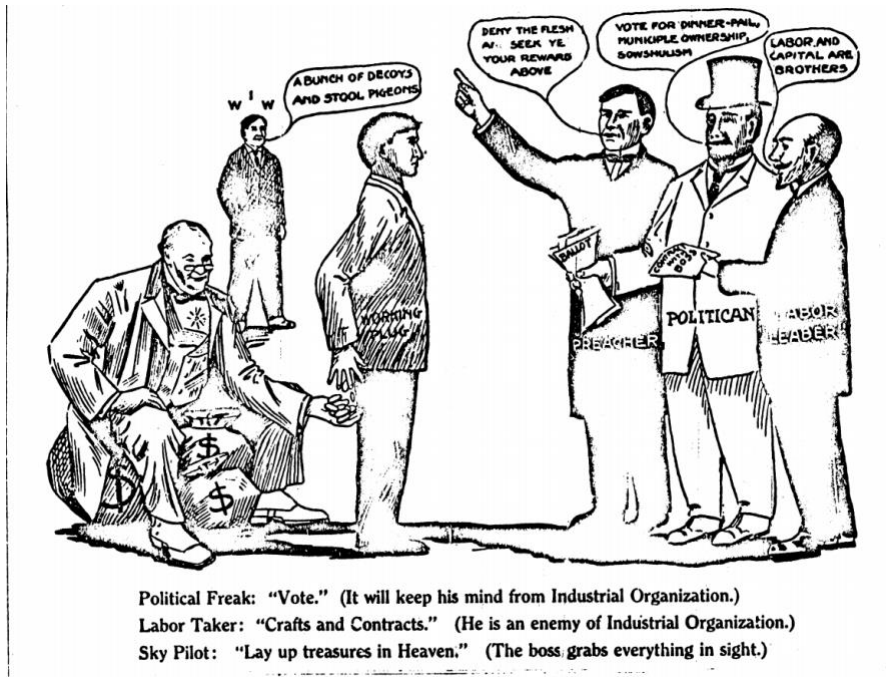
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<sup>81</sup> Joe Hill “Preacher And The Slave” in *The Big Red Songbook* (London: Pluto Press, 1981) 143

<sup>82</sup> Ray Ginger, *The Bending Cross: a biography of Eugene Victor Debs* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1949) 244

<sup>83</sup> *The Industrial Worker* June 11, 1910. Marxist International Archive Online. <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v2n12-w64-jun-11-1910-IW.pdf> Accessed January 6, 2017.

It is fitting then that, in the June 11, 1910 edition of the *Industrial Worker*, the very same issue that advertised the LRS for the first time, a cartoon appeared which foreshadowed the LRS's intended usage.



The cartoon depicts a "Political Freak" a "Labor Taker" and a "Sky Pilot" or priest, deceiving a worker with voting, "crafts and contracts", and "treasures in heaven", while a boss is quietly emptying his pockets. To the IWW a triple threat of religion, rival unions, and politicians, served only to keep the working classes unaware of their position as "toiling classes."<sup>84</sup>

While the IWW was unapologetically anti-capitalist, their relationship with religion is much more muddled. It criticized religion, but simultaneously acted as an ersatz "religion" in many ways. As by Donald E. Winters Jr. argues in *The Soul Of The Wobblies*, though criticizing religion, the IWW is in fact "religious" itself. Winters

<sup>84</sup> "Preamble To IWW Constitution" IWW Ephemera Collection. PE.044 Box 2, Folder 8. Tamiment Library and Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York NY.

defines a wobbly religion as “a system of beliefs and symbols which seeks to develop in the working class a sense of solidarity and class consciousness, and a motivation to engage in a class struggle against the evil force of capitalism toward the end of creating a new order a ‘commonwealth of toil’ in the shell of the old.”<sup>85</sup> Winters postulates that the IWW gained its membership through a religious aesthetic, one that promised the working class a centralized “home”, a commonwealth of labor. Winters claims the IWW adapted the protestant structure of “revivalist organizing”, complete with songs, poetry, “sermon”, and revivalist condemnation of a devil, which, in this case, is the ruling class.

While the official constitution of the IWW is not vociferously anti-religious, its membership was not silent regarding religion, did not equate labor activism to Christ, and did not couple their policy platform with Christian sentiment. George N. Falconer, a wobbly orator, published his opinions on the matter in the *Industrial Worker*, “Religion is no more a private matter than is politics. If religion is altogether good it is in no danger from discussion or criticism. If it in any way hinders mental or moral progress or tends to block the march of evolution, it should be scrapped like any other useless antique.”<sup>86</sup> Eugene V. Debs, in an anti-war speech given in 1918, states that, “In every age the pulpit has been on the side of the rulers and not on the side of the people. That is one reason why the preachers so fiercely denounce the I.W.W.” While the IWW did not contain official bylaw explicitly stating an opposition to religion, the de facto stance was critical of creed. Yet, simultaneously, Wobblies were partial to Jesus Christ as a symbol of a redemptive workingman. This comparison is not too hard to rationalize; A carpenter, a

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<sup>85</sup> Donald E. Winters Jr., *The Soul Of The Wobblies: The I.W.W., religion and the American culture in the Progressive Era, 1905-1917*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985) 7-11

<sup>86</sup> George N. Falconer *The Industrial Worker* (Spokane, Washington) Feb. 3 1917 PE.044 Box 2, Folder 10. Tamiment Library and Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York Ny.

critic of the rich, and champion of the poor, many Wobblies viewed the teachings of Jesus in a positive light.

In one instance of the appearance of Jesus as a proletarian champion, the Wobblies of the Pacific Northwest crowned their organizing leader as the “Jesus of Nazareth of the lumberjacks of the Northwest”, during his early years of his selfless dedication to the local IWW chapter.<sup>87</sup> In an anonymously penned “Outcast’s Prayer” that appeared in the *Industrial Worker* in 1921, the author gives the solemn invocation of ‘Scissor Bill’, a racist and anti-union character that Joe Hill previously introduced in song in 1913, who asks the lord for aid against the “employment sharks”, and asks for mercy on the “blanket stiffs.” “Jesus” answers back as “a Rebel called Jerusalem Slim”, angrily condemns Scissor Bill as a “fool for Henry Ford” and refuses to help someone who “won’t help himself!”<sup>88</sup> In these instances Jesus is the personification of the spirit of the IWW.

To complicate matters more, in an IWW pamphlet from 1912 answering “popular questions regarding industrial unionism”, a question appears asking “is the IWW anti-religious?” The official IWW response goes as follows: “No. It has no religious bias and it does not interfere with the religious belief of any member. Such beliefs are part of the freedom of men and the IWW strives to extend freedom, never to lessen it.” A curt answer that contradicts most of what the IWW was attempting to promote with its music.

Songbooks and the promotion of music as an organizing tool has its beginnings in the 1910 climax of the Spokane Free Speech Fight. In 1908 a city ordinance was passed in Spokane Washington, barring public speaking. This ordinance was specifically

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<sup>87</sup> Joyce Kornbluh *Rebel Voices: An IWW anthology* (Chicago: PM Press, 2011) 351

<sup>88</sup> Anonymous “The Outcasts Prayer” *The Industrial Worker* (Spokane: Washington) July 23, 1921

targeted towards an IWW campaign whose strategy was sending orators to speak on soapboxes and decry the practice of job selling, where a job agency sells job positions to unemployed men, and often bankrupting them in the process. Spokane's IWW lodge began a plan to "pack" the prisons of the city. John Panzer, an IWW member present at the protests, recalls, "the plan was to call for volunteers to speak on the streets in violation of the city ordinance. If you were arrested, we would go to jail until all the jails were full."<sup>89</sup>

*The Industrial Worker* put out an announcement in its February 26 edition of 1910, calling for 5,000 men and women who believe in "freedom of speech, press, and public assemblage" to be present in Spokane to break the "homemade law" of barring public speaking.<sup>90</sup> The plan worked and the IWW announced their victory in Spokane on March 12<sup>th</sup> 1910. The police would no longer arrest IWW speakers, they returned what documents they seized from the Local, and they removed police presence from IWW meetings.<sup>91</sup> Though the police would relent from persecuting the IWW Spokane Local's constitutional rights, the IWW would encounter a new opponent in organizing.

The Spokane Free Speech Fight is the first major instance of a clash between the IWW and religion. To counter IWW soapboxing, a Salvation Army band would often arrive to drown out the oration with religious hymns. It was in these encounters with the Salvation Army that Spokane IWW organizer J.H. Walsh decided to form an IWW band,

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<sup>89</sup> John Panzer "The Spokane Free Speech Fight" *The Writers Group Journal* September 1959.

<sup>90</sup> "Call To Arms!" *The Industrial Worker* February 26, 1910. *Industrial Worker Microform Collection* Columbia University Microform Library. Reel-FN 49

<sup>91</sup> "Spokane Settled" *The Industrial Worker* March 12<sup>th</sup> 1910. *Industrial Worker Microform Collection* Columbia University Microform Library. Reel-FN 49

formulate their own brand of music, and print their songs on small index size cards.<sup>92</sup> One of the members of this “IWW Band” that Walsh put together was the young self-ascribed hobo Harry “Haywire Mac” McClintock, the same McClintock who claimed to pen “Hallelujah! I’m A Bum”. A drifter who worked numerous jobs in the West and would later go on to pen the 1930’s hit “Big Rock Candy Mountain”, his first claim to fame was being the first person to perform a radically anti-religious song based on a Salvation Army Hymn...the perfect “answer-back” to the encroaching Salvation Army bands. The song was entitled “Preacher And The Slave” and was written by an IWW member from San Pedro California. According to McClintock, the song was sent to the Spokane Local and was set to the tune of the hymn “In The Sweet By And By”, and instantly became a popularly requested song. McClintock claims to have first performed it in Portland Oregon in a solidarity protest in support of Spokane, and completely sold out of the song cards that they were printed on within a day.<sup>93</sup>

The song became incredibly popular and would be the first of a slew of songs parodying Salvation Army Hymns and criticizing organized religion, and would be the first of many songs by Joe Hill, the IWW’s soon to be most famous member. Joe Hill is the most famous of Wobbly songwriters, poets, and cartoonists, and a man whose life remains mostly a mystery to modern historians. Hill’s song would mark the beginning of the expansion of the IWW’s crosshairs to not just include capitalists, politicians, and craft unionists, but also organized religion.

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<sup>92</sup> Harry K. McClintock and Sam Eskin. “Long Haired Preachers (Preacher And The Slave)”, recorded 1953, track 3 on *Haywire Mac*, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. Compact disc

<sup>93</sup> Ibid



Joel Emmanuel Hägglund was born in Gävle Sweden on October 7, 1879. Young Joel Hägglund was brought up in a family of eleven, that was extremely devout to Christianity, completely mum on political debate, but incredibly dedicated to music. The Hägglund household contained a piano, an organ, violins, guitars, and accordions, all of which Joel learned to play “expertly”.<sup>94</sup> The family was, by all accounts, quite poor and most of the boys quit school to work in various industries after the passing of the patriarch Olaf Hägglund. Joel worked in a rope factory at the age of ten, and shortly after worked as a fireman in a bathhouse, and then a fireman in a lumber yard.<sup>95</sup> Joel worked from age ten until the age of twenty-three when his mother Margritha died. It was her passing that unraveled the seemingly tight knit family, and sent Joel and his older brother Paul aboard a ship to the United States.

Joel Hägglund arrived in New York City in the fall of 1902, reportedly working a menial job cleaning spittoons in a Bowery saloon, and occasionally playing piano for saloon patrons. It was during his time in New York City that Joel Hägglund began to change his name to “Americanize” his patronymic—Joel Hägglund became Joel Hillstrom, and eventually the infamous Joe Hill.<sup>96</sup> Within a year, Joe and his brother Paul parted ways to search for better employment opportunities, Paul took a job on the railroads, while Joe headed west. Joe became an itinerant worker, finding employment on wheat farms, herding cattle in Wyoming, mining in the Colorado Rockies, and wandering through various logging camps and sawmills.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Gibbs M. Smith, *Labor Martyr Joe Hill* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1969) 44

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> William Adler, *The Man Who Never Died: The Life, Times, And Legacy Of Joe Hill* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012) 49

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 287

Hill's song "The Preacher And The Slave" contains a message of contempt for organized religion that simply did not exist in labor music before. With lyrics humorously calling the Salvation Army the "Starvation Army", and lines about giving money to Jesus while starving on earth, to its memorable catchphrase of a promised "pie in the sky", the song was a direct attack on the legitimacy of the Salvation Army and other Social Gospel groups. Once the popularity of Hill's song grew, so did admonishing organized religion.

On February 9, 1912, a few months after Hill's song was officially published in the *Little Red Songbook*, a story appeared in the IWW's publishing department targeting a new enemy, the Catholic Church. The Militia Of Christ, an anti-socialist secret society of American Federation Of Labor (AFL) members, were perceived as direct enemies to the IWW, and puppets of both the AFL and the "great international whore" of the Catholic Church.<sup>98</sup> The IWW would then go on to publish the names and locations of members of the Militia Of Christ, in a heinous act of intimidation.<sup>99</sup> New poems were published by the IWW that had similar messages to "The Preacher And The Slave". "The Coming Day" by WM Roberts proclaims "we shall bow our heads no longer to the god of foolish creed" and to "cast aside all creeds and doctrines that debauch the human mind."<sup>100</sup> Hill himself wrote a new song, "Casey Jones" depicting a union scab, or strikebreaker, who ends up in heaven only to find St. Peter praising him for his work and informing him he can "scab the angels anytime he likes."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> "Militia Of Christ" *Industrial Worker* (Spokane: Washington) February 22, 1912PE.044 Box 1, Folder 10. Tamiment Library and Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York NY.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid

<sup>100</sup> W.M. Roberts "The Coming Day" *The Industrial Worker* February 9, 1912. *Industrial Worker Microform Collection* Columbia University Microform Library, reel T-2095

These new attacks on the clergy are present only after Hill's "Preacher And the Slave" became a Wobbly favorite, though this song alone did not direct a new foray into religious criticism. Hill was only reacting to the problems facing the IWW, and, like any good musician hopes to do, was able to capture a common issue and reinterpret it into a song that would appeal to any Wobbly. Hill first encountered the Salvation Army in the shantytowns of San Pedro California, and, having already dealt with their preaching first hand, understood the annoyance the Spokane IWW branch felt when dealing with them.

Although it was not Hill alone who pushed the IWW into making attacks on religious groups, it would be Hill alone who the IWW would chose to canonize as their own Saint of The Working Man. In 1914 he was arrested on the charge of killing a grocery store owner in Salt Lake City Utah without much evidence to suggest he did so. Though the world may never know if Hill was innocent or guilty, his arrest and eventual execution would be triumphantly promoted by the IWW as an act of martyrdom by their most famous member.

On November 25<sup>th</sup> Thanksgiving day 1915, ten thousand "singing socialists" took to the streets of Chicago to celebrate and mourn the life and influence of the Industrial Workers of The World's (IWW) newly christened martyr Joe Hill. Notified by the reportedly hundreds of handbills in "a dozen languages", Joe Hill's funeral service showed the world just how far his doctrine of worker solidarity flowed.<sup>102</sup> Swedes, Russians, Hungarians, Italians, Germans, Lithuanians, Polish, were all present at the commemoration of Hill's casket. Though Hill's famous last wishes of "don't mourn organize" were unfulfilled that day by the thousands of mourners, the powerful display of

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<sup>102</sup> O.N. Hilton, "Funeral Oration in Memoriam of Joe Hill" *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Illinois) November 25, 1915. Accessed 8/4/2017 <http://chicagotribune.newspapers.com/image/29007687/?terms=joe+hill+funeral>

solidarity along racial, religious, and class lines cemented atheist Joe Hill as the paradoxical saint of the working man.

According to Archie Green in his folkloric account of the labor movement *Wobblies, Pile Butts, And Other Heroes* states “the IWW did not want Joe Hill to be remembered as a religious icon, a sanctified or mythological figure.”<sup>103</sup> Yet this does not seem to be the case. As Donald Winters posits in *Soul Of The Wobblies*, “religious sensibility and imagery helped mobilize the radical element of the labor movement in a way that guarantees the Wobblies a permanent and important place in American labor lore.”<sup>104</sup> The IWW greatly capitalized on Joe Hill’s death as an organizational strategy, and Hill played along. The IWW effectively delegitimized the idols of religious zealotry propagated by entities such as the Salvation Army and the Catholic Church, and in turn created their own.

While in jail, Hill repeatedly refused to meet with the customary minister appointed to him in prison, claiming to have “worked out a theory of religion for himself” and did not need a minister.<sup>105</sup> He penned a letter to Bill Haywood asking to call off the fundraising for his bail and protests of his execution, “We cannot let the whole organization go bankrupt just on the account of one individual,” and signing off with his now famous attribute of “don’t mourn organize!”<sup>106</sup> He served as his own attorney in an appeal case and refused to say if he was guilty or innocent. In affect, Hill knew he was

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<sup>103</sup> Archie Green, *Wobblies, Pile Butts, And Other Heroes* (Chicago: University Of Illinois Press, 1993) 80

<sup>104</sup> Donald E. Winters, *Soul Of The Wobblies* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985) 131

<sup>105</sup> Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “Joe Hill Case Materials” TAM.529 Box 1 “Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Hill case clippings scrapbook” File 9

<sup>106</sup> Joe Hill, “Letter to Big Bill Haywood” in Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “Joe Hill Case Materials” TAM.529 Box 1 “Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Hill case clippings scrapbook” File 9

doomed to die regardless of evidence proving his innocence, and he chose, as he put it, to “live like an artist, die like an artist.”<sup>107</sup>

Hill’s official IWW funeral was not bereft of symbolism. According to the funeral program, “Preacher And The Slave” would be sung in unison, followed by orations of various IWW luminaries. Speaker Frank Evers proclaimed that “I don’t think Joe Hill would want us to shed any tears over him. He was imbued with our spirit. What we must do when we go away from here is defy capitalism to the last.”<sup>108</sup> Funeral patrons wore ribbons reading “Joe Hill: Martyr to the great cause”.<sup>109</sup> Oscar Larson, a Swede who spoke on behalf of Hill’s contributions to the Swedish people, attacked the Mormon Church in proclaiming Utah as their celestial Zion, but allowing an innocent man to get shot.<sup>110</sup> Hill’s ashes were packaged in 600 envelopes and spread throughout the world...excepting Utah, which was the only place Hill did not want his remains to be.<sup>111</sup>

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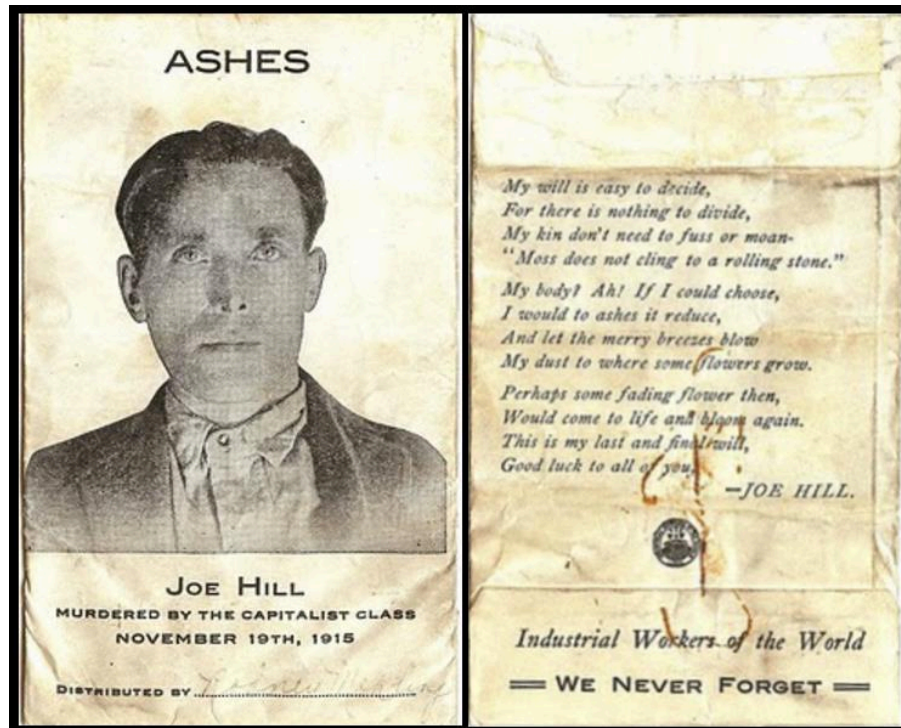
<sup>107</sup> “The Funeral Of Joe Hill” in Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “Joe Hill Case Materials” TAM.529 Box 1 “Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Hill case clippings scrapbook” File 9

<sup>108</sup> Ibid

<sup>109</sup> Ibid

<sup>110</sup> “Attack Of Mormon Church” in Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “Joe Hill Case Materials” TAM.529 Box 1 “Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Hill case clippings scrapbook” File 9

<sup>111</sup> Gibbs Smith, *Labor Martyr Joe Hill* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1969) 188-189



*A picture of the envelope used to send Hill's ashes to IWW members who wished to scatter them.*

*(Source: JoeHill.org)*

The IWW successfully sanctified Hill in their canon of idols, even though Hill's only contribution to the IWW was his songs. Hill has been mistaken as an IWW organizer and labor leader, but there is no evidence to prove such connection. The IWW exploited the popularity of their most famous member, a man whose fame is testament to the power and popularity of songs within the IWW, songs that actively attacked the church, songs that were written in perfect timing with the IWW's new focus on condemning religion. The IWW utilized these songs to effectively disempower the Salvation Army's tactics of drowning out Wobbly orators, repurpose Christian hymns as their own, and, in turn, create their own brand of religious sentiment centered on solidarity and class-consciousness. They then took the man who penned these ballads

and, ignoring his otherwise limited contributions to the IWW, erected him as a hero for the working class, “the man who never died”.

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*“A Clear And Present Danger”*

The IWW remained relatively unscathed by their attacks on religion, the AFL, corporations, and the police. While their membership faced violence, death, jail time, and deportation, the IWW’s popularity as an alternative to the conservative craft unionism of the time period remained strong. Though these targets of attack perhaps helped the IWW’s perception in the public view in some instances, the IWW’s stance on the emerging war in Europe would lead to its eventual downfall.

During the IWW’s 1916 convention, an anti-war resolution was passed as the union’s official stance on the emerging war was anti-interventionist, “We condemn all wars, and for the prevention of such, we proclaim the anti-militaristic propaganda in time of peace, thus promoting class solidarity among the workers of the entire world, and, in time of war, the general strike, in all industries.”<sup>112</sup> The IWW remained steadfast to their foundational belief that, though self-applying the moniker of an “industrial army” and utilizing the word “war” to describe labor disputes, the “working class and the employing class have nothing in common” and war is only a product of capitalism.<sup>113</sup>

The IWW’s stance on the war would ironically label them as unpatriotic and anti-American, and, when coupled with the AFL’s staunch pro-war stance, one of the lone unions that did not view wartime production as a boon to labor. In under a year a labor union whose creation was crafted by natural born Americans, evolved through the culture of the American West, classified as synonymous to American Industrialism, and

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<sup>112</sup>“The IWW Position On War: Anti-war resolution passed by the 1916 convention of the Industrial Workers of the World” [https://www.iww.org/sv/history/resolutions/Convention\\_war\\_1916](https://www.iww.org/sv/history/resolutions/Convention_war_1916) (Accessed March 19, 2018)

<sup>113</sup> Preamble To IWW Constitution” IWW Ephemera Collection. PE.044 Box 2, Folder 8. Tamiment Library and Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York NY.



mobilized by the lowliest laborer in American society, would be ostracized completely from the burgeoning wartime nationalism sparked by the Great War.<sup>114</sup>

The IWW had always faced opposition in its radical language and methods of projecting its speech. Spokane was the pinnacle of the IWW's free speech battles, but many more were waged in San Pedro, San Diego, and Calexico in California, while Missoula Montana and Sioux City Iowa were battlegrounds for speech outside of the West Coast. Though they were not all victories, music had always been the medium of speech that could not be successfully quelled in these battles. The popularity of a song could not easily be stamped out by the iron heel of state supervised suppression.

With the murder of the IWW's main symbolic figure of Joe Hill, the United States government began to target its increasingly vocal anti-war leadership. Woodrow Wilson's administration's greatest victory in their campaign against radical leftists came at the arrest of Eugene V. Debs. Though Debs was at this time not an official member of the IWW, his association as a vocal proponent of socialism and the vindication of the laborer made him a heroic figure within the IWW. The Wilson Administration's "Espionage Act of 1917" effectively created punishment for a breach of a broad definition of conspiring with enemy states, any person presenting a "clear and present danger" was subject to arrest.<sup>115</sup>

Debs was arrested on the basis of a speech he gave in Canton Ohio in 1918, now known as the "Anti-War Speech". In it he ridicules the European war that the US had recently gotten involved in,

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<sup>114</sup> Carleton H. Parker *Casual laborer, and other essays*. (Charleston: Nabu Press, 1918) 23

<sup>115</sup> Espionage Act 18 U.S.C. § 37 (1918)

...the working class who fight all the battles, the working class who make the supreme sacrifices, the working class who freely shed their blood and furnish the corpses, have never yet had a voice in either declaring war or making peace. It is the ruling class that invariably does both. They alone declare war and they alone make peace.<sup>116</sup>

These words, in the eyes of the US Government, would be the proverbial “last straw” in Debs’ fiery anti-war rhetoric.

Though Debs would have the spotlight as the most famous and most vocal victim of the United States’ newly enacted Espionage Act, the symbolic death blow to the IWW would come at the incarceration of its figurehead, Big Bill Haywood. Haywood was targeted by President Wilson along with a hundred other IWW members for promoting the action of avoiding the draft, encouraging desertion from military service, and vocal opposition to the US war effort.<sup>117</sup> The group was put on a trial that lasted for five months, the longest criminal trial in history up to that point. All of the defendants were found guilty, and an appeal of the conviction was unsuccessful. Haywood, at the surprise of his IWW compatriots and his lawyers, skipped bail and fled to Vladimir Lenin’s Russia.<sup>118</sup>

The IWW, targeted for its virulent radicalism, left without a leader, stripped of much of its young male membership due to the draft and harsh law enforcement, and in a losing battle with a still growing AFL, dwindled away in both size and scope. It was not

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<sup>116</sup> Eugene V. Debs "The Canton, Ohio Speech, Anti-War Speech." The Canton, Ohio Speech. (1918) Accessed April 28, 2016. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/debs/works/1918/canton.htm>.

<sup>117</sup> Peter Carlson, *Roughneck: the life and times of Big Bill Haywood*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983) 252

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 255

until after the war that its numbers surprisingly made one more spike in membership, until it was virtually completely phased out by the first red scare of the 1920s.<sup>119</sup>

Yet on August 15, 1969 lights sparked on an open-air stadium in the small agrarian upstate farm town of White Lake New York. The last act of the opening night of the Woodstock Festival was about to begin. The Woodstock concert was the apex of the sixties rock and roll music genre, but a defiant folk singer took the stage at midnight and played a song that she felt was relevant to the ongoing cultural crises of the time period. Joan Baez stopped in the middle of her thirteen-song set to play a Wobbly composition called “Joe Hill”, a song penned by Alfred Hayes in 1938 as a memorialization of Hill’s contributions to the working class.

Baez, a holdout from the Greenwich Village folk scene that was eventually “electrified” by Bob Dylan and cast as obsolete in favor of rock music, was making a symbolic gesture that the music and spirit of Woodstock was built upon the traditions of protest songs such as Joe Hill’s. Her haunting vocals sing the last verses,

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

Her beautiful rendition rang true; The cultural movement of the 60’s was predicated upon much of the its music. A music that was borne out of the conscious lyricism of Dave Van Ronk, Phil Ochs, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, and Harry

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<sup>119</sup> Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History Of The Industrial Workers Of The World* (Baltimore: University Of Illinois Press, 2000) 341

Belafonte, all of whom either sang IWW songs, affiliated with IWW members, or were members themselves.

In Wayne Hampton's *Guerilla Minstrels: John Lennon, Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan*, Hampton categorizes John Lennon, Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie, and Bob Dylan as "working class heroes", a term he defines as an individual who is surrounded by a "cult of originality."<sup>120</sup> Hampton argues that the four musicians share a unique ability to craft protest songs for their respective generations. He sets Hill aside as "the most influential writer of twentieth-century protest music."<sup>121</sup> Though Hill did write many "protest songs", a few of his songs would become folk songs.

Folklorist John Greenway contends that historians "do not agree on what constitutes as a folk song" but *does* give definition to what a protest song is. Greenway argues that protest songs are ephemeral, losing meaning very quickly as they often become dated once the thing they are protesting wanes.<sup>122</sup> With this in mind Greenway argues that the Hill penned IWW songs of "Preacher And The Slave" and "Casey Jones", and the other IWW songs "Solidarity Forever" and "Hallelujah! I'm A Bum" are folk songs as they survived through their respective eras and have been adopted into the folk tradition.

The lyrics of Alfred Hayes' "Joe Hill" would remain true, as it is apparent that Joe Hill "never died." Though Hill is the figurehead of the IWW's music, the folk music revival of the 1960's is testament to the scope of influence that *all* of the Western born radical songwriters of the IWW had. Their music, born out of the West, would reach the

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<sup>120</sup> Wayne Hampton *Guerilla Minstrels: John Lennon, Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan* (Knoxville: University Of Tennessee Press, 1986) 23

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 56

<sup>122</sup> John Greenway *American Folksongs Of Protest* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970) 4-5

1908 IWW convention and wrestle the union's leadership away from East Coast intellectuals and fifty years later reach East Coast's largest city, and nestle itself in a new form of radicalism of the 1960s.

A young Woody Guthrie idolizing troubadour from Duluth Minnesota would spring out of this folk revival, penning songs that would earn him the title of the "voice" of his generation. Bob Dylan's lyrics would find themselves printed in *Broadside* magazine, a folk music periodical that, like the *Little Red Songbook*, aimed to promote the singing of topical songs as a tool for social change. Dylan attempted to mimic the socially conscious songs in the style of his idol Woody Guthrie, the musical voice of the Great Depression. Though Dylan originally began covering Guthrie songs, he would eventually write his own. He would play his songs at Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee events, refused to play the *Ed Sullivan Show* due to an attempt to censor his lyrics, and performed at the Freedom March in Washington D.C. <sup>123</sup>



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<sup>123</sup> Peter Dreier "The Political Bob Dylan" *Dissent Magazine* May 24, 2011.  
[https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/the-political-bob-dylan](https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/the-political-bob-dylan)

*Bob Dylan with Greenwich Village mentor Dave Van Ronk, a dues paying IWW folksinger, 1963*

(Source: *Mayor Of Macdougall Street* by Dave Van Ronk)

Dylan was not uneducated on the history of folk music. After spending hours researching the folk tradition at the Folklore Center in Greenwich village Dylan remarked, “What I read could have come out of a mystery novel. Joe Hill Was a Swedish immigrant who fought in the Mexican War. He had led a bare and meager life... A Messianic figure who wanted to abolish the wage system of capitalism—a mechanic, musician, and poet. They called him the Workingman’s Robert Burns.” Obviously awed by the myth of Joe Hill, Dylan’s reverence for Hill came from the admiration of his idol, “Joe wrote the song ‘Pie in the Sky’ and was the forerunner of Woody Guthrie. That’s all I needed to know.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Bob Dylan *Chronicles Volume 1* (New York: Simon And Schuster, 2004) 52

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**Preacher And The Slave**

**By**

**Joe Hill**

*Sung to the tune of "In The Sweet By and By"*

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

CHORUS:

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

The starvation army they play,  
They sing and they clap and they pray  
'Till they get all your coin on the drum  
Then they'll tell you when you're on the bum:

Chorus

Holy Rollers and jumpers come out,  
They holler, they jump and they shout.  
Give your money to Jesus they say,  
He will cure all diseases today.

Chorus

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

Chorus

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

Chorus

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

**Casey Jones, Union Scab**

**By  
Joe Hill**

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 his engine and its 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 some one put a bunch of railroad ties across the track,  
And Casey hit the river bottom with an awful crack.

Casey Jones hit the river bottom;  
Casey Jones broke his blessed spine;  
Casey Jones was an Angelino,  
He took a trip to heaven on the S. P. line.

When Casey Jones got up to heaven, 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 went on strike;  
You can get a job a-scabbing any time you like."  
Casey Jones got up to heaven;  
Casey Jones was doing mighty fine;  
Casey Jones went scabbing on the angels,  
Just like he did to workers of the S. P. line.

They got together, and they said it wasn't fair,  
For Casey Jones to go around a-scabbing everywhere.  
The Angels' Union No. 23, they sure were there,  
And they promptly fired Casey down the Golden Stairs.

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

**Hallelujah, I'm A Bum!**  
**By**  
**Harry Haywire Mac McClintock**

Why don't you work like other folks do?

How the hell can I work when there's no work to do?

*Refrain*

Hallelujah, I'm a bum,

Hallelujah, bum again,

Hallelujah, give us a handout

To revive us again.

Oh, why don't you save all the money you earn?

If I didn't eat, I'd have money to burn.

Whenever I get all the money I earn,

The boss will be broke, and to work he must turn.

Oh, I like my boss, he's a good friend of mine,

That's why I am starving out on the bread line.

When springtime it comes, oh, won't we have fun;

We'll throw off our jobs, and go on the bum.

**The Mysteries Of A Hobo's Life**

**By**

**T-Bone Slim**

I took a job on an extra gang  
Way up in the mountain  
I paid my fee and the shack shipped me  
And the ties I soon was counting  
  
Well the boss he put me driving spikes  
And the sweat was enough to blind me  
He didn't seem to like my pace  
So I left the job behind me  
  
I grabbed a hold of an old freight train  
And around this country traveled  
The mysteries of a hobo's life  
To me were soon unraveled  
  
I traveled east and I traveled west  
And the shacks could never find me  
Next morning I was miles away  
From the job I left behind me

I ran across a bunch of stiffs  
Who were known as Industrial Workers  
They taught me how to be a man  
And how to fight the shirkers

I kicked right in and joined the bunch  
And now in the ranks you'll find me  
Hurrah for the cause, to hell with the boss  
And the job I left behind me