

Si Kahn and George Mann

“Labor Day” Lyrics

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“LABOR DAY” CD LYRICS

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Back When Times Were Hard

(Performed by Si Kahn)

The wind is off the river
Moon is up tonight
Factory windows shine against the rain
A stranger from another town
Stands just outside the gate
Waiting for the midnight shift to change

Some just walk by quickly
Afraid the boss will see
Some just turn their faces to the ground
But they whisper in the corners
They say it with their eyes
Praise the Lord, the union's come to town

They stood for the union
They stood for the union
They stood for the union
Back when times were hard

Who will spread the message
Who will bring the news
Who will guide the plow and break the ground
Who will show the courage
To overcome the fear
Who will build a union in this town

Outside the gates at midnight
In a hundred company towns
They talked about the truth that makes us free
The power of the union
The strength that's in us all
The vision of a day that's still to be

They stood for the union
They stood for the union
They stood for the union
Back when times were hard

Some of them were beaten
Some got thrown in jail
Some of them were ridden out of town
But the unions that they organized
Are here with us today
Proud and strong, they'll never keep us down

We rarely stop to honor
The ones who showed the way
We forget their stories much too soon
But the spirit that they gave us
Stands guard outside the gates
Cradled in the shadow of the moon

They stood for the union
They stood for the union
They stood for the union
Back when times were hard

They stood for the union
They stood for the union
They stood for the union
Back when times were hard

Solidarity Day

(Performed by George Mann and Si Kahn)

There's a lot of water gone over the top of the dam
Where it's going there's none of us can say
But the power of the waterfall still turns the strongest wheel
We remember on Solidarity Day

Today we have the chance
To stand on the mountaintop
See the future like a vision far away
On Solidarity Day
On Solidarity Day

There's a lot of heroes gone over to the other shore
Each one did their work and had their say
Their vision leads us onward towards a future bright and fair
We follow on Solidarity Day

Today we have the chance
To stand on the mountaintop
See the future like a vision far away
On Solidarity Day
On Solidarity Day

There's a lot of power kept just outside our reach
We stumble past the stones set in our way
But this river that guides us will someday reach the sea
We swear it on Solidarity Day

Today we have the chance
To stand on the mountaintop
See the future like a vision far away
On Solidarity Day
On Solidarity Day
On Solidarity Day
On Solidarity Day

Jail Can't Hold My Body Down

(Performed by Vivian Nesbitt & John Dillon)

Standing on the picket line hooting at the scabs
Sheriff said he'd teach us right from wrong
Thirty dollars, thirty days, that judge he wrote us down
Sitting in that narrow cell we sang the whole night long

Jail can't hold my body down
Chains can't turn my soul around
I'm singing through the bars
Flying free among the moon and stars
Jail can't hold my body down

Locked up in that prison, our children by our sides
We sang just like cats let loose in hell
Slept all day, sang all night, that judge just lay awake
Sent down for the sheriff and he opened up that cell

Jail can't hold my body down
Chains can't turn my soul around
I'm singing through the bars
Flying free among the moon and stars
Jail can't hold my body down

Have you known the freedom of voices joined together
Have you felt the power in that sound
While there is a soul in prison we shall not be free
While there is a song in prison we shall not be bound

Jail can't hold my body down
Chains can't turn my soul around
I'm singing through the bars
Flying free among the moon and stars
Jail can't hold my body down

Gone Gonna Rise Again

(Performed by Michael Jonathon and Odetta)

I remember the year my granddaddy died

Gone gonna rise again

We dug his grave on the mountainside

Gone gonna rise again

I was too young to understand

The way he felt about the land

But I could read his history in his hands

Gone gonna rise again

It's corn in the crib, apples in the bin

Gone gonna rise again

Ham in the smokehouse, cotton in the gin

Gone gonna rise again

Cows in the barn, hogs in the trough

You know he never had a lot

But he worked like the devil for the little he got

Gone gonna rise again

These apple trees on the mountainside

Gone gonna rise again

He planted the seeds just before he died

Gone gonna rise again

I guess he knew he'd never see

The red fruit hanging from the tree

But he planted the seeds for his children and me

Gone gonna rise again

High on the ridge above the farm

Gone gonna rise again

I think of my people that have gone on

Gone gonna rise again

Like a tree that grows in the mountain ground

The storms of life have cut 'em down

But the new wood springs from the roots underground

Gone gonna rise again

We're the Ones

(Performed by Billy Bragg)

We're the ones who did the fighting
We're the ones who fought their wars
We're the ones who did the dying
We're the ones who bear the scars
We're the ones who built the railroads
We're the ones who laid the track
All we have we had to fight for
Now they want to take it back

For the mothers and the fathers
For the daughters and the sons
Ours the challenge, ours the struggle
Ours the victory, we're the ones

We're the ones who did the suffering
We're the ones who feel the pain
We're the ones with bodies broken
While they say that we're to blame
From the fire, from the acid
From the falls and burning steel
Lungs destroyed by coal and cotton
Do you wonder how we feel

For the mothers and the fathers
For the daughters and the sons
Ours the challenge, ours the struggle
Ours the victory, we're the ones

We're the ones who paid the taxes
We're the ones who paid the dues
We're the ones who built our countries
Now it's up to me and you
Working folks of every color
Working women, working men
Side by side stand up for freedom
Stand together 'til we win

For the mothers and the fathers
For the daughters and the sons
Ours the challenge, ours the struggle
Ours the victory, we're the ones

Ours the challenge, ours the struggle
Ours the victory, we're the ones

Were You There

(Performed by George Mann)

Were you there when we organized
Were you there, were you there
Were you there when we organized
Were you there, were you there

When we stood up to the bosses
Were you there, were you there
When we stood up to the bosses
Were you there, were you there

When we organized the union
Were you there, were you there
When we organized the union
Were you there, were you there

When we went on strike for justice
Were you there, were you there
When we went on strike for justice
Were you there, were you there

When we held the line together
Were you there, were you there
When we held the line together
Were you there, were you there

When we fought for peace and freedom
Were you there, were you there
When we fought for peace and freedom
Were you there, were you there

When we stood up for the future
Were you there, were you there
When we stood up for the future
Were you there, were you there

Were you there when we organized
Were you there, were you there
Were you there when we organized
Were you there, were you there

Long Way to Harlan

(Performed by Laurie Lewis & Si Kahn)

Haven't I seen your face before
Long time ago
Didn't you live on Second Street
End of the row
What're you doing way out here
Place like LA
I bet you're lonesome bad as me
You know they say

That it's a long way to Harlan, long way to go
Long way to Harlan, long way to home
Yes, it's a long way to Harlan, long way to go
Long way to Harlan, long way to home

Say ain't you Bill McCarthy's boy
I should have known
Why, you were just a little old thing
Lord how you've grown
Your Daddy was on the graveyard shift
At Number Nine
Your Momma worked in the company store
They sure were fine folks

It's a long way to Harlan, long way to go
Long way to Harlan, long way to home
Yes, it's a long way to Harlan, long way to go
Long way to Harlan, long way to home

I still drive a pickup truck
I never liked a car
I wish you'd let me take you home
It's kind of far
A coal camp woman can sure get lost
In this low land
It feels so good to come across
A hometown man

And it's a long way to Harlan, long way to go
Long way to Harlan, long way to home
Yes, it's a long way to Harlan, long way to go
Long way to Harlan, long way to home

Lawrence Jones
(Performed by Kathy Mattea)

The air is thick as silence
You can cut it with a knife
A man lies in the hospital
Draining out his life
The trucks are on the back roads
In the dark their headlights shine
There's one man dead
On the Harlan County line

Anger like a poison
Is eating at your soul
Your thoughts are loud as gunfire
Your face is hard as coal
Bitterness like buckshot
Explodes inside your mind
There's one man dead
On the Harlan County line

A miner's life is fragile
It can shatter just like ice
But those who bear the struggle
Have always paid the price
There's blood upon the contract
Like vinegar in wine
There's one man dead
On the Harlan County line

From the river bridge at High Splint
To the Brookside railroad track
You can feel a long strength building
That can never be turned back
The dead go forward with us
Not one is left behind
There's one man dead
On the Harlan County line

The night is cold as iron
You can feel it in your bones
It settles like a shroud upon
The grave of Lawrence Jones
The graveyard shift is walking
From the bath house to the mine
There's one man dead
On the Harlan County line

Aragon Mill

(Performed by Peggy Seeger)

At the east end of town
At the foot of the hill
Stands a chimney so tall
That says Aragon Mill

But there's no smoke at all
Coming out of the stack
For the mill has pulled out
And it ain't coming back

And the only tune I hear
Is the sound of the wind
As it blows through the town
Weave and spin, weave and spin

Now I'm too old to change
I'm too young to die
And there's no place to go
For my old man and I

There's no children at all
In the narrow empty streets
Now the looms have all gone
It's so quiet I can't sleep

And the only tune I hear
Is the sound of the wind
As it blows through the town
Weave and spin, weave and spin

Now the mill has shut down
It's the only life I know
Tell me where will I go
Tell me where will I go

And the only tune I hear
Is the sound of the wind
As it blows through the town
Weave and spin, weave and spin

Standing at the End of the Line

(Performed by Si Kahn)

Old John Jones grew up in the mill
He used to work twelve hours for a five-dollar bill
Now he's all broke down but he ain't dead yet
The longer he goes you know the slower he gets

Wake up John, time to join the union
We know it takes a lot of time to make up your mind
But wouldn't it feel good to belong to something
After spending a lifetime standing at the end of the line

His younger dreams they had no end
He really thought the company was his best friend
To please his friend he worked so hard
He just got too tired to sign a union card

Wake up John, time to join the union
We know it takes a lot of time to make up your mind
But wouldn't it feel good to belong to something
After spending a lifetime standing at the end of the line

When he thinks about his long gone past
He must have been looking through a rose-colored glass
But those glasses can't hide the writing on the wall
When it's written in letters that's ten feet tall

Wake up John, time to join the union
We know it takes a lot of time to make up your mind
But wouldn't it feel good to belong to something
After spending a lifetime standing at the end of the line

The Old Labor Hall

(Performed by Joe Jencks)

For my great friends of over 40 years, Chet Briggs & Karen Lane

They stand outside the doorway
As the long shadows fall
A line of ghostly figures
At the Old Labor Hall
Mother Jones has just arrived
In pillbox hat and shawl
From the Battle of Blair Mountain
To the Old Labor Hall

Big Bill Haywood stoops to enter
He's nearly six feet tall
Bringing children from Lawrence
To the Old Labor Hall
He nods to Emma Goldman
So fiery yet so small
She's arguing with Eugene Debs
At the Old Labor Hall

We still tell their stories
We still share their pride
'Cross a century of struggle
We're still on their side

They view the ancient photographs
That line the worn wood walls
They are back in 1900
At the Old Labor Hall
An Italian woman cocks her head
As if trying to recall
Some old song from Palermo
At the Old Labor Hall

A Scots stonemason proudly holds
His chisel and his maul
His Highland brogue still echoes
Through the Old Labor Hall
He sculpts the Barre granite
The finest stone of all
For some rich man's mausoleum
At the Old Labor Hall

We still tell their stories
We still share their pride
'Cross a century of struggle
We're still on their side

With socialists and anarchists
Sometimes it's quite a brawl
It isn't always peaceful
At the Old Labor Hall
But on the roll of honor
The brightest names of all
Are the immigrants whose strong hands built
The Old Labor Hall

So today we gather
Grateful to recall
This gentle man who fought to save
The Old Labor Hall
Who with such grace and humor
Such feeling for us all
Infused his steadfast passion
Through the Old Labor Hall

We will tell his story
We will share his pride
Today and in the future
Chet Briggs is on our side

We still tell their stories
We still share their pride
'Cross a century of struggle
We're still on their side

They're still on our side

Spinning Mills of Home

(Performed by Magpie – Terry Leonino & Greg Artzner)

Early Monday morning
I keep thinking that I'm late to work
Why didn't someone wake me
Guess the mills are down again
Three years I've been trying to raise
My kids on card room wages
Guess it's time to hit the road and try
My luck up North again

On the highway heading South
On the highway heading North
Just back and forth
Sometimes I feel like a rolling stone
From the rolling mills of Gary
To the rolling hills
And spinning mills of home

All along the river
Railroad tracks turned red and rusty
Cotton fields all dry and dusty
You can taste it in your mouth
Now you've heard people say
How they've got one foot in the grave
Well, I've got one in Indiana
And the other in the South

On the highway heading South
On the highway heading North
Just back and forth
Sometimes I feel like a rolling stone
From the rolling mills of Gary
To the rolling hills
And spinning mills of home

I wish that they would write it down
The way someone who knows their work
Can have their labor bought and sold
Like cotton by the pound
It's just too hard to choose between
A job at home for lousy pay
And making real good money
In some Northern factory town

On the highway heading South
On the highway heading North
Just back and forth
Sometimes I feel like a rolling stone
From the rolling mills of Gary
To the rolling hills
And spinning mills of home

Truck Driving Woman

(Performed by Cathy Fink & Marcy Marxer)

You see me on the highway
And you nearly shift your load
You take another look good buddy
And you nearly leave the road

Ain't you never seen a truck driving woman
Ninety pounds of fire in a five foot frame
And you better move on over
I'm right behind you in the left hand lane

When you see me in the truck stop
And my long hair hangs in curls
Don't you try to buy my coffee
I ain't no good time girl

No I'm a truck driving momma
Five children waiting when I end my run
And I gotta keep moving
Got to be in Georgia with the rising sun

So when you see me on the highway
And you hear my diesel moan
Don't you whistle at me buddy
'Cause you know I'm not alone

I got my old man beside me
Working together it's the way we feel
Yeah I'm a truck driving woman
Night haul from Pittsburgh with a load of steel

In the Family

(Performed by Si Kahn)

I've always worked for a living
And I've always worked just as hard as I can
My momma was a good-hearted hard-working woman
My daddy was a hard-working man

And I'm proud to be in the family
Of people who work for a living each day
If you're looking for good-hearted hardworking people
You won't find no better, nowhere, no way

There were good times, lean times, some in between times
You don't know how hard times will fall
Sometimes there was plenty of meat on the table
Sometimes there was nothing at all

And I'm proud to be in the family
Of people who work for a living each day
If you're looking for good-hearted hardworking people
You won't find no better, nowhere, no way

I look at my children, my hope for the future
Some of the best work I've done
If they turn out as good-hearted hard-working people
Then I've earned my place in the sun

And I'm proud to be in the family
Of people who work for a living each day
If you're looking for good-hearted hardworking people
You won't find no better, nowhere, no way

They All Sang Bread and Roses

(Performed by George Mann)

Now don't you think it's crazy
This old world and its ways
Whoever thought the '60s
Would be called "the good old days"
But like the Weavers sang to us
Wasn't that a time
When we raised our hands and voices
On the line

And we all sang "Bread and Roses"
"Joe Hill" and "Union Maid"
We linked our arms and told each other
We are not afraid
"Solidarity Forever"
Would go rolling through the hall
"We Shall Overcome" together
One and all

The more I study history
The more I seem to find
That in every generation
There were times just like that time
When folks like you and me
Who thought that they were all alone
Within this honored Movement
Found a home

And they all sang "Bread and Roses"
"Joe Hill" and "Union Maid"
They linked their arms and told each other
We are not afraid
"Solidarity Forever"
Would go rolling through the hall
"We Shall Overcome" together
One and all

Though each generation
Fears that it may be the last
Our presence here is witness
To the power of the past
Just as we have drawn our strength
From those who now are gone
Younger hands will take our work
And carry on

And they'll all sing "Bread and Roses"
"Joe Hill" and "Union Maid"
They'll link their arms and tell each other
We are not afraid
"Solidarity Forever"
Will go rolling through the hall
"We Shall Overcome" together
One and all

"We Shall Overcome" together
One and all

Go to Work on Monday

(Performed by John McCutcheon)

I did my part in World War Two
Got wounded for the nation
Now my lungs are all shot down
There ain't no compensation

I'm gonna go to work on Monday one more time
I'm gonna go to work on Monday one more time, one more time
I'm gonna go to work on Monday one more time

The doctor says I smoke too much
He says that I'm not trying
He says he don't know what I've got
But we both know he's lying

The last time I went near my job
I thought my lungs were broken
Chest bound like iron bands
I couldn't breathe for choking

The politicians in this state
They're nothing short of rotten
They buy us off with fancy words
And sell us out to cotton

The doctor says both lungs are gone
There ain't no way to shake it
But I can't live without a job
Somehow I've got to take it

They tell me I can't work at all
There ain't no need of trying
But living like some used up thing
Is just this short of dying

Sitting on my front porch swing
I'm like someone forgotten
Head all filled with angry thoughts
And lungs filled up with cotton

We're Not Leaving

(Performed by Si Kahn)

The sun comes up in Arizona
It shines like copper on the town
We stand together on the highway
Like soldiers on some battleground

This is our home and we're not leaving
These are our jobs and we won't go
We'll stand together with our union
This is our work, this is our home

The company boys come down the highway
Their heads are stuffed with angry plans
They take the jobs we worked to build here
And leave us all with empty hands

This is our home and we're not leaving
These are our jobs and we won't go
We'll stand together with our union
This is our work, this is our home

Night comes down upon the valley
The hard times fall on everyone
But we will rise just like the morning
And we will shine just like the sun

This is our home and we're not leaving
These are our jobs and we won't go
We'll stand together with our union
This is our work, this is our home

The Power of the Union

(Performed by George Mann)

Some people can never say no to the boss
They take what they get for their labor
While others will stand up whatever the cost
To fight for the rights of a neighbor

Every day (*every day*)
Every night (*every night*)
Will you fight for the things you believe in
Will you stand (*will you stand*)
All your life (*all your life*)
Hand in hand with the power of the union

Some people can never say what's on their mind
In hard times you hardly can find them
There's always a few who stand first in the line
Hold on 'til there's hundreds behind them

Every day (*every day*)
Every night (*every night*)
Will you fight for the things you believe in
Will you stand (*will you stand*)
All your life (*all your life*)
Hand in hand with the power of the union

Look at this crowd, so proudly we stand
Together our hearts loudly beating
The strength and the spirit that we feel tonight
Is proof of the power of the union

Every day (*every day*)
Every night (*every night*)
Will you fight for the things you believe in
Will you stand (*will you stand*)
All your life (*all your life*)
Hand in hand with the power of the union

Every day (*every day*)
Every night (*every night*)
Will you fight for the things you believe in
Will you stand (*will you stand*)
All your life (*all your life*)
Hand in hand with the power of the union
Hand in hand with the power of the union

Hold Our Ground Forever

(Performed by Tom Chapin and The Chapin Sisters)

When times grow dark and life grows mean
The hardest times we've ever seen
When darkness overwhelms the dawn
Can we find strength to carry on

When high winds tear down what we've built
Do we give in to blame and guilt
Or work and fight as we've done before
And rise once more, and rise once more

You are here (*hold our ground*)
I am here (*hold our ground*)
We are here together
Through times of strife (*hold our ground*)
Through times of fear (*hold our ground*)
We will hold our ground forever

When tempers and the Earth grow hot
We'll trust the goals for which we've fought
We'll not lose sight of a brighter day
Nor lose one friend along the way

You are here (*hold our ground*)
I am here (*hold our ground*)
We are here together
Through times of strife (*hold our ground*)
Through times of fear (*hold our ground*)
We will hold our ground forever

No matter what the future holds
We'll be outspoken, kind and bold
Whether with poem or clenched fist
We'll find the ways we can resist

The common good is still our creed
To each according to their need
Though oceans rise and high winds wail
Our quiet courage will prevail

You are here (*hold our ground*)
I am here (*hold our ground*)
We are here together
Through times of strife (*hold our ground*)
Through times of fear (*hold our ground*)
We will hold our ground forever
Hold our ground forever

You Are the "U" in Union

(Performed by Si Kahn)

Blessed are the weak
Blessed are the poor
Blessed those who love their neighbor
Blessed are the children
Blessed are the meek
Blessed are all those who labor

Lift up your eyes
Lift up your voice
Come to the great reunion
Give us your hand
Join in our band
You are the 'U' in union

Battered and tossed
Scattered and lost
All of these years divided
Each one is precious
Each plays a part
When we are all united

Lift up your eyes
Lift up your voice
Come to the great reunion
Give us your hand
Join in our band
You are the 'U' in union

Poor from our birth
Promised this earth
Let us unite and share it
Seeking for justice
Here in this world
We shall one day inherit

Lift up your eyes
Lift up your voice
Come to the great reunion
Give us your hand
Join in our band
You are the 'U' in union

People Like You

(Performed by George Mann)

Old fighter, you sure took it on the chin
Where'd you ever get the strength to stand
Never giving up or giving in
You know I just want to shake your hand

Because people like you
Help people like me
Go on, go on
People like you
Help people like me
Go on, go on

Old battler, with a scar for every town
Thought you were no better than the rest
You wore your colors every way but down
All you ever gave us was your best
But you know that

People like you
Help people like me
Go on, go on
People like you
Help people like me
Go on, go on

Old dreamer, with a world in every thought
Where'd you get the vision to keep on
You sure gave back as good as what you got
I hope that when my time is almost gone
They'll say that

People like me
Helped people like you
Go on, go on
Because people like you
Help people like you
Go on, go on, go on