

250+ IWW Songs: A Treasure Trove of Labor History and Solidarity

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), also known as the Wobblies, is a radical labor union founded in 1905. Known for its revolutionary ideals and militant tactics, the IWW has played a significant role in labor history, organizing workers in various industries and advocating for social justice. One of the most enduring legacies of the IWW is its vast collection of songs, which have become an integral part of American labor folklore.



Big Red Songbook: 250+ IWW Songs! (Charles H. Kerr Library)

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

Language : English
File size : 6755 KB
Text-to-Speech : Enabled
Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
Word Wise : Enabled
Print length : 606 pages



The Charles Kerr Library: A Repository of Labor Songs

The Charles Kerr Library, located in Chicago, Illinois, is a treasure trove of labor literature and history. Its collection includes over 250 IWW songs, many of which are unavailable elsewhere. The library serves as a hub for researchers, labor activists, and anyone interested in the rich history of the American labor movement.

Themes and Motifs in IWW Songs

IWW songs are known for their diverse themes and motifs, reflecting the experiences and struggles of working-class people. Some of the most common themes include:

- **Industrial Capitalism and Exploitation:** Many songs critique the harsh conditions faced by workers in factories, mines, and other industries, denouncing exploitation and the greed of capitalists.
- **Solidarity and Unionism:** A central theme in IWW songs is the importance of unity and collective action among workers. Songs promote the idea of "one big union" that transcends craft and industry lines.
- **Class Struggle and Revolution:** IWW songs often express a revolutionary sentiment, calling for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a more just and equitable society.
- **Humor and Satire:** Despite the serious themes they address, IWW songs frequently employ humor and satire as a way to critique the ruling class and uplift the spirits of workers.

Notable IWW Songs

- **"Solidarity Forever":** Written by Ralph Chaplin in 1915, this anthem has become the unofficial anthem of the IWW and is widely considered one of the most iconic labor songs of all time.
- **"The Preacher and the Slave":** This ballad tells the story of a greedy preacher who exploits his congregation, highlighting the hypocrisy and injustice prevalent in society.

- **"Hallelujah, I'm a Bum":** A humorous and satirical song that celebrates the freedom of the hobo lifestyle, rejecting the constraints of wage labor.
- **"The Rebel Girl":** This song portrays a strong and independent woman who defies societal norms and embraces her revolutionary spirit.
- **"Bread and Roses":** Inspired by the Lawrence Textile Strike of 1912, this song emphasizes the importance of both material needs (bread) and cultural aspirations (roses) for workers.

Legacy and Influence

IWW songs have had a profound impact on American culture, shaping the labor movement and inspiring generations of activists. They have been sung at rallies, picket lines, and union halls, becoming a powerful tool for building solidarity and raising awareness about labor issues. Many IWW songs have also been adopted by other social movements, such as the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement.

- **Influence on Folk and Labor Music:** IWW songs have influenced the development of folk and labor music, with many traditional and contemporary folk artists incorporating IWW songs into their repertoire.
- **Preservation and Revival:** Organizations such as the Charles Kerr Library and the IWW's Solidarity Music Project continue to preserve and revitalize IWW songs, ensuring their legacy for future generations.

The 250+ IWW songs housed at the Charles Kerr Library offer a rare and invaluable glimpse into the history, struggles, and aspirations of the American labor movement. These songs not only document the past but

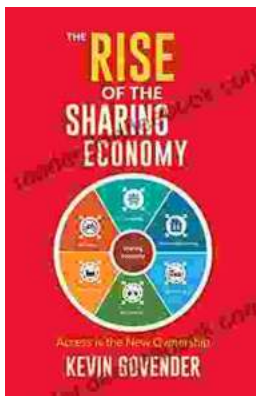
also continue to inspire present-day activists and remind us of the power of solidarity and collective action. By exploring this rich collection, we deepen our understanding of the fight for workers' rights and the enduring spirit of the IWW.



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