

Joe Hill Ashes

By:Mark Levy

Let's sing of Joseph Hillstrom, better known as old Joe Hill,
Murdered by a firing squad, shot but never killed.
His will said that his ashes be strewn across the land
So flowers that refuse to die would rise up strong and stand.

We sing his songs to fan the flames and talk about him much.
The ashes of this rebel voice are still too hot to touch.

Joe's corpse lay in Chicago, where thirty-thousand marched.
They flew the Wobbly banner. High above the throng it arched.
The workers sang and cheered his name. They did not eulogize.
They honored Joe Hill's last request
"Don't mourn. Organize!"

And the union took Joe's body, which then they did cremate,
His ashes stuffed in envelopes and mailed to every state,
Except, of course, to Utah, for Joe had clearly said,
"Don't leave me here in Utah: here I wouldn't be caught dead!"

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Then, someone in the mail room discovered what was up.
The postmaster was summoned: the mailing to disrupt.
An envelope tore open in the cancelling machine.
'Twas just Joe's way of saying, "Automation is obscene!"

With patriotic fervor, the postmaster was seized.
He treated that poor envelope as if it were diseased.
He said, "I won't deliver such subversive mail."
So, for a while, Joe had to wait in some dead letter file.

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At long last, the post office sent Joe's ashes to D.C.,
To the archives, like an artifact of ancient history.
The Wobblies in Chicago asked that he be sent home.
They wouldn't see him catalogued down in that catacomb.

So, Joe's back with the Wobblies, and thus concludes my tale.
But if there is a moral, I might say, "Don't trust the mail!"
We'll build that One Big Union before Joe's ash gets cold,
And we'll bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old.

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