

**Billy Bragg's Revival of Aging Anthems:  
Radical Nostalgia or Activist Inspiration?**

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## **Billy Bragg's Revival of Aging Anthems: Radical Nostalgia or Activist Inspiration?**

What makes a song an anthem of a social movement? Extending beyond the limited moment of topical or protest songs, anthems embody a movement's often visionary, utopian or even apocalyptic values and goals by tapping deep cultural themes and metaphors, enduring over time and recalling participants to renew commitment and sacrifice.

But even reasonably successful movements follow a course of emergence, ascendance and decline. Inevitably, over time, the master frame of a movement is superseded by new narratives. Anthems can be expected to rise and decline in potency along with their movements.

When and how does time's passing dampen the resonance of an anthem? Can an anthem be revised and revived? English punk rock singer Billy Bragg, in his 1990 album "The Internationale," attempted to revive three venerable but fading movement anthems born in the context of the Nineteenth Century – "The Red Flag," "The Internationale," and "Blake's Jerusalem." "Jerusalem" has a specifically English context, but "The Red Flag" was once sung in the United States as well as Britain, and "The Internationale" was, of course, sung around the world.

Although "The Red Flag" and "The Internationale" were creations of the late Nineteenth Century socialist movement, in the Twentieth Century they came to be identified with communism. Can these songs portraying class struggle and conflict survive the collapse of the Soviet Union and the multiple identities of the post-modern Twenty-First Century? The historic American labor anthem "Solidarity Forever" offers an interesting comparison to "The Red Flag" and "The Internationale." Can these old songs regain vitality? Can aging anthems inspire new movements? What can we conclude seventeen years after Bragg's album *The Internationale*?

Each of these songs has a ritual aspect that was, and in some instances remains, important for its movement – being sung as a reaffirmation of tradition after meetings, conferences, conventions, and other significant events. Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, in their book *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century*, define traditions as socially constructed processes connecting a "usable past" with the present.<sup>1</sup> At its most effective, social movement music reflects a mobilization of tradition in support of the movement, often presenting a "message of hope and transcendence."<sup>2</sup> Whether anthems retain their power thus depends on whether the past reflected in the music is still usable in the present.

## “The Red Flag”

Jim Connell, an Irish dock worker living in London, wrote “The Red Flag” in 1889. He had attended a meeting of the Social Democratic Federation, and was returning home on a train from Charing Cross station to New Cross Gate in South London when the lyrics came to him. He finished writing six verses and the chorus by the time he reached home.<sup>3</sup> The song is most frequently sung to the tune of the German carol “O Tannenbaum,” but Connell intended “The Red Flag” be sung to a more obscure old Scots Jacobite tune, “The White Cockade.”<sup>4</sup> “Tannenbaum” angered Connell both for its religious association, and because it served as the melody of the reactionary pro-Confederate song “Maryland, My Maryland.”<sup>5</sup>

Connell blamed Adolphe Smith Headingley for inducing people to sing “The Red Flag” to the tune of “Maryland.” Connell wrote, “Every time the song is sung to ‘Maryland’ the words are murdered. . . . robbed of their proper emphasis and true value and meaning. . . . Headingley might as well have set the song to ‘The Dead March in Saul.’”<sup>6</sup> The “Maryland” or “Tannenbaum” version can sound a bit like a dirge, while “The White Cockade” version sounds more like a lively reel.

Connell’s six verses as they first appeared in the paper *Justice* in December 1889 are as follows:

### The Red Flag

The people's flag is deepest red;  
It shrouded oft our martyred dead,  
And ere their limbs grew stiff and cold  
Their heart's blood dyed to ev'ry fold.

### Chorus:

Then raise the scarlet standard high!  
Within its shade we'll live and die.  
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,  
We'll keep the Red Flag flying here.

Look round, the Frenchman loves its blaze;  
The sturdy German chants its praise;  
In Moscow's vaults its hymns are sung;  
Chicago swells the surging song.  
(Chorus)

It waved above our infant might  
When all ahead seemed dark as night;  
It witnessed many a deed and vow--  
We must not change its colour now.  
(Chorus)

It well recalls the triumphs past;  
It gives the hope of peace at last.  
The banner bright, the symbol plain  
Of human right and human gain.  
(Chorus)

It suits today the meek and base  
Whose minds are fixed on pelf and place  
To cringe beneath the rich man's frown  
And haul that sacred emblem down.  
(Chorus)

With heads uncovered swear we all  
To bare it onward till we fall.  
Come dungeon dark, or gallows grim,  
This song shall be our parting hymn.  
(Chorus)

“The Red Flag” was written before the labor and socialist movements had won much in the way of victories, which could account for its somewhat gloomy outlook. Connell cites the London Dock Strike of 1889 as the biggest victory of its kind to that date, but also notes the grim hanging of the Haymarket anarchists in Chicago in 1887.<sup>7</sup> The greatest strength of the song is its spirit of proud defiance. Although the second, third, and fourth stanzas suggest some reasons for hope, the tone of the fifth and sixth stanzas returns to themes of pessimism, betrayal and martyrdom. The “meek and base” among the workers have “minds fixed on pelf and place;” they “cringe beneath the rich man’s frown” and would “haul that sacred emblem down.” The movement is surrounded, the chorus implies, by flinching cowards and sneering traitors. This is the song of a beleaguered remnant, not an ascendant vanguard.

Nevertheless, or perhaps for that very reason, “The Red Flag” resonated with the early radical workers’ movement in the United States, and it appeared as the first song in the first edition of the “Little Red Songbook” of the Industrial Workers of the World in 1909. For reasons unknown, only five of the six stanzas were printed, omitting the fourth stanza that begins, “It well recalls the triumphs past.”<sup>8</sup>

The red flag served as the emblem of the British Labour Party from its organization in the first decade of the Twentieth Century until the party conference of 1986, when it was replaced by the red rose. “The Red Flag,”

Labour's official anthem from its founding, was first sung in the House of Commons on Aug. 1, 1945, when Parliament convened after Labour's defeat of Winston Churchill's Conservatives.<sup>9</sup> It was sung again in Parliament in February 2006 to mark the centenary of the Labour Party's founding.<sup>10</sup> In 1999 Tony Blair and New Labour decided "The Red Flag" would no longer be considered the official anthem of the party, and would not be sung at the conclusion of the annual Labour Party Conferences.<sup>11</sup>

The most concerted effort to honor Jim Connell and revive singing of "The Red Flag" has been conducted by a group of Irish radicals, who have produced a web site and a CD, "The Songs of Irish Labour."<sup>12</sup> This group dedicated a monument to Connell in Crossakiel, County Meath, on 26 April 1998. One of the covers on the CD is sung by Des Geraghty, general president of the SIPTU (Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union) from 1999 to 2003 (imagine, if you can, his counterpart Andy Stern of SEIU).

Billy Bragg's sings his version to Connell's preferred tune of "The White Cockade." He drops the second stanza, beginning, "Look round, the Frenchman loves its blaze" (what does that line about "Moscow's vaults" mean anyway?), but includes the fourth stanza that the IWW songbook had omitted, with its more contemporary-sounding lines about peace and human rights.

Satirical versions along the lines of "The People's Flag is Palest Pink" have been sung for many years by the Left wing of the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, and by others critical of the moderate drift of "New Labour." One version goes as follows:

The people's flag is palest pink  
It's not the colour you might think  
White collar workers stand and cheer  
The Labour government is here.

We'll change the country bit by bit  
So nobody will notice it.  
And just to show that we're sincere  
We'll sing The Red Flag once a year.

The cloth cap and the woolen scarf  
Are images outdated.  
For we're the party's avant garde  
And we are educated.

So raise the rolled umbrella high  
The college scarf, the old school tie.  
And just to show that we're sincere,

We'll sing The Red Flag once a year.<sup>13</sup>

Joe Glazer, "labor's troubadour" of the AFL-CIO, cites an even more cynical parody:<sup>14</sup>

The working class can kiss my ass  
I've got the foreman's job at last.  
The system I'll no more resist,  
I'm going to be a capitalist.

Now you can raise the standard high,  
Beneath its shade to fight and die.  
But brother, please don't count on me—  
I've up and joined the bourgeoisie.

As the USSR, the People's Republic of China, and other Communist countries adopted flags with various symbols against an all-red background, the red flag became identified with the Communist movement, and the song lost favor among non-Communist left and labor movements. The replacement of the red flag by the red rose by the British Labour Party in 1986 was one manifestation of this trend, as was the adoption of the red rose held in a fist as the symbol of the Socialist International, many of its member parties, and the Socialist bloc in the European Parliament (the symbol is thought to have originated as a graphic of the May 1968 protests in Paris). In this sense "The Red Flag" has suffered a similar fate to "The Internationale." As it has come to symbolize the Marxist-Leninist tradition, it appears unlikely that "The Red Flag" will be sung without irony by many outside of Communist and Trotskyist factions.

### **"The Internationale"**

The words to "The Internationale" were written in French in 1871 by Eugene Pottier, who intended them to be sung to the tune of "The Marseillaise." In 1888 composer Pierre Degeyter set the words to the music that became widely adopted and known to us today. The original French version has six stanzas, but translated versions are seldom sung with more than two or three stanzas.<sup>15</sup> The title refers to the First International (more precisely, the International Workingmen's Association), which was founded in London in 1864 and disbanded in 1876, in the wake of the defeat of the Paris Commune. Its purpose was revived by the Second International, organized in 1889 and disbanded in 1916 during World War I.<sup>16</sup> It was revived as the Labor and Socialist International in 1923, and continued until 1940, when it collapsed in the onset of World War II.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, the Third or Communist International (Comintern) was organized by the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) in 1919, and was dissolved in 1943 during World War II as a gesture toward the Allies in the war against Nazi Germany.<sup>18</sup> A Fourth International was organized in Paris by Trotskyists in

1938.<sup>19</sup> Any of these Internationals might be the implicit subject of the song, depending on the era and the politics of the singers.

Charles H. Kerr published a five-stanza version of the song with his own English translation in *Socialist Songs* (1900); his translation became the standard version in the United States and Canada. His chorus, with its intimation of an apocalyptic end to capitalism, goes:

'Tis the final conflict<sup>20</sup>  
Let each stand in his place,  
The international working class  
Shall be the human race.  
(repeat)

In Britain, Ireland, and Australia, a mostly different anonymous six-stanza English translation is known, with the chorus:

So comrades come rally  
And the last fight let us face  
The Internationale  
Unites the human race.  
(repeat)

Although "The Internationale" was originally sung by socialists and anarchists of many varieties, during the 1920s and 1930s the song became more identified with the Soviet Union, which adopted it as its national anthem in 1922. In 1944, during the Second World War, the USSR changed its national anthem to the "Hymn of the Soviet Union," but "The Internationale" remained the official anthem of the Communist Party of the USSR. Non-communist groups tended to stop singing "The Internationale."<sup>21</sup>

Following the 1989 student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, where the students sang "The Internationale," Billy Bragg decided it was time to replace the archaic language and historical baggage of state Communism associated with the song, and with the encouragement of Pete Seeger wrote his own new verses to "The Internationale,"<sup>22</sup> which go as follows:

## Billy Bragg's "The Internationale"

Stand up, all victims of oppression,  
For the tyrants fear your might!  
Don't cling so hard to your possessions,  
For you have nothing if you have no rights!  
Let racist ignorance be ended,  
For respect makes the empires fall!  
Freedom is merely privilege extended,  
Unless enjoyed by one and all.

Chorus:

So come brothers and sisters,  
For the struggle carries on.  
The Internationale  
Unites the world in song.  
So comrades, come rally  
For this is the time and place!  
The international ideal  
Unites the human race.

Let no one build walls to divide us,  
Walls of hatred nor walls of stone.  
Come greet the dawn and stand beside us,  
We'll live together or we'll die alone.  
In our world poisoned by exploitation,  
Those who have taken, now they must give!  
And end the vanity of nations,  
We've got but one Earth on which to live.  
(Chorus)

And so begins the final drama,  
In the streets and in the fields.  
We stand unbowed before their armour,  
We defy their guns and shields!  
When we fight, provoked by their aggression,  
Let us be inspired by life and love,  
For though they offer us concessions,  
Change will not come from above!  
(Chorus)

The difference in tone and substance is obvious: the philosophical underpinning is idealistic and universal, not materialistic and class structured ("The international ideal unites the human race"). The end is not an apocalyptic class struggle, but a peaceful discovery of unity ("The Internationale unites the world in song").



The IWW's song book has included "The Internationale" from its third edition in 1910 forward, in the Charles H. Kerr translation.<sup>23</sup> In the highly revised 36<sup>th</sup> edition (1995), also termed the International Edition, Billy Bragg's version is printed, along with one stanza of the original French version, and single stanzas of the British, Spanish, and Swedish translations.<sup>24</sup>

Interest in "The Internationale" and the Russian Revolution got a brief stimulus in 2006 from the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of a DVD of the movie *Reds* – co-written, produced and directed by Warren Beatty, and starring Beatty as journalist John Reed (author of *Ten Days that Shook the World*) and Diane Keaton as Reed's wife, Louise Bryant. In the film, "The Internationale" is sung by the Moscow Radio Chorus, over a long sequence at the end of the first half of the movie; at the beginning of the second half, just after the intermission, the British version of the chorus is sung solo by the elderly Dora Russell (second wife of British philosopher Bertrand Russell).<sup>25</sup>

In the film *The Internationale*, Pete Seeger notes how the slow and ponderous choral versions can make the song seem a pompous symbol of the establishment. As an alternative, listen to the recent folk guitar duet version sung by Alistair Hulett and Jimmy Gregory.<sup>26</sup>

There have been relatively few parodies of "The Internationale," the most notable being George Orwell's "Beasts of England, beasts of Ireland," in his *Animal Farm*.<sup>27</sup> Tuli Kupferberg (of "The Fugs" fame) offers a half-hearted attempt in "The New Internationale" ("Arise, ye prisoners of stagnation, . . .").<sup>28</sup>

If Bragg's version of "The Internationale" were to catch on, one might think that it would be taken up by the anti-globalization movement, the leading international left-wing cause of the last decade. But there is little sign this is the case. On reflection, the reasons Bragg's song has not found a constituency there are not hard to discern if the various components of the movement are examined. Consider the varied groupings taking part in the World Social Forum and the demonstrations against the World Economic Forum, the WTO, etc. The Communist and Trotskyist factions prefer to sing the old "Internationale," not some new idealistic version. Many of the indigenous groups emphasize their local musical traditions, not Western music. A significant portion of the Western activists are militant localists, and would not support the spirit of internationalism in either the old or new versions of "The Internationale." And among the 57 varieties of anarchists, some probably do favor Bragg's song, but many don't, and that hardly makes for a clear constituency. In the end, Bragg's partisans are most likely those who consider themselves to be democratic socialists -- more militant than social democrats, but less dogmatic than the Marxist sects. And that many be only a minor constituency in the broader movement. Our post-modern era of multiple identities, the reassertion of identification with local and

national traditions – all serve to diminish the appeal of the unitary and universal internationalism implied in “The Internationale,” whether old or new versions.

### “Jerusalem”

“Jerusalem” is based on a short poem, usually referred to by its opening line, “And did those feet in ancient time,” taken from the preface to William Blake’s 1804 epic, *Milton: a Poem*. The English composer Sir Charles Hubert Parry set it to music in 1916, specifically for a patriotic woman suffrage meeting in the context of the First World War. It was adopted as an official anthem by Millicent Garrett Fawcett’s National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, the mainstream woman suffrage movement in England. After he conducted the music at the Royal Albert Hall, Parry’s composition became known as “Jerusalem.”<sup>29</sup>

Following the suffrage victory in Britain in 1918, the song became identified with the Women’s Institute (imagine a combined YWCA and League of Women Voters in the United States). It became associated with the Labour Party during its 1945 campaign, when Clement Attlee said Labour would build a “new Jerusalem” in Britain.<sup>30</sup> It is traditionally sung on the Last Night of the Proms, a large classical music festival held in the summer in the Royal Albert Hall and broadcast to Proms in the Park locations throughout England. Recently it has been sung at international cricket matches involving the English team.<sup>31</sup> Can its radical roots be resurrected once it has been accepted as a patriotic hymn or unofficial English national anthem?

#### Jerusalem

And did those feet in ancient time  
Walk upon England’s mountains green?  
And was the Holy Lamb of God  
On England’s pleasant pastures seen?  
And did the countenance divine  
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded here  
Among these dark satanic mills.

Bring me my bow of burning gold!  
Bring me my arrows of desire!  
Bring me my spear! O Clouds unfold!  
Bring me my chariot of fire!  
I will not cease from mental fight  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England’s green and pleasant land!

Offhand, one might think the answers to Blake's questions in the first stanza would be, "No, of course not!" But Blake's poem is evidently based on a legend that Joseph of Arimathea made a voyage to the English town of Glastonbury, accompanied by the young Jesus. The new Jerusalem imagined in the poem is the heavenly city that appeared, descending to earth, to St. John the Divine in his vision of the Apocalypse (Revelation 21:2). The new Jerusalem represents the predicted thousand-year rule of Christ on earth, and thus a vision of perfection in earthly government. In an increasingly secular Britain, the religious sources of the song may be largely unappreciated; its utopian vision would have been better understood during Oliver Cromwell's 17<sup>th</sup> Century Puritan revolution than in contemporary England.

"Jerusalem" may seem an odd song to group with the other radical anthems. Billy Bragg has responded, "My belief that Jerusalem is a left wing anthem has got me into arguments with public schoolboys at Eton and Trotskyist newspaper sellers in Trafalgar Square. Nevertheless I remain convinced that this song does not belong alongside "Rule Britannia" and "Land of Hope and Glory" at the last night of the Proms. William Blake was a radical and a visionary. A friend of Thomas Paine, he was harassed by the Establishment of the day, eventually being arrested for sedition. Written at the time of the Industrial Revolution, I believe this song is an attack on the new breed of capitalists that Blake saw in his midst. It asks how can the morals of Christ be compatible with the morality of exploitation, both of people and of the environment."<sup>32</sup>

The claim that the song reflects Blake's repulsion toward capitalist industrialization ("dark Satanic mills") has been challenged by scholars who point out that industrial development was rudimentary in 1804, and Blake had little contact with it. Furthermore, Blake was more likely referring to other elements he considered "Satanic" (alternative theories range from the Church of England to pagan Stonehenge). Regardless, the song is greatly treasured in England, although almost unknown in the United States (the only recorded cover currently available by an American is by Paul Robeson from the 1950s).<sup>33</sup>

Monty Python satirizes "Jerusalem" in several performances, but perhaps most memorably in the episode in which the staff of a department store must sing "Jerusalem" to get a salesman to remove a paper bag he places over his head when he hears the word "mattress."<sup>34</sup> "Jerusalem" appears to have become an omnibus, general-purpose song, no longer retaining much of a radical edge for most singers.

### **"Solidarity Forever"**

"Solidarity Forever" has been the best-known and most enduring anthem of the labor movement in the United States and Canada. It has avoided an association with sectarianism, and can be sung enthusiastically by any union. This is

surprising only when one considers that it is quite contrary to the intention of the song's author.

Ralph Chaplin began writing "Solidarity Forever" in 1914, while he was covering the Kanawa coal miners' strike in Huntington, West Virginia. He completed the song on January 15, 1915, in Chicago, on the date of a hunger demonstration.<sup>35</sup> Chaplin was a dedicated Wobbly, a writer at the time for *Solidarity*, the official IWW publication in the eastern United States, and a cartoonist for the organization. He shared the analysis of the IWW, embodied in its famed "Preamble," printed inside the front cover of every *Little Red Songbook*.

The Preamble begins with a classic statement of a two-class analysis of modern capitalism: "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common." The class struggle will continue until the victory of the working class: "Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system." The Preamble denounces trade unions as incapable of coping with the power of the employing class. By negotiating contracts, trade unions mislead workers by giving the impression that workers have interests in common with employers.

The Preamble calls for workers to build an organization of all "members in any one industry, or in all industries." Although that sounds a lot like the industrial unionism developed by the CIO, the IWW would oppose John L. Lewis' campaign to split from the AFL and organize industrial unions in the 1930s. The Preamble explains, "Instead of the conservative motto, 'A fair day's wage for a fair day's work,' we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, 'Abolition of the wage system.'" The IWW embraced syndicalism, and opposed participation in electoral politics: "by organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old."<sup>36</sup> With a close reading of the text, we can see the outlook of the Preamble embodied in "Solidarity Forever:"

### Solidarity Forever

When the union's inspiration through the workers' blood shall run,  
There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun;  
Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one,  
But the union makes us strong.

Chorus:

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

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)

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, magnified a thousand-fold.  
We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old  
For the union makes us strong.  
(Chorus)

“Solidarity Forever” is remarkable in that it enunciates a complete theory of revolutionary change. The third stanza (“It is we who plowed the prairies”) embodies a labor theory of value, echoed in stanzas four and five, which provides ethical justification for the workers’ claim to “all the world.” The second stanza (“Is there aught we hold in common with the greedy parasite”) assumes the two antagonistic classes analyzed in the IWW Preamble. The first and fifth stanzas provide the strategy for labor: union solidarity. And the sixth stanza projects the utopian outcome, a new world brought to birth “from the ashes of the old.”

On the other hand, the impracticality of the IWW opposition to the norms of collective bargaining gave the organization little chance to compete with other unions over the long run, and was clearly one of the major factors in the IWW’s decline.<sup>37</sup> The Preamble’s two-class formulation is a simplification even of a rudimentary Marxism, which begins with a three-class analysis of modern

capitalism: bourgeoisie, petit bourgeoisie, and proletariat. One contemporary neo-Marxist to formulate a more sophisticated class analysis is Erik Olin Wright, who develops the notion of “contradictory locations within class relations,” finding spaces between each pair of the three classes for such groupings as managers and supervisors, small employers, and semi-autonomous wage earners.<sup>38</sup> Even his abstract structural typology only begins to capture the complexity of contemporary class relations in advanced capitalist societies.

Despite all that is outdated in its formulations, “Solidarity Forever” remains a vital composition that can still be sung by a variety of unions. How can this be? First and foremost, the truth that “the union makes us strong!” is undeniable, and applies generally to all labor organizing. The irony is that this was not Ralph Chaplin’s intention; he was writing a specifically IWW song. He was chagrined that AFL-CIO unions would sing his song.

Late in his life, after he had turned to the Catholic Church and become a voice opposing Communists in the labor movement, Chaplin wrote an article “Why I wrote Solidarity Forever,” in which he denounced the “not-so-needy, not-so-worthy, so-called ‘industrial unions’ spawned by an era of compulsory unionism.” He wrote that among Wobblies “there is no one who does not look with a rather jaundiced eye upon the ‘success’ of ‘Solidarity Forever.’ All of us deeply resent seeing a song that was uniquely our own used as a singing commercial for the soft-boiled type of post-Wagner Act industrial unionism that uses million-dollar slush funds to persuade their congressional office boys to do chores for them.” He added, “I contend also that when the labor movement ceases to be a Cause and becomes a business, the end product can hardly be called progress.”<sup>39</sup>

We can understand how “Solidarity Forever” retains its relevance despite Chaplin’s intentions by starting with Pete Seeger’s observation that “a song is often a triumph of oversimplification.”<sup>40</sup> Chaplin didn’t write “for the IWW makes us strong,” or “for the One Big Industrial Union makes us strong.” He wrote “for the union makes us strong.” That was a great oversimplification of his viewpoint, but it makes both for easier singing and for a general relevance today. Further, most singers (other than Utah Phillips) do not sing all six verses of “Solidarity Forever.” Most typically drop verses two (“Is there aught we hold in common with the greedy parasite”) and four (“All the world that’s owned by idle drones is ours and ours alone”), thus leaving out the most archaic material. Of course it also helps that Chaplin chose a tune that is one of the most familiar and most imitated in American music: “Battle Hymn of the Republic” and “John Brown’s Body.”<sup>41</sup>

“Solidarity Forever” has been an inspiration for updated verses, rather than satire. One set of new verses has been written by Canadian women unionists:<sup>42</sup>

It is we who wash the dishes, scrub the floors and chase the dirt,  
Feed the kids and send them off to school, and then we go to work,  
Where we work for half men’s wages for a boss who likes to flirt,

But the union makes us strong!

We're the women of the union and we sure know how to fight.  
We'll fight for women's issues and we'll fight for women's rights.  
A woman's work is never done from morning until night,  
And women make the union strong!

## Conclusion

Anthems embody visionary and utopian values, and endure over time, calling participants to renew their commitment to the movement. Over long periods of time, historical changes accumulate and new narratives emerge, often leaving anthems sounding archaic. Seemingly out of date, they no longer inspire new activists, and they drop from the movement repertoire, to be sung only by antiquarian preservationists and nostalgic radicals.

Billy Bragg's effort to revive three venerable movement anthems in his 1990 album *The Internationale* ran into problems beyond his ability to influence.<sup>43</sup> "The Red Flag" and "The Internationale" belong to an era now largely past, and remain identified in the public mind with Communist states championed only by a few sectarians. "Jerusalem," on the other hand, has lost its radical edge by becoming an omnibus patriotic song and anthem of English nationalism. In contrast, "Solidarity Forever," by virtue of a simple message of union solidarity, rings true today as it did nearly a century ago – despite the intentions of its author. For new anthems, as Joan Baez suggests, we will need to look to songs written in the thick of widespread social struggle.<sup>44</sup>

## Appendix

### The Internationale (anonymous British translation)<sup>45</sup>

Arise! ye workers, from your slumbers;  
Arise! ye prisoners of want.  
For reason in revolt now thunders  
And ends at last the age of cant.  
Away with all your superstitions  
Servile masses, arise! arise!  
We'll change henceforth the old tradition  
And spurn the dust to win the prize.

Chorus:  
So comrades, come rally  
And the last fight let us face  
The Internationale  
Unites the human race.

No saviour from on high delivers;  
No faith have we in prince or peer.  
Our own right hand the chains must shiver:  
Chains of hatred, greed and fear.  
E'er the thieves will out with their booty  
And give to all a happier lot.  
Each at his forge must do his duty  
And strike the iron while it's hot!  
(Chorus)

The law oppresses us and tricks us,  
The wage slave system drains our blood;  
The rich are free from obligation,  
The laws the poor delude.  
Too long we've languished in subjection,  
Equality has other laws;  
"No rights," says she "without their duties,  
No claims on equals without cause."  
(Chorus)

Behold them seated in their glory  
The kings of mine and rail and soil!  
What have you read in all their story,  
But how they plundered toil?  
Fruits of the workers' toil are buried  
In strongholds of the idle few



In working for their restitution  
The men will only claim their due.  
(Chorus)

No more deluded by reaction  
On tyrants only we'll make war  
The soldiers too will take strike action  
They'll break ranks and fight no more  
And if those cannibals keep trying  
To sacrifice us to their pride  
They soon shall hear the bullets flying  
We'll shoot the Generals on Our Own Side.  
(Chorus)

We peasants, artisans, and others  
Enrolled among the sons of toil,  
Let's claim the earth henceforth for brothers,  
Drive the indolent from the soil!  
On our Flesh too Long has fed the Raven;  
We've too long been the vulture's prey.  
But now farewell the spirit craven:  
The dawn brings in a brighter day.  
(Chorus)

Words: Eugene Pottier  
Music: Pierre Degeyter

## The Internationale (Charles H. Kerr translation)<sup>46</sup>

Arise, ye prisoners of starvation! □  
Arise, ye wretched of the earth  
! □ For justice thunders condemnation,  
□ A better world's in birth! □  
No more tradition's chains shall bind us, □  
Arise ye slaves, no more in thrall!  
□ The earth shall rise on new foundations,  
We have been nought, we shall be all.

Chorus:

Tis the final conflict, □  
Let each stand in his place. □  
The Industrial U □ nion  
Shall be the human race □.

(Alternate chorus)

'Tis the final conflict, □  
Let each stand in his place. □  
The international working class □  
Shall be the human race.

We want no condescending saviors □  
To rule us from a judgment hall; □  
We workers ask not for their favors; □  
Let us consult for all.  
To make the thief disgorge his booty  
□ To free the spirit from its cell,  
□ We must ourselves decide our duty, □  
We must decide, and do it well. □  
(Chorus)

The law oppresses us and tricks us,  
wage slav'ry drains the workers' blood;  
The rich are free from obligations,  
The laws the poor delude.  
Too long we've languished in subjection,  
Equality has other laws;  
"No rights," says she "without their duties,  
No claims on equals without cause."  
(Chorus)

Behold them seated in their glory  
The kings of mine and rail and soil!  
What have you read in all their story,  
But how they plundered toil?  
Fruits of the workers' toil are buried  
In the strong coffers of a few;  
In working for their restitution  
The men will only ask their due.  
(Chorus)

Toilers from shops and fields united,  
The union we of all who work;  
The earth belongs to us, the workers,  
No room here for the shirk.  
How many on our flesh have fattened;  
But if the noisome birds of prey  
Shall vanish from the sky some morning,  
The blessed sunlight still will stay.  
(Chorus)

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> It first appeared in print in the paper *Justice*, December 21, 1889, under the heading "A Christmas Carol," with subheadings, "The Red Flag," "Air – 'The White Cockade,'" and signed "J. Connell." There are six stanzas, each followed by the chorus.

<sup>4</sup> Jim Connell, "How I Wrote the "Red Flag," *The Call*, May 6, 1920, p. 5: reprinted in Archie Green, David Roediger, Franklin Rosemont, and Salvatore Salerno, editors, *The Big Red Songbook* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2007), pp. 367-369.

<sup>5</sup> "Maryland, My Maryland" was written as a poem in 1861 by James Ryder Randall, a Confederate sympathizer, who was outraged by riots and deaths that occurred in Baltimore in April 1861 as federal troops passed through the city on their way to defend Washington, DC. The Maryland legislature made it the official state song in 1939. See "Maryland, My Maryland," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 12 Mar 2007, 07:35 UTC. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 14 May 2007:  
<[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Maryland%2C\\_My\\_Maryland&oldid=114490961](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Maryland%2C_My_Maryland&oldid=114490961)>.

<sup>6</sup> Jim Connell, "How I Wrote the "Red Flag," *The Call*, May 6, 1920, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Archie Green *et al.*, eds., *The Big Red Songbook*, pp. 37-39. Although the reprinted 19<sup>th</sup> edition (1923) of *I.W.W. Songs* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2003) does not indicate the tune for "The Red Flag" (p. 10), my copy of the 31<sup>st</sup> edition (1964) rubs salt in Jim Connell's wounds by indicating the tune of "The Red Flag" as "Maryland, My Maryland" (p. 17). "The Red Flag" does not appear in the extensively revised 36<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Little Red Song Book* (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, 1995).

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<sup>9</sup> Joe Glazer, *Labor's Troubadour* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001). p. 183.

<sup>10</sup> "Red flag." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 25 May 2007, 16:53 UTC. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 28 May 2007 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Red\\_flag&oldid=133448502](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Red_flag&oldid=133448502)>.

<sup>11</sup> "Songs: The Red Flag," Working Class Movement Library (UK); see: [http://www.wcml.org.uk/culture/songs\\_redflag.htm](http://www.wcml.org.uk/culture/songs_redflag.htm)

<sup>12</sup> "Songs of Irish Labour," produced by Helena Sheehan and Bread and Roses Productions, Ltd., BRPCD001, recorded at Dublin City University in 1998. A number of additional recordings of "The Red Flag" can be heard at their website: <http://www.comms.dcu.ie/sheehanh/connell.htm>

<sup>13</sup> "The People's Flag is Palest Pink." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 11 Feb 2007, 14:54 UTC. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 20 May 2007 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The\\_People%27s\\_Flag\\_is\\_Palest\\_Pink&oldid=107324607](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_People%27s_Flag_is_Palest_Pink&oldid=107324607)>. British folk musician Leon Rosselson has written a version of this titled, "Battle Hymn of the New Socialist Party;" see: <http://www.thesocialistparty.org/spo/archive/songs/battle.html>

<sup>14</sup> Glazer, *Labor's Troubadour*, p. 184.

<sup>15</sup> Jim Connell, "How I Wrote the "Red Flag," *The Call*, May 6, 1920, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> "International Workingmen's Association." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 16 May 2007, 11:01 UTC. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 28 May 2007 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=International\\_Workingmen%27s\\_Association&oldid=131264816](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=International_Workingmen%27s_Association&oldid=131264816)>.

<sup>17</sup> "Second International." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 30 Mar 2007, 15:09 UTC. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 28 May 2007 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Second\\_International&oldid=119049313](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Second_International&oldid=119049313)>.

<sup>18</sup> "Comintern." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 27 May 2007, 01:31 UTC. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 28 May 2007 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Comintern&oldid=133761517>>.

<sup>19</sup> "Fourth International." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 20 May 2007, 16:01 UTC. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 5 Jun 2007

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<[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fourth\\_International&oldid=132234611](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fourth_International&oldid=132234611)>.

<sup>20</sup> This line is the source of the mondegreen (or mishearing) that Jessica Mitford dated from her youth listening to soapbox singers at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park, and used as the title of her memoir, *A Fine Old Conflict* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), see p. 3. Of course, this would mean she heard the American version sung by London communists, an unlikely possibility. It's a good story, though.

<sup>21</sup> See the comments of Archie Green in the film *The Internationale*, produced and directed by Peter Miller, Icarus Films, 2000; issued on DVD in 2006. Although much of the film consists of reminiscences of Old Lefties, Spanish Civil War veterans, etc., there are interviews with young people who sing the Billy Bragg version. Peter Miller also helped organize a radio show on WFMU, 24 October 2001, that played some 23 versions of "The Internationale:" the audio is archived at:

<http://wfmua.org/playlists/shows/950>

Brief excerpts from the film are available on YouTube at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPFlyrvEb8M&mode=related&search=>

<sup>22</sup> See Bragg's comments in the film *The Internationale*.

<sup>23</sup> Archie Green *et al.*, eds., *The Big Red Songbook*, p. 70.

<sup>24</sup> *The Little Red Song Book*, 36<sup>th</sup> Edition – May 1, 1995 (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World), pp. 2-3.

<sup>25</sup> *Reds* (1981; 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition DVD, Paramount Pictures, 2006). Excerpts from the end of part one and the beginning of part two are available on YouTube at:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDY0BAe\\_qGQ&mode=related&search=](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDY0BAe_qGQ&mode=related&search=)

<sup>26</sup> Alistair Hulett and Jimmy Gregory, "The Internationale," on YouTube at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PtAfIjRKUak>

On the blog Leftwrites, Robert Bollard describes the curious background to the order in which Hulett sings the verses in "A Cautionary Tale," December 2, 2006: <http://www.leftwrites.net/2006/12/02/a-cautionary-tale/>

<sup>27</sup> George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (1946; New York: The New American Library, 1956), pp. 22-23.

<sup>28</sup> Tuli Kupferberg, *Tuli and Friends*, Shimmy-Disk, 1987, "The New Internationale," track 23.

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<sup>29</sup> “Jerusalem,” Icons of England, ICONS Online, at:  
<http://www.icons.org.uk/theicons/collection/jerusalem>

<sup>30</sup> “And did those feet in ancient time.” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 28 May 2007, 23:04 UTC. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 30 May 2007  
<[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=And\\_did\\_those\\_feet\\_in\\_ancient\\_time&oldid=134186264](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=And_did_those_feet_in_ancient_time&oldid=134186264)>.

<sup>31</sup> “Jerusalem,” Icons of England, ICONS online, at:  
<http://www.icons.org.uk/theicons/collection/jerusalem>

<sup>32</sup> Billy Bragg, notes to the CD *The Internationale*, Electra Utility, 1990. Andrew Collins, author of *Still Suitable for Miners -- Billy Bragg: The Official Biography* (1998; Virgin Books, 2002), on Bragg and “Jerusalem” writes only, “don’t get him started on it” (p. 176).

<sup>33</sup> Paul Robeson, “Jerusalem,” on *Ballads for Americans*, Vanguard Records, 1989, a recording from the late 1950s.

<sup>34</sup> *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*, Episode 8, Season 1 (“Full Frontal Nudity”), 1969. See also Eric Idle singing “Jerusalem” as a nightclub crooner in Episode 4, Season 1 (“Owl-Stretching Time”).

<sup>35</sup> Ralph Chaplin, *Wobbly: The Rough-and-Tumble Story of an American Radical* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), ch. 15, pp. 162-171; and Ralph Chaplin, “Why I Wrote Solidarity Forever,” *American West*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (January 1968), 18-27, 73. See also Chaplin’s two-part article, “Confessions of a Radical,” *Empire Magazine* of the *Denver Post*, February 17, 1957, pp. 12-13, and February 24, 1957, pp. 10-11.

<sup>36</sup> Chaplin, *Wobbly*, p. 148, has a clear copy of the Preamble.

<sup>37</sup> See the “Epilogue” to Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the IWW* (1969; New York: Quadrangle, 1973), pp. 480-484, for several elements contributing to the IWW’s decline.

<sup>38</sup> Erik Olin Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978); ch. 2, “The Class Structure of Advanced Capitalism,” pp. 30-110.

<sup>39</sup> Ralph Chaplin, “Why I Wrote Solidarity Forever,” *American West*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (January 1968), pp. 24-25.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Seeger, toward the end of the film, *Strange Fruit* (California Newsreel, 2002); 35 mm. film, VHS and DVD.

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<sup>41</sup> The literature on these is extensive. Among many possible sources, see Boyd B. Stutler, *Glory, Glory, Hallelujah! The Story of "John Brown's Body" and "Battle Hymn of the Republic"* (Cincinnati: The C. J. Krehbiel Co., 1960); and Sarah Vowell, "John Brown's Body," in *The Rose and the Briar: Death, Love and Liberty in the American Ballad*, ed. Sean Wilentz and Greil Marcus (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 83-89. These songs continue to inspire singers; in the past year (2006) I collected two "Battle Hymn" parodies written by members of the Raging Grannies chapter in Sonoma County, California, satirizing George W. Bush and the Iraq War.

<sup>42</sup> The two women's verses are credited to CUPE Local 3903, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Local 3903 had a Women's Caucus which has evolved into the Trans Feminist Action Caucus; see:

<http://www.cupe3903.tao.ca>

<sup>43</sup> In his recent book *The Progressive Patriot: A Search for Belonging* (Bantam Press, 2006), roughly equal parts family history, memoir, and reflections on patriotism, Billy Bragg says nothing about his venture with the 1990 album *The Internationale*. Bragg biographer Andrew Collins acknowledges that the album manages to contemporize the songs, and point them at the future, but notes that the album is among the least played by his fans; Collins terms Bragg "punk's first dedicated historian" (*Still Suitable for Miners*, pp. 207-208).

<sup>44</sup> Joan Baez, toward the end of *We Shall Overcome* (Ginger Group Productions, 1988), PBS Home Video 174.

<sup>45</sup> "The Internationale." *Wikisource, The Free Library*. 19 Jun 2007, 22:58 UTC. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 14 Jul 2007  
<[http://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=The\\_Internationale&oldid=395438](http://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=The_Internationale&oldid=395438)>.

<sup>46</sup> *Little Red Songbook*, 31<sup>st</sup> edition, (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, 1964), pp. 18-19.