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PETE SEEGER: Sings and Answers Questions

★ Side One

Opinions and Social Justice
Background to Social Songs
in Europe and the USA
Social Songs from the Colonial
Times to today
Songs of the Immigrants

★ Side Two

Labor Songs in the USA
Songs of Prejudices and Protests
Black Revolts in the USA

★ Side Three

Question and Answer Period
Anti-Vietnam Songs
The Big Muddy Controversy: TV
Arts in a Changing Society
Violence and Protest

★ Side Four

Lisa Kalvalege Song
Union Labor Songs
Bells of Rhymney
Woody Guthrie
Afro-American Songs

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PETE SEEGER



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SINGS AND ANSWERS QUESTIONS

AT THE FORD HALL FORUM
BOSTON MASSACHUSETTS

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PETE SEEGER Questions And Answers

On November 12, 1967, Pete Seeger was the speaker at Ford Hall Forum, Boston Mass. Ford Hall Forum has for sixty years presented speakers, talking on significant topical issues of the day.

The topic of Pete Seeger's program is music and social justice. Pete Seeger was born in N.Y.; his parents were professional musicians. His uncle interestingly enough as we learn from the Forum, was Allan Seeger, who wrote the well-known poem "I have a Rendezvous with Death," just before he was killed during the first World War. Pete Seeger quit Harvard after several unsuccessful tries at Art and Journalism, but in 1935 he was introduced to folk music by his father. He spent a year listening to the recordings of American folk songs in the Library of Congress, and by 1940 was appearing on radio networks with Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly, Alan Lomax and others. He was black listed by commercial broadcasting from 1950-1967, but he has appeared on television in foreign lands including Australia, Denmark and the U.S.S.R. as well as Israel, and he has performed on many college and university campuses.

Forum President Reuben Lurie gave Pete the following introduction:

Mr. Lloyd Garrison the great abolitionist, I want to read you what he said. What he said was this. "These were days of great danger". I am in earnest, I will not equivocate, I will not excuse, I will not retreat a single inch, and I will be heard. This I believe is the heroism of Mr. Seeger. I present him with pleasure.

THE RECORD SIDE I

You probably realize that people disagree violently on their opinions of what social justice is, and they also disagree violently on their opinions of what music is. Tonight, I, like any musician, am highly prejudiced, and probably like any person who thinks about the condition of the human race, I'm also highly prejudiced. And with those grains of salt you can use with anything I say, then, I'll go ahead and make a batch of prejudiced statements. Whenever people feel strongly moved about anything there's a tendency for them to sit down and write poetry about it or sometime burst into song. And that's why we have love songs; we have religious songs; we've got war songs, songs about babies, home, there's class war songs. But tonight we're particularly looking at the angle in songs... well, it'll come out. Let me sing you fragments of several different songs. One that might've been... was known by probably every single Bostonian a few centuries ago, and they called it Old Hundred.

"All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice."

And this was not just a religious song; it was a song of people who had a very social outlook. They believed that they were going to set up a new social order. Unfortunately, their opinion of what "all people" consisted of was a little narrow I think. You remember what Mark Twain said, "The Pilgrims first landed on their knees to thank the Lord, then they landed on the Indians." Here's another song:

"Some do think it a misfortune to be christened Pat or Dan

But to me it is an honor to be born an Irish man."

It was 100 years ago that that was a popular song in many a Boston bar. It was a song protesting the signs which were up at many a factory gate saying: "No Irish need apply."

Here's a song put together maybe 30 years ago. I learned it from the man who wrote it. He was a great blues singer. He's dead now. But, he came down to sing at a

Hootenany in N.Y. in 1946. And as he said goodbye he said, "Pete I sure had a lot of fun, I wish I could sing for you all the time, but I got to earn a living." he said, "I'm gonna send you a song." And a week later, well... he had gone into one of these booths where it said, "record your voice - 25¢," And I received this little record. It said, "Pete, I can't sing this in the kind of places I work at, but maybe you can." Although I can't really play blues... wish I could but I can't... I will sing you Big Bill's song, or a little of it.

"Now listen to this song I'm singing brother, you know it's true.

If you're black and got to work for a living, this is what they'll do.

Well if your white, your alright,

But if your brown, stick around,

And if your black, oh brother, get back, get back, get back..."

It's an old, old tradition. My guess is it's as old as the human race has been talking or singing. There was a book once, Upton Sinclair I think edited it, called The Cry for Justice. He had poems in there of Egyptian peasants 5,000 years ago complaining that the taxes were too high and there was no justice in the world. In every country there was a tradition for poets not just to make up lyrics about eternal verities, but to make up highly pointed lyrics about highly contemporary verities. In Arabia, there was a saying that when the King put a poet on his payroll, it was cutting off the tongue of the poet. I've often thought of that, when the problem comes up of what you do if you get offered a good job on television.

I have been told that this next song from Germany also originated in the peasant war. There's some disagreement about that, but it's very possible that it could have.

"Die Gedanken sind Frei. (German)

My thoughts freely flower.

Die Gedanken sind Frei.

My thoughts give me power.

No scholar can map them.

No hunter can trap them.

No man can deny,

Die Gedanken sind Frei."

Thoughts are free. This is a very accurate translation incidentally, by Arthur Kevess. The original line says

"Es bleibt dabei, die Gedanken sind Frei.

I think as I please, my thoughts give me pleasure.

My conscience decrees this right I must treasure,

My thoughts will not cater, to duke or dictator.

No man can deny,

Die Gedanken sind Frei..."

Now, as I said earlier, people can have very different ideas of what social justice consists of. Today if one was in either Egypt or Israel one could find songs passionately convinced that they have 100% of the right as far as social justice went. You could probably find the same opposing viewpoints in our own history. Thing is we don't know about them. I've often regretted that I've never been able to find out any of the songs, never been able to learn... it's something you have to study all of your life to really learn well... to learn some American Indian songs. Because here was a people that fought, and fought hard, but they were hopelessly outnumbered and out techniqued. So the only songs we know about the Indian wars present the European side. But it is a fact that in the year 1634, The Mass. colony said outright in black and white print, that they must exterminate the Piquad race. And every squaw and every child as well as every adult male was exterminated, several thousand of them. I don't have any song from that period. 1725 is the nearest I can get. A very popular song in New England in 1725:

"A worthy Captain Lovewell, I propose now to sing
how valiantly he served his country and his king,
He and his valiant soldiers did range the woods
full wide, and hardships they endured to quell
the Indians' pride..."

Benjamin Franklin said, "Savages we call them because
their ways are different than ours." I am afraid he was
in the minority of the country in his opinion.

There's songs like this all through our history you know.
Like this Captain Lovewell. Some of them are more
generous. The song I've often sung about - the 1870's
I guess - or 1860's.

"I'll sing you a song though it may be a sad one,
of trials and troubles and where it first begun
I left my dear family, my friends and my home,
To cross the wide mountains, and deserts to
roam..."

It tells how they went out to Nebraska; started travelling...

It's a better song. I'll tell you why. It's more objective.
Of the thousands of songs that are made up, get made up
every year, every day I guess, most of them - 999 out of
1,000 - get forgotten. The few that get remembered,
usually are because they have some little germ of uni-
versal objectivity in them.

But we've had songs written by the conquering White race
all across our country. We got the famous ballad about
Hell in Texas. Oh it is a very funny song - how the devil
created Texas, how he put the cactus there and then when
he finished it he said, "This beats Hell." Then the last
verse says, "Just dine with a greaser and then you will
shout; I've Hell on the inside as well as the out." And of
course, you know - if you don't you should - that the word
"Greaser" was a contemptuous term used by the white
people of the Southwest for the Mexican-Americans.

There were songs extolling the Irish Railroad workers
that built the railroad to California, and some of them
were sung at the big California celebration as soon as
the railroad was finished. But the 10's of thousands of
Chinese laborers who built half of the railroad were not
invited even to the celebration. None of their songs
appear. They were "Coolies", they were "Chinks".
There's Klu Klux Klan songs today you know. A lot of
you may have heard some of the freedom songs from the
Negro liberation movement, but they're Klu Klux Klan
songs also. Did you ever hear this song? This was
1898, sung by American soldiers in the Philippines.

"Damn, Damn, Damn, the Phillipino, Cross-eyed,
Cocky-acked..."

And I hope that any Phillipino people listening will
pardon me. Just trying to get at the historical situation.
And yet, the same people who maybe have been blind in
one way, fought very hard for democracy in another way
perhaps.

"Let law and order be the state with freedom
and protection.
Let's all stand by the ballot box for fair and
free election."

In the year of 1800, it was one of the campaign songs
around Tom Jefferson's day.

And they really were fighting hard. Because in those
days it was customary for only men of property to be
allowed to vote; and there was a big battle on for working
men and people who did not own land to also be allowed to
vote. Of course, they hadn't gotten so far as to think that
women also might have the right to vote. They hadn't
gotten so far as to think that perhaps people with dark
skins might have a right to vote. Nevertheless, that was
a widely sung song. They had thousands of them. You go
through the history books, you can find literally thousands
of songs like that. Most of them are poor songs. They
are editorials in rhyme. 125 years ago I think exactly,
they had one of the first Abolitionists' conventions here in
Boston, and a group of New Hampshire farm people that
loved to sing, came and made up a song.

"Oh the Carr Emancipation rides majestic
through our nation.
Bearing on its wheels the story, liberty
the nations glory.
Roll it along, through the nation..."

I'm sorry, that was the year 1844. The reason is that the
melody was swiped from a pop tune of the day, "Old Dan
Tucker", and we put new words to it.

"Men of various predilections, frightened run
in all directions,
Lawyers, editors, physicians, merchants,
priests and politicians,
Roll it along..."

The 1840's was also the birth of the women's suffrage
movement. They had songs that ... as I say, most of
these songs get very wordy. They're not really good for
singing, and you can dig them out of the library if you
want. Temperance songs, my gosh they had thousands
of them.

"Cold water, cold water for me..."

Warming up to my subject ... In the 1880's there was
ferment in the cities and ferment in the countryside. They
called it "Farmers Alliance."

"Oh the farmer comes to town with his wagon
down,

But the farmer is the man who feeds them all..."

Can't remember the verses of this; it was one of the "eight
hour day" songs. In the 1880's the labor movement was
just getting rolling. The demand, that eight hours be the
standard hours of work, six day week of course.

"Eight hours we'll have for labor
Eight hours we'll have for play..."

But as I say, too doggone wordy ... I call them editorials
in rhyme.

"I once was a tool of oppression, as green as a
sucker could be,
And Wall Street and the old party bosses teamed
up on a hayseed like me..."

That tune, maybe some of you recognize, is one of the
really great Irish melodies. It's been known in 10,000
versions.

Actually, the tradition of making up songs about events of
the day was strongly reinforced by the Irish people com-
ing here, because they've been used to it for centuries,
making up songs as part of the Irish national struggle.
Not that the English didn't have political ballads too.

"Robin the Bobin, the big belly Ben,
ate more meat than three score men.
Swallowed the church, swallowed the steeple,
swallowed the priest, and all of the people."

Still his belly wasn't full. Anybody ever remember see-
ing the portrait of King Henry VIII with his big pot belly?
You know who that nursery rhyme was directed at. It
was the popular thing in the 16th century and 17th too, to
make up political barbs in double-talk. Robin the Bobin,
you know he was taking over the Church of England, he
wanted all that loot for himself.

"Robin the Bobin, the big bellied Ben, ..."

But the Irish really had some of the greatest of these -
"topical songs" I tended to call them, because they're on
topics of the day. And as I say, some of them were so
great that they lasted far down into the generations.

"Mrs. McGrath the Sargeant said, would you
like to make a soldier out of your son Ted..."

Hey, you know what; I've been hollering my head off all
by myself. Will you help me out on that chorus? It's
a silly thing. The Irish really loved it. You put in a lot
of "toori fa tha din kadiddle" types.

"Wid your toori oori oori a?" I didn't hear you;
try it again.

Now after every chorus, you help me out...

(The song continues, about Mrs. McGrath's son becoming a soldier and losing his legs in a war. The song contains the lines:

"I'd rather have my son as he used to be,
Than the King of France and his whole navy.")

SIDE II

I'm skipping very lightly through our history. Come up to the days of the Wobblies - called them the "I Won't Works" - IWW, International Workers of the World. They once had about 300,000 enthusiastic members in days just before and just after World War I, and to every man they signed up they not only gave them a little membership card, but they gave them a little red book full of songs. On the outside it said "To Fan the Flames of Discontent." And one of the Wobblies who made up the song which today the most respectable labor people still sing.

"Solidarity forever, solidarity forever, solidarity forever, for the Union makes us strong."

Let me sing a little bit more from the Irish tradition, because so many people today forget exactly how strong was the contempt for the Irish a hundred years ago. They called them dirty; they called them ignorant; they called them Pappists; and it came into many a song.

"We got a pig in the parlor; we got a pig
in the parlor,
we got a pig in the parlor; and he is Irish too."

There's a famous fiddle tune called the Pigtown Fling:
Even the Irish washerwoman used to have verses like

"Did you ever go into an Irishman's shanty where water was scarce and whisky was plenty."

And to the Irish people listening, let me pardon, please let me pardon - pardon me for singing these kind of songs; but I want to get the historical record out.

I'm glad to say that in a 100 years this situation has of course been changed. The Irish power did something.

Their most famous song writer, Joe Hill, was accused of murder and shot in Utah, in 1916. His songs kept on going.

"You will eat by and by, in that glorious land
above the sky.
Work and pray. Live on hay. You'll get pie in
the sky, by and by."

To people who know the original song I should again beg your pardon, because this probably is offensive. The original hymn was called "In the Sweet By and By." The church in those days was very antagonistic to the organized working people. Not always, but sometimes, they'd be preaching over here saying, "Don't pay any attention to those wild Wobblies, come to Jesus." And while they were singing "In the Sweet By and By", the Wobblies would have their own soapbox and they'd be singing their own words.

"Long haired preachers come out every night,
try to tell you what's wrong and what's right.
But when asked about something to eat, they
will answer with voices so sweet ...

They put new words to the famous hymn, "Take it to the Lord in Prayer."

"Are you poor forlorn and hungry? Are there lots of things you lack, (can't remember the line here)
Dump the bosses off your back."

Coming up through the 1930's, an interesting thing happened. The Labor Movement again took a lot of melodies from the gospel church. But their words were not anti-church, they simply emphasized a militancy that had long been there ... but they emphasized it. And so it

was that in the 1930's you could find not one, not two, but dozens of songs made up to hymn tunes. Instead of 'Roll the Chariot On,' it became:

"We're gonna roll, we're gonna roll, we're gonna roll the Union on."...

Instead of: "That old Ship of Zion, What is that I see coming, coming, it's the old Ship of Zion, Zion, Zion." Its: "That Union train's a coming, coming, coming. It saved many a thousand." It was actually the same song, but it was now a Union song instead of a Protestant Christian song.

The most famous one of all - I don't know who made it up, but it was undoubtedly made up by Negro union members in the South - instead of: "Jesus is my captain, I will not be moved," they changed that "I" to "we." A very important change.

"We shall not, we shall not be moved,
" " " " " " " " "

Just like a tree that's planted by the waters,
We shall not be moved."

The same change was made - instead of the old hymn, "I Will Overcome," it became, "We Will Overcome,"

And now in the last few minutes of the first half of this evening's program, I'll get down to the nitty gritty as they say. Because the fundamental problem as you know and I know in the United States right now, and in many parts of the world, is: are the light skinned people of the world going to treat the dark skinned people of the world as human beings, or something less than human beings. And so the next 15 minutes will be circling around this question which I call the White problem.

The interesting thing is that when it comes to songs, the element of protest is often so subtly and artistically inter-worked within the song that it's not apparent to the average White listener. The folklorist John Greenway, wrote a whole book called American Folksongs of Protest. When it came to songs of the Negro people, he said, "It's funny that the Negro people don't really have any protest songs." He really made this statement. And the reason was, that he couldn't find any songs like the Irish songs I've sung you, or like the union songs. And when he came along to a song in a book that said:

"Did my Lord deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel,
deliver Daniel,
Did my Lord deliver Daniel, then why not
every man."

He just turned the page and said, "Well of course that's not really a protest song." I think it's now generally recognized though that the Negro people in the South seized upon the Bible, the Old Testament especially, with the story of Moses. Maybe the slave owner of course, he gave them the Bible and said, "Now read this where it says obey thy master." But then he walked back and he left the Bible, and they turned over the page and they read "Moses freed the slaves."

"Oh Mary, don't you weep don't you mourn,
 " " " " " " " "
 Pharoah's army got drowned.
 Oh Mary don't you weep."

Hey you know what? This is too good a song not to sing all the way through. Sing it with me.

Now we need a little harmony. This kind of song is not a song unless you have a little harmony. You wouldn't want to play tennis just with one person, and you can't sing this song with just one melody either.

"Oh Mary, don't you weep, . . ."

How about a few basses?

"Oh Mary, don't you weep don't you mourn
 " " " " " " " "
 The Pharoah's army got drowned,"

Basses you were the rock foundation of this glorious, glorious edifice. Don't collapse or we'll all fall on top

of you. Try that again, low women as well as low men.

"Oh Mary, don't you weep, don't you mourn, ..."

Now it's every man and woman for theirself. If you hear too many people singing low, you sing high, and if too many people sing high, you sing low, and some people slither in between, have a good time on the melody.

"Oh Mary, don't you weep don't you mourn ..."

Oh sing it again.

Here's the greatest verse of all. You know this really is the greatest verse in all American folklore - I think the greatest verse in the world maybe. Just me, that's my own prejudiced opinion. 'Cause this verse might've been written by some - written I say - invented by some illiterate person 100 years ago - 120. But this person made up a verse for the whole poor damn human race, and they're still trying to learn to live together.

"God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no
more water, but fire next time.
Pharaoh's army got drowned,
Oh Mary don't you weep."

I've sung that song before the most varied audiences in a dozen, two dozen countries of the world, and I really do believe that that verse is the greatest. "God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water but fire next time." It keeps coming up again and again, and the whole question of peace is interwoven with the whole question of freedom. I'll give you some of my own prejudiced opinions on the subject. But let me be frank and say that I don't know all the answers.

I've sung often a little ditty written by a young Canadian, and,

"Last night I had the strangest dream,
I never dreamed before,
I dreamed the world had all agreed,
to put an end to war..."

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I really do believe that the people of this country, just as much as you and I, and the whole world, most of the world, would like to see peace. People also want to see a little more justice, it is no doubt.

Do you know that 2 hundred million people in India get paid between 4-1/2¢ and 5¢ a day. I know that because there was an argument in the Indian Parliament when I was there four years ago as to whether it was 4-1/2¢ or 5¢. The people in the cities can make more money. A good carpenter can earn as much as 75¢ a day in Calcutta. But in the countryside, you just barely stay alive on a handful of rice, and you're only half alive. You can go through that country and see millions of people whose legs are no thicker than my wrist, because they've lived their entire life on the 5¢ a day. Well we could say "Isn't that terrible," but to a person who has lived that and sees us throw away food and waste things, and spend billions of dollars trying to go to the moon, and tens of billions of dollars trying to conquer Vietnam, they don't say, "Isn't that too bad." People are starting to grab bricks and throwing them, and other things they want to throw. We say: we want peace. Give us Justice; you'll get peace.

I think peace will come, myself, when we recognize that crimes have been committed. The most modern methods of penal institutions and jurisprudence, I think agree, that the purpose of putting a man in jail if there is any purpose, is to try and see that he doesn't go around robbing, raping, murdering anymore. And if a man truly is not - is gonna stop his robbing, murdering, and raping, usually the way is open for a parole. And this is true not only in our country, but many other countries. If you ever read the book by the two young Philadelphia Quakers who were prisoned in China, accused of being United States spies. The whole book is an account of how they gradually - their confusion was gradually cleared up. Because they were thrown in jail, they said, "How long are we in jail?" And they

said, "Until you realize that you have committed a crime." And I think too, that once people are willing to admit that a crime has been done, this is a step in the direction of saying, "We will not commit such crimes as this in the future." I think that one of the main things that we have to do is recognize that the European people came over and took this country by force, just as much as any other country in the world was ever taken by force. And this isn't going to say that I think everybody ought to go back to Europe. I agree with Godfrey Cambridge, he said to his nightclub audience, "Let's face it, you ain't going back to Europe and I ain't going back to Africa."

But the crimes that go on, crimes of force and violence, where innocent children are killed, where innocent bystanders are killed. These will not stop; they'll keep on going on year after year until each side admits the existence of crimes.

When Arabs admit that there has been such a thing as anti-semitism. When the Israelis admit that they walked into a country with one million people and decided they were going to take over. When White people admit that for 300 years the dark skinned people have not been treated like human beings.

Everybody knows about - let me tell you a little thing I just discovered two weeks ago reading a book of New York City history. You all know about the trial of John Peter Zenger - 1734 - great victory for freedom of the press. His newspaper criticized the king's governor. The king's governor tried to throw him in jail. They had a trial and the jury refused to convict him, and it was a landmark for freedom of the press in the United States - 1734 A.D.

1741 - the following events took place. New York City consisted of some 10,000 people of which 2,000 were African slaves. Several slaves were accused of stealing and were sentenced to jail. That week, a house caught fire. The judge - and later on in the week, another house caught fire, and rumor swept the little town that the slaves were planning a revolt. Several slaves were quickly questioned, and of course, after the custom of police officers everywhere, they said, "Now just tell us whose at the bottom of this and we'll spare you." And pretty soon, everybody was accusing everybody else and within three months 150 people were arrested; 70 were sold to slavery in the West Indies to get them out of the way; some 14 were hung; some 17 were burned at the stake. This in a city of 10,000 people. Including incidentally four White people, one of them a Catholic priest. He was accused of gathering Negroes in a circle and reading them devilish incantations. Because in those days, there were prohibitions against Catholics in most American colonies with the exception of Maryland, I believe. And finally, it became apparent that no one really knew who was guilty of what, because everybody was accusing everybody else and they just stopped throwing people in jail and that was the end of the slave revolt of 1741.

We never even read of it in our history textbooks. How many of you ever read of that in your history textbooks? Will you raise your hand if anybody has ever read of it. Not a single one of us. A thousand people here. You all read about John Peter Zenger. Isn't it wonderful how Americans fight for democracy. We never once read about the crimes. I suppose our country is no worse than any other. You read the history textbooks how the British burnt Washington in 1812, but it doesn't tell a thing of how we went up and burnt Toronto. Poor Torontonians didn't do nothing to us, but we figured we're gonna get back at them, those terrible British. So ... most of the Torontonians were Tories; we didn't like them anyway. You see, the British population of Canada was started off by the several hundred thousand who fled United States after 1776; and we just didn't like them up there; and we went up and burnt Toronto. But we don't mention it in our history books much.

It is now 9:00, and I think I'll sit down and see what questions you have.

SIDE III

We're back at Ford Hall Forum. Judge Ruben Lurie is coming out on stage and will entertain questions from our audience. Judge Lurie:

Q. Do you know any anti-Vietnam songs?

A. I've heard dozens really, maybe 50 or more. One of the songs is the famous one Tom Paxton made up.

"Lyndon Johnson told the nation, have no fear of escalation, we are trying everyone to please. And though it isn't really war, we're sending 50,000 more

To help save Vietnam from Vietnamese."

© Tom Paxton

It is one of Tom's best songs. He gets tremendous applause when he sings it. But I don't believe it has been played on the radio much. Let me sing you one which I made up myself. It doesn't mention Vietnam by name, and it's conceivable that in another period of history I might sing it with quite different connotation. But I know what it means to me right now. I know that if a song gets good applause when I sing it in my concerts, whether at Carnegie Hall or out in Central Park, or anywhere ... and I wanted to sing it on the Smothers Brothers Show a couple months ago ... And the Smothers Brothers wanted me to sing it too. They said, "Oh that's great." But the CBS brass said flatly, "We will cut this song out of the show;" and they did."

I made this up about a year and a half ago:

It was back in nine-teen forty two,
I was a member of a good platoon.
We were on maneuvers in a Loozianna,
One night by the light of the moon.
The captain told us to ford a river
That's how it all begun.
We were knee deep in the Big Muddy
But the big fool said to push on.

The sergeant said, "Sir, are you sure,
This is the best way back to the base?"
"Sergeant, go on; I forded this river
'Bout a mile above this place
It'll be a little soggy but just keep slogging.
We'll soon be on dry ground."
We were waist deep in the Big Muddy
And the big fool said to push on.

The sergeant said, "Sir, with all this equipment
No man'll be able to swim."
"Sergeant, don't be a nervous Nellie,"
The Captain said to him.
"All we need is a little determination;
Men, follow me, I'll lead on."
We were neck deep in the Big Muddy
And the big fool said to push on.

All at once, the moon clouded over,
We heard a gurgling cry.
A few seconds later, the Captain's helmet
Was all that floated by.
The sergeant said, "Turn around men,
I'm in charge from now on."
And we just made it out of the Big Muddy
With the Captain dead and gone.

We stripped and dived and found his body
Stuck in the old quicksand
I guess he didn't know that the water was deeper
Than the place he'd once before been.
Another stream had joined the Big Muddy
'Bout a half mile from where we'd gone.
We were lucky to escape from the Big Muddy
When the big fool said to push on.

Well, I'm not gonna point any moral;
I'll leave that for yourself

* In January the song was again sung on The Smothers Brothers show. This time it made it, and was not censored.

Maybe you're still walking and you're still talking
And you'd like to keep your health.
But every time I read the papers
That old feeling comes on;
We're waist deep in the Big Muddy
And the big fool says to push on.

Waist deep in the Big Muddy
And the big fool says to push on
Waist deep in the Big Muddy
And the big fool says to push on
Waist deep! Neck deep!
Soon even a tall man'll be over his head
Waist deep in the Big Muddy!
And the big fool says to push on!

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Q. Is it correct that CBS only wanted you to delete the last verse of this song you just sang?

A. I never spoke directly to CBS. I spoke to ...

For the record, we had a rehearsal on Monday and on Tuesday we had another rehearsal and I sang this. And the CBS censor who sits in on rehearsals, said ... I was told that he said to Tom Smothers, "I don't think that song's gonna be possible to sing. People might think it refers to Johnson." Tom Smothers said, "Oh don't be ridiculous." But on Wednesday I was asked by one of the - whether it was Tom Smothers or one of the other people connected with the show - "Could you take out that 6th verse there?" And I said, "No, you know that's part of the song, and so exactly what the CBS censor said I don't know or what N.Y. said I don't know. But I was asked at one time, I think it was Wednesday of that week if that verse could be taken out and I said no. Finally on Friday when the show was taped, we were getting down to the line and the bargaining was going back and forth, and the phone call went to N.Y. and the producer said, "Well Pete, they say they want to cut the song and we said it's our show and we're gonna put it in." And so we went ahead and put it in on the taping. But evidently during the next four or five days the N.Y. said, "Well it may be your show but it's our network," and it came out. I think they're wrong though. I think the network really belongs to the American people.

Q. Will you comment on the role of the arts in changing society?

A. Art, and by art I agree with you; dancing, theatre, poetry, novels, songs, funny papers, all the arts have been used not only to change society but to preserve society. From the days when human beings lived in tribes, through the days of feudalism and slavery, capitalism, communism, whatever social system people live in, the arts have never been quote: "just entertainment." Shakespeare was a great entertainer, but he was not just a great entertainer. His plays, play after play bring out his fundamental ideological position that the happiness of the people depend upon an honest monarch. And today I think anybody who thinks that the arts should be "just entertainment" is demeaning the purpose of art in life. Now this doesn't mean that art is all political, someone once said "Art is a weapon in political progress." Well it's true; maybe it is. But a bread knife is a weapon; it also cuts bread. And I'd say that art helps us to live by giving us a larger picture of our life; and yet if it's really good art, it comes back to us and helps us live better. So that the Negro sharecropper who goes to his Baptist church and sings "Oh Mary don't you weep, don't you mourn," is lifted out of his own troubles to think of things that went on 4,000 years ago. But this very song strengthens him in his own situation in the here and now. And my own opinion is that art at its best has this dual role of lifting us out of our troubles and also helping us solve them.

Q. Are there many anti-Communist songs sung by the people living in these oppressed lands?

A. I haven't learned any. I haven't actually heard them, but I know they exist. In some of the European countries

there were people who found they did not get along with the new government for one reason or another. And there were songs like people in prison have often made up in every country of the world. They're not generally as many as you'd think, because in many of these countries For example we all know of the Hungarian rebellion of 1956. The people in Hungary, some of them might have hated the Communist Regime, but some of the Hungarians for the first time had a relatively happy life. Remember that Hungary had a Fascist regime all during the 1920's and 1930's, a highly anti-semitic regime. So that I can't tell you anymore than that. I've spoken to A. L. Lloyd who has collected folk songs in Rumania and Bulgaria. And when somebody asked him that exact question, he said, "Well they do exist but frankly not too many. Probably in England and America you can find songs written by bankers, but they're not very many of them."

Q. What action should be taken to combat the present political problems in the United States?

A. I will now give you all the answers to all the world's problems.

Maybe I should start off with that wonderful opening line of Malcolm X: "Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends and Enemies. I just can't believe everybody here is my friend and I don't want to leave anybody out." It's a wonderful opening line. The only thing I'd say is . . . that . . . don't bury your head in the sand, don't get discouraged. When I was 16 years old I loved the outdoors as I still do, but I felt the world was so messed up, the most honest thing to do was be a hermit. And some good people jumped on me like a ton of bricks. They said what kind of morality do you call that, you're going to be pure yourself and let the rest of the world go to hell. So I cannot answer your questions specifically of course, but I say, whatever you decide to do, don't sit back and say nothing can be done. The people who tell you the world is going to be finished in a few generations, the human race is going to be all over; throw their cock-sureness right back in their face. What makes them think that they are so right; how can they be so certain; they think they know all the answers. They're certain, 100% sure, that there's gonna be no human race 100 years from now. I admit, it's perfectly possible. But if anybody asks me what would you do. I'd say, don't just sit back and say it's a forgone conclusion. Figure that the world's got at least a 50-50 chance. And maybe your little grain of sand as much as mine might help tip the scale; and it might be the grain of sand which would mean the human race will keep on going.

Q. To what degree do you consider socially conscious rock music to be in the tradition of folk music, and the fight for social justice?

A. Here again I can't say that I've heard that much of it. I've heard a little of it. And my guess is that it's in the tradition of a lot of popular poetry; Francois Villon right on down. And it undoubtedly comments. Whether these comments are all understood though is a different thing. And I myself am kind of an old fashioned person when it comes to art of any kind. I believe that art does need to be understood. Now this doesn't mean that you have to make everything simplistic. "Go tell Aunt Rhody, the old Gray Goose is dead," is a very simple song, but it's got layers and layers of meaning; and art at its best should always have many layers of meaning. We know that some commercial art often has only surface meaning and it's so shallow . . . Well take a pop song "Wrap your troubles in dreams and dream your troubles away." Its not got enough layers of meaning to keep you. So that this is why you can leaf through the years of popular art, whether it's the comic strip, popular music or popular novels, and laugh at them because their meanings were so shallow. At the same time, if you deny your audience any superficial meaning, you're making it very difficult for people to get with you. And this I think is the fault of a number of avant garde artists whether they're painters, or writers or musicians. Some of the

music schools can produce people . . . music which is so complicated to listen to, that the average person just turns it down. And sometimes I think this can happen with the music that you just mentioned, what they call rock music. That is that, a lot of people would be more interested in it if they could figure out what the heck the words are.

Q. Has the "Establishment" ever seen fit to invite you to entertain the troops in Vietnam?

A. I'm not sure if I know what you mean by the "Establishment," but I never have been invited, no.

Q. This lady says she is disturbed by your statement relative to the Israelis and the Arab population in Israel, and she would like to have you support that statement.

A. If I can remember what my exact words were . . . I'll try and re-construct it. I said if the Israelis would admit the injustice that was committed when they decided that they would become the . . . they would start a new nation where a million people already lived . . . Vermont is approximately the size of Israel, minus the Negev desert. Vermont has 400,000 people in it. There were one million farmers and small townsmen in Palestine at the time the Zionists decided that this would be where they must establish a national home. In many ways I tend to agree with them, that after 2,000 years of never being allowed to be a first-class citizen anywhere, not in Spain, not in France, not in Germany, not in Russia, not in Poland, not in England, not in America, the Jews had a right to want to find one little spot in this Earth where they could be first-class citizens.

And surely their ancient homeland which they remembered for 2,000 years and refused to forget for 2,000 years - that's a long long time - surely that would be the logical place. At the same time, not to realize that there were one million people there, I think was very foolish. Why didn't they insist that every new settler learn the Arab language? Why didn't they? Martin Buber said they should; but they didn't listen to him

Q. This gentleman suggests that he believes that the Vietnam situation is a little more complicated than what would appear in the song that you sang. And he also says - and this is the barb - that he doesn't quite see how referring to anybody as a fool helps solve the problem.

A. I'm a fool; I'm a criminal fool; maybe the whole human race is. That song did not mention Vietnam once. I am a shoemaker. I go around the world making shoes, and if they fit, why, it's not me. . .

Now I'll agree, Vietnam situation is very complicated and I think probably that one of the greatest dangers in the world is this thing we call "over simplification." When I was at Harvard thirty years ago, I listened in on one of the lectures of Alfred North Whitehead, a wonderful little old man. He said he would inscribe above the entrance to every university; "Strive for simplicity but learn to mistrust it." Well, I agree with that.

Q. Do you advocate violence on the March on Washington as a means of protest against Vietnam?

A. I've never advocated violence ever myself, although I was in an organization once that advocated violence, for 3-1/2 years. And I think under similar circumstances I would have joined this organization again, because it was an extreme situation. I don't think I'd ever join it again, but between the years of 1942-1945 I was in the U.S. Army fighting Hitler. So I'm not a complete pacifist. That's the only way I can answer your question sir.

Q. What do you think is the effectiveness of the recent renaissance of resistance to the war by way of the marches, the protests and the rest of it?

A. Sir, really you're asking me . . . a lot of these questions . . . asking me as though I was some authority. I'm just as ignorant as most people. I feel like Will

Rogers, he used to say, "All I know is what I read in the papers." I'd say that every little bit helps, and though I don't agree 100% with a lot of people, I'd say go to it, maybe you're right, maybe I'm not. My own particular angle is I'm trying to reach the 180 million people who don't read the newspapers much. Who get all their information from that little magic box in the corner of their room we call the TV set. And this TV medium is tightly under control. Do we realize how much its under control? This is a wonderful Ford Hall Forum, but has it been put on TV? Why isn't it? Because TV is the greatest mass-media the world has ever known. Freedom of speech is wonderful if you're speaking to a few hundred or if you're speaking to 1,000 or even tens of thousands, but if you get on the Smothers Brothers program with 35 million people listening, they're very careful about what is said.

Q. What good is it to protest against the situation in Vietnam when we do not look in our own history to see the crimes that have been committed here, as for example against the Indians?

A. I tend to agree with you sir, that freedom and peace begin in your own home and your own community. There's many a man who's been a great revolutionist, but his poor wife's been enslaved to the stove all her life.

SIDE IV

Q. Will you give us your opinion if you care to, concerning Joan Baez as a singer, a player and a protester?

A. When anybody asks me this kind of question and it comes up often, I really have to answer that I think of other musicians on two completely different levels: one is as a listener and the other is as a performer. As a performing artist, I have very very narrow prejudiced standards. I wouldn't really be much of an artist if I didn't. As a listener I'm very broad minded. So to answer your question I'd give you two such different answers that it would be almost meaningless.

Q. Do you think that draft card burning can be justified?

A. Never tried it myself yet, so I don't know.

Q. This young lady has asked that a certain song be sung. I thought the time appropriate.

A. The song "LISA KALVELEGE" which was requested by the young lady down there, I made up about a year and a half ago about a true person... true event. It's not the world's greatest song, but I had an interesting experience of singing it in Berlin last January. Lisa Kalvelege is a German-American housewife in California. I was singing in both West Berlin and East Berlin in January, and this song took on very special meanings for my audiences there. We'll see what meanings you get out of it. Oh I should say that Lisa Kalvelege and three friends put on their best clothes, high heels, nylons, white gloves and went down to a place where napalm bombs were being loaded. Later on, a newspaper reporter at the jail asked her why, and she gave him this answer.

"My name is Lisa Kalvelege, I was born in Nuremberg, And when the trials were held there nineteen years ago, It seemed to me ridiculous to hold a nation all to blame, For the horrors which the world did undergo. A short while later, when I applied to come to be a G.I. bride An American consular official questioned me. He refused my exit permit, said my answers did not show I'd learned my lesson about responsibility.

Thus suddenly I was forced to start thinking on this theme And when later I was permitted to emigrate I must have been asked a hundred times; where I was, what I did,

In those years when Hitler ruled our state.

I said, I was a child, or at most a teenager But this always extended the questioning They'd ask: where were my parents, my father, my mother

And to this... I could answer not a thing.

The seed planted there in Nuremberg in Nineteen-forty-seven,

Started... to sprout and to grow

Gradually I understood what that verdict meant to me When there are crimes that I can see and I can know.

And now I also know what-it-is-to-be charged with mass guilt

Once... in a lifetime is enough for me.

No, I could not take it... a second time,

And that is why... I'm here today.

The events of May 25th, the day of our protest

Put a small balance weight on the other side

Hopefully, someday, my contribution to peace

Will help just a bit to turn the tide.

And perhaps I can tell my children six

And later on, their own children

That at least in the future they need not be silent

When they are asked: Where was your mother when....?"

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Q. What do you think the greatest crime today is?

A. The greatest crime today is that with the greatest mediums of communication the world has ever known, they are not being used to increase the understanding of the human race to each other's troubles.

Q. This gentleman would like to request a song he heard in Newport in 1966: "If You Love Your Uncle Sam, Bring Them Home."

A. Poor old Uncle Sam's been called many names in many parts of the world. But I myself, coming from a long line of Yankees, feel sympathy for him and I love the good things that our country has done, the wonderful things that our country has done. And when I see our flag dirtied, I don't feel like burning our flag, I feel like washing it. So it was that I made up a song... I won't sing it all the way through here. A rabble rousing song, but I sang it at Newport for 10,000-15,000 people and they really sang along with me.

"If you love your Uncle Sam, bring 'em home, bring 'em home, Support our boys in Vietnam, bring 'em home, bring 'em home."

Q. This gentleman suggests that many of the Union songs in the late 1800's and up to the 1930's tended to deal with social justice, but the Unions themselves have not been too successful, some of them in advocating social justice. Are there any songs to this effect?

A. Phil Ochs, a few years ago, wrote a song specifically directed at this problem: "Come You Men of Labor and Listen to My Song." And he tells how there are songs when they fought for the eight hour day, when they fought against child labor, when they fought for the right to strike, and where were they now. They were sitting at home when the Negro people were fighting for their rights as human beings. I think any historian can tell you there's a tendency of peoples' organizations to start off being quite enthusiastic, idealistic and radical, and they get more conservative and complacent as they grow older. The Grange today, for example, is a fine farmers' organization, but it's a far cry from the radical organization it was of the 1880's. And the same way with the AFL-CIO. There are parts of it that are still organizing, like the grape strikers of Delano, California, but I think this is the exception that proves the rule.

Q. Will you explain as well as play the song "The Bells of Rhymney?"

A. This song is a good example of what I meant when I said a song has many layers of meaning. I think they can have layers on the surface, layers underneath. The same thing though could be said of any good song. "Hard Rain is Gonna Fall" - I feel the same way about that song as I do about "The Bells of Rhymney." The words of "The Bells of Rhymney" were written by a young Welsh coal miner named Idris Davies, right after what he called the angry summer of 1926. There was a general strike in Britain which was lost, and he determined to leave coal mining. He studied for four years. Went to school; became a school teacher. But this poem he wrote will stand for many years I believe, because it referred... well he wrote it up in the heat of his agony of 1926 and the general strike. It has many layers of meanings.

"Oh what will you give me? say the sad bells of Rhymney.
Is there hope for the future? say the brown bells of Merthyr.
Who made the mine owner? say the black bells of Rhondda.
And who robbed the miner? say the grim bells of Blaina.

They will plunder willy-nilly, say the bells of Caerphilly.
They have fangs, they have teeth, shout the loud bells of Neath.
Even God is uneasy, say the moist bells of Swansea.
And what will you give me, sang the sad bells of Rhymney.

Throw the vandals in court, say the bells of Newport.
All would be well if if if, say the green bells of Cardiff.
Why so worried, sisters why? sang the silver bells of Wye.
And what will you give me? sang the sad bells of Rhymney."

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Q. What does your banjo say?

A. Woody used to have on his guitar "This machine kills fascists." He had that sign on it all through 1941-1946 - and up. But I had a slightly different slogan. I wrote, "This machine surrounds hate and forces it to surrender."

Q. Will you comment upon Woody Guthrie and his contribution to our civilization and to his art, and the man?

A. I think Woody Guthrie in future centuries will be regarded throughout the world as a great national folk poet as much as we think of Robert Burns of Scotland, or Taras Shevchenko of the Ukraine. Like him they also were born in obscurity, knew poverty, but had a burning curiosity to learn. Their talent brought them to the attention of the big city, but they also refused to knuckle under to the comfortable way of life, and remained profane and radical to the end.

Woody was a radical. He believed that Jesus was the greatest revolutionist, and His message had been watered down. He liked the idea of Robin Hood and Jesse James and all the other outlaws. He said the right idea but quite not exactly the right method. He wanted to take money from the rich and give it to the poor. And I don't think I need to talk much more about him except maybe sing you a little fragment of one of his lesser known songs.

"Why do these warships sail on my waters?
Why do these bombs drop down from my sky?
Why do you burn my towns and my cities?
I want to know why, I want to know why!

CHORUS: I want to know, friend, I've got to know!
Hungry lips ask me wherever I go!
Comrades and friends are falling around me,
I've got to know, friend, I've got to know."

© Woody Guthrie

I wonder if I could seize the initiative for 1/2 second because we only have about five or six minutes more, and teach you a song. I told you that I felt the biggest crime in the world was the failure of communication when we have such tremendous mediums of communication like TV, and it's being used for trivialities. I say TV is part of the bread and circuses syndrome. I wasn't able to blast through it, maybe others will be able to. But I'll teach you a song and maybe you can get just a little glimmer of how desperate the people of the world feel that don't have money for the clothing that you and I are able to afford tonight, who don't have a full belly, who don't have the chances for an education. This is an Afro-American song I learned when visiting a prison in Texas a few years back, and a young man stepped up to the microphone (we had a tape recorder). He said, "Well, gentlemen, this is Andrew B. Crane serving a life time sentence on Retrieve State Farm; and this is a song I sing with the boys when I get worried." He raised back with his head and sang.

"Won't you go down old Hannah, well, well, well,
Don't you rise no more,
Don't you rise no more."

Old Hannah is their nickname for the sun; and they don't want this sun to rise in the morning unless it brings the end of the world. And that whole gang came in and said: "well, well, well." See if you can get it with me.

"Well I looked at old Hannah, well, well, well,
She was turning red, she was turning red."

You got the idea. Don't hold back. Come in on that.

"Well I looked at my partner, well, well, well,
He was almost dead. (Repeat)

I said wake up old dead man, well, well, well,
Help me carry my row,
Help me carry my row."

Now some of you are singing pretty good but the others sitting back just listening. After all, you got a comfortable bed to go home to. Just for once, see if you can imagine that you are this man.

"Well he said you ought to been in this prison,
Well, well, well, in 1910, 1910.
Well he said you ought to been in this prison,
Well, well, well, in 1910, 1910.
He was driving the women, like they do the men."

This song went on and on and on. It wasn't a song, it was an opera - an epic. "You ought to been in this prison in 1904, you could find a dead man on every row;" says, "if you get lucky make it back home, go down by Julie's tell her I won't be long;" says, "I was a good man but they drove me down." One verse I'll never forget says, "It seems like everything, everything, I do, seems like everything I do, is wrong."

"Well seems like everything, well, well, well,
Everything I do, (repeat first two lines)
Well it seems like most everything I do is wrong."

Judge Lurie, I'll turn things over to you, it's about 10 o'clock.

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