**HANDOUT #13a: Labour Songs**

**Union maid**

Verse 1

There once was a union maid

She never was afraid

of the goons and ginks and the company finks

And the deputy sheriffs that made the raid

She went to the union hall

When a meeting it was called

And when the company boys came ‘round

She always stood her ground

Chorus

Oh, you can’t scare me, I’m sticking to the

union

I’m sticking to the union, I’m sticking to the

union

Oh no you can’t scare me, I’m sticking to the

union

I’m sticking to the union ‘til the day I die.

Verse 2

This union maid was wise

To the tricks of company spies

She couldn’t be fooled by the company stools

She’d always organize the guys

She’d always get her way

When she struck for higher pay

She’d show her card to the National Guard

And this is what she’d say

Chorus

Verse 3 (version one)

A woman’s struggle is hard

even with a union card

You’ve got to stand on your own two feet

And not be a servant to the male elite

We’ve got to take a stand

by working hand in hand

There’s a job that’s got to be done

and a fight that’s got to be won

Verse 3 (version two)

You women who want to be free, take a tip

from me,

Break out of that mold we’ve all been sold,

you got a fighting history

The fight for women’s rights with workers

must unite

Like Mother Jones, move those bones to

the front of every fight!

Verse 3 (version three, Woody Guthrie’s

original)

You gals who want to be free, take a tip

from me,

Get you a man who’s a union man, and

join the Ladies’ auxiliary.

A married life ain’t hard when you got a

union card.

A union man with a union wife has got a

happy life.

Chorus

1. What words are used to describe the people supporting the boss?

2. Why is there a reference to the National Guard?

3. What is the main theme of this song?

4. What verse do you think was added after Woody Guthrie’s death? Is that verse an important addition; if so, why?

5. (a) Compare Woody Guthrie’s original verse #3 with the other two (the currently used ones). Why do you think his words have been changed?

**Solidarity Forever**

*Solidarity Forever* is perhaps one of the best known songs associated with labour. Ralph Chaplin, of the International Workers of the World, wrote it in 1915. Read the words, and answer the following questions.

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.

They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn

But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel could 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

**Previous Verses (not often sung)**

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

It is we who ploughed 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 ‘mid the wonders we have made

But the union makes us strong

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

1. What does the author mean by “There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun”?

2. What does solidarity mean?

3. Why does the song suggest people should organize into unions?

4. Read and compare the previous (more radical) verses of Solidarity Forever, and those that remain.

a) What do the early words mean?

b) Why do you think they have been removed?

c) Do you think it is better to now include or exclude these words from “Labour’s anthem”? Why/Why not?

5. Why do you think this song has been so popular and long lasting?

**Bread and Roses**

James Oppenheim wrote the words to Bread and Roses; Caroline Kohlsaat wrote the music. They were inspired by a strike by women in the textile industry in Lawrence, Massachusetts more than eighty years ago. The women carried a banner reading “We want bread and roses too,” and at the end of their strike, the women had won gains for all textile workers in the area. Read the words to the song, and answer the following questions.

As we come marching, marching, in the beauty of the day

A million darkened kitchens, a thousand mill lofts gray

Are touched with all the radiance that a sudden sun discloses

For the people hear us singing, Bread and Roses, Bread and Roses.

As we come marching, marching, we battle too for men

For they are women’s children and we mother them again.

Our lives will not be sweated, from birth until life closes

Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses.

As we come marching, marching. Unnumbered women dead

Go crying through our singing, their ancient call for bread

Small art and love and beauty, their dredging spirits knew

Yes, it is bread we fight for, be we fight for roses too.

As we come marching, marching we bring the greater days

The rising of the women is the rising of us all\*

No more the drudge and idler, ten that toil while one reposes

But the sharing of life’s glories, Bread and Roses, Bread and Roses

\* The original wording “of us all” was “of the race”

1. What does the author mean by “Give us bread, but give us roses”?

2. Why do women battle for men too?

4. Why do you think the words were changed from “of the race” to “of us all”? What do you think the original writers meant by this term?

4. Explain the last two lines of the song.

**Where the Fraser River Flows**

Joe Hill, a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, wrote Where the Fraser River Flows, in 1912. The song was written in solidarity with striking railroad workers in British Columbia. Joe Hill is the most famous labour folk singer from the 1900–1914 period. His songs still inspire workers today. He is known as the man who never died. This is because, not only does he live in memory and song, but because his ashes were deliberately scattered across the USA by his followers (all states except Utah, where he was killed).

Fellow workers pay attention to what I’m going to mention,

For it is the brave contention of the workers of the world

That we should all be ready, true hearted, brave, and steady.

To rally around the standard when the Red Flag is unfurled.

**Chorus:**

Where the Fraser River flows, every fellow worker knows

They have bullied and oppressed us, but still the Union grows.

And we’re going to find a way, friends,

for shorter hours and better pay, friends

And we’re going to win the day, friends,

where the Fraser River flows.

For these gunny-sack contractors have all been dirty actors,

And they’re not our benefactors, as each fellow worker knows.

So we’ve got to stick together in fine or dirty weather,

And we will show no white feather where the Fraser River flows.

**Chorus**

Now the boss the law is stretching, bulls and pimps he’s fetching.

And they are a fine collection, as Jesus only knows.

But why their mothers reared them and why the devil spared them

Are questions we can’t answer, where the Fraser River flows.

Chorus

1. Why is there a reference to the Red Flag?

2. What does it mean to show no white feather?

3. What terms are used to describe the bosses?

4. What are the workers fighting for?

5. Why do you think Joe Hill is known as the man who never died?

**Ginger Goodwin**

Sean Muldoon, a Vancouver teacher, wrote Ginger Goodwin. Goodwin refused to support World War I, which he considered to be a war to benefit only the capitalist class. According to prevailing labour mythology he was hunted down and murdered outside Cumberland for his antiwar and union activities. He has become British Columbia’s most famous labour martyr. Recent critics have claimed that, rather than some deep conspiracy, Goodwin was “killed” by a mentality of the times that assumed he was an “outlaw” (his actions, in effect, removing him from the protection of the law) and therefore, like a mad dog, in need of being put down before the social illness spread. The prevailing attitude, if true, would strengthen rather than weaken Goodwin’s labour martyr status, and would put his death in a much wider context of worker struggle.

Ginger Goodwin, he worked hard

Till the police laid him low

Signing up those union cards

The people cried to see him so

Ginger’s sleeping sound and fast

A hero of the working class

But he won’t hear those May Day Songs

Dead heroes never sing

He was hiding in a shack

In the hills of Cumberland

Police shot him in the back

Because he was a union man

Newspapers said too bad

Ginger was a dangerous lad

He wouldn’t kill his fellow man

So he was killed instead

Ginger’s sleeping sound and fast

A hero of the working class

He won’t sing no May Day songs

Dead heroes never sing

They carried Ginger’s body down

They laid him on a bed of straw

All the people gathered round

They won’t forget the man they saw

When word spread that he had died

Thousands came to say goodbye

They laid a stone where Ginger lies

Here lies a worker’s friend.

Now when I see workers strike

They say we’re here to win this fight

I think of Ginger and I know they’re right

Here lies a worker’s friend.

1. Which lines refer to the reasons why Ginger Goodwin was killed?

2. Why is there a reference to May Day songs?

3. How does the song convey sadness?

4. What is written on Ginger Goodwin’s tombstone and why?