



## CELEBRATING LABOR DAY and the work you do every day!

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### ON LABOR DAY

# Solidarity — Now, and Forever

In Tacoma, Ralph Chaplin's body may be 'mouldering in the grave' but his spirit is marching on.

By Don McIntosh

This Labor Day — like every Labor Day the last 20 years — a crowd will gather beside a gravestone in Tacoma to honor the man who wrote the words to “Solidarity Forever.”

Solidarity Forever — sung to the tune of the Battle Hymn of the Republic — is the most famous anthem of the American labor movement. Ralph Hosea Chaplin wrote it in 1915 after witnessing the bloody struggles of striking coal miners in West Virginia. At the time, Chaplin was a poet, writer and cartoonist for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a radical anarchist-influenced union of miners and loggers.

Where the Battle Hymn says “his truth is marching on,” Solidarity Forever ends its refrain with “the Union makes us strong.” Today it’s sung at union meetings, rallies, and on picket lines in the United States and other English-speaking countries.

Chaplin was one of the IWW’s leading lights, and was

one of about 100 IWW members who went to prison under the Espionage Act of 1917 for opposing U.S. involvement in World War One. He was released after serving four years of a 20-year sentence, and went right back to labor activism.



Ralph Chaplin

Chaplin lived in Tacoma for the last decade of his life. There he worked as an archivist for the Washington State Historical Society and served as editor to the newspaper of the Pierce County Labor Council. He died in 1961 and was buried beside his wife at Calvary Cemetery in Tacoma.

The annual graveside observance began in 1999. It started with a pledge a local labor leader made to a dying member. Phil Lelli, the longtime leader of International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 23, promised Local 23 member T. A. “Tiny” Tronson he wouldn’t let Chaplin’s place in labor history be forgotten. That year and every year since, the Pierce County Labor Council has sponsored the memorial. It features songs, stories, and the display of an artifact — a tin cup Chaplin scratched his name on when he was in jail on the Espionage Act charges.

- Time: Monday, Sept. 2
- Place: Calvary Cemetery, 7220 S Mullen St, Tacoma, Washington

### 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!

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]

— Ralph Chaplin, Jan. 17, 1915

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