

This past week I was in Silver Spring, Maryland for the 40th anniversary of the Labor Heritage Foundation's annual Great Labor Arts Exchange, at which they presented me with their Joe Hill Lifetime Achievement Award, a great honor.

Joe Hill came to this country from Sweden in 1902. He became famous as a labor agitator and songwriter for the Industrial Workers of the World, which believed there should be "One Big Union" for all workers. Hated by the "copper bosses," he was framed up for murder and executed by firing squad at the Utah State Penitentiary in Salt Lake City on November 19th, 1915. One hundred years later to the day, I watched my long-time great friend and musical co-conspirator John McCutcheon perform *Joe Hill's Last Will*, a play I had written for John using Joe Hill's songs.

Among the things I learned from Joe Hill were that one of the best ways to make sure a political message really gets heard is to use humor and satire, and that people pay the most attention to songs when they can sing along. In "Going Going Gone" the chorus is fun to sing and the humor is pretty outrageous:

*When the sale was over I sure did thank my luck
Paid for both my Senators, put 'em in the truck
Now one has gone to milking and one has gone to seed
By wintertime they'll understand just what the farmers need*

I have no memory whatsoever of writing this song and it certainly wasn't written about any particular President of the United States. But songs sometime have a way of becoming more pointedly relevant many years later than when they were originally created. When I sing about the attempt to auction off the White House and say:

*But no one bid a nickel, they just stared so hard and cold
'Cause you can't bid on something that's already bought and sold*

I can't imagine anyone listening to it today not figuring out who the song is now talking about.