

PETE SEEGER HUAC TESTIMONY

Date: August 18, 1955

Role	Name	Description
Witness & Counsel	Pete Seeger	Folk singer, songwriter, and social activist
	Paul L. Ross	Seeger's lawyer
Committee	Honorable Francis E. Walter	Chairman of the Subcommittee, Democratic Representative from Pennsylvania
	Edwin E. Willis	Democratic Representative from Louisiana (non-speaking role)
	Gordon H. Scherer	Republican Representative from Ohio
Staff	Frank S. Tavenner, Jr.	Chief Counsel to HUAC
	Thomas W. Beale, Sr.	Chief Clerk (non-speaking role)
	Donald T. Appell	Congressional Staff Investigator (non-speaking role)
	Frank Bonora	Congressional Staff Investigator (non-speaking role)

Mr. Tavenner: When and where were you born, Mr. Seeger?

Mr. Seeger: I was born in New York in 1919.

Mr. Tavenner: What is your profession or occupation?

Mr. Seeger: Well, I have worked at many things, and my main profession is a student of American folklore, and I make my living as a banjo picker—sort of damning, in some people's opinion.

Mr. Tavenner: Mr. Seeger, prior to your entry in the service in 1942, were you engaged in the practice of your profession in the area of New York?

Mr. Seeger: It is hard to call it a profession. I kind of drifted into it and I never intended to be a musician, and I am glad I am one now, and it is a very honorable profession, but when I started out actually I wanted to be a newspaperman, and when I left school—

Chairman Walter: Will you answer the question, please?

Mr. Seeger: I have to explain that it really wasn't my profession, I picked up a little change in it.

Chairman Walter: Did you practice your profession?

Mr. Seeger: I sang for people, yes, before World War II, and I also did as early as 1925.

Mr. Tavenner: And upon your return from the service in December of 1945, you continued in your profession?

Mr. Seeger: I continued singing, and I expect I always will.

Mr. Tavenner: The Committee has information obtained in part from the *Daily Worker* indicating that, over a period of time, especially since December of 1945, you took part in numerous entertainment features. I have before me a photostatic copy of the June 20, 1947, issue of the *Daily Worker*. In a column entitled "What's On" appears this advertisement: "Tonight-Bronx, hear Peter Seeger and his guitar, at Allerton Section housewarming." May I ask you whether or not the Allerton Section was a section of the Communist Party?

Mr. Seeger: Sir, I refuse to answer that question whether it was a quote from the New York Times or the Vegetarian Journal.

Mr. Tavenner: I don't believe there is any more authoritative document in regard to the Communist Party than its official organ, the *Daily Worker*.

Mr. Scherer: He hasn't answered the question, and he merely said he wouldn't answer whether the article appeared in the New York Times or some other magazine. I ask you to direct the witness to answer the question.

Chairman Walter: I direct you to answer.

Mr. Seeger: Sir, the whole line of questioning—

Chairman Walter: You have only been asked one question, so far.

Mr. Seeger: I am not going to answer any questions as to my association, my philosophical or religious beliefs or my political beliefs, or how I voted in any election, or any of these private affairs. I think these are very improper questions for any American to be asked, especially under such compulsion as this. I would be very glad to tell you my life if you want to hear of it.

Mr. Tavenner: ...Did you lend your talent to the Essex County Communist Party on the occasion indicated by this article from the *Daily Worker*?

Mr. Seeger: Mr. Walter, I believe I have already answered this question, and the same answer.

Chairman Walter: The same answer. In other words, you mean that you decline to answer because of the reasons stated before?

Mr. Seeger: I gave my answer, sir.

Chairman Walter: What is your answer?

Mr. Seeger: You see, sir, I feel—

Chairman Walter: What is your answer?

Mr. Seeger: I will tell you what my answer is.

(Witness consulted with counsel [Paul L. Ross].)

I feel that in my whole life I have never done anything of any conspiratorial nature and I resent very much and very deeply the implication of being called before this Committee that in some way because my opinions may be different from yours, or yours, Mr. Willis, or yours, Mr. Scherer, that I am any less of an American than anybody else. I love my country very deeply, sir.

Chairman Walter: Why don't you make a little contribution toward preserving its institutions?

Mr. Seeger: I feel that my whole life is a contribution. That is why I would like to tell you about it.

Chairman Walter: I don't want to hear about it.

Mr. Scherer: Did you sing before the groups that Mr. Tavenner asked you about?

Mr. Seeger: I am saying that my answer is the same as before. I have told you that I sang for everybody.

Chairman Walter: Wait a minute. You sang for everybody. Then are we to believe, or to take it, that you sang at the places Mr. Tavenner mentioned?

Mr. Seeger: My answer is the same as before.

Chairman Walter: What is that?

Mr. Seeger: It seems to me like the third time I have said it, if not the fourth.

Chairman Walter: Maybe it is the fifth, but say it again. I want to know what your answer is.

(Witness consulted with counsel.)

Mr. Seeger: I decline to discuss, under compulsion, where I have sung, and who has sung my songs, and who else has sung with me, and the people I have known. I love my country very dearly, and I greatly resent this implication that some of the places that I have sung and some of the people that I have known, and some of my opinions, whether they are religious or philosophical, or I might be a vegetarian, make me any less of an American. I will tell you about my songs, but I am not interested in telling you who wrote them, and I will tell you about my songs, and I am not interested in who listened to them.

Mr. Tavenner: Are you a member of the Communist Party now?

Mr. Seeger: My answer is the same.

Mr. Scherer: I ask for a direction on that question.

Chairman Walter: I direct you to answer.

Mr. Seeger: My answer is the same as before.

Mr. Tavenner: I have no further questions, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Walter: The witness is excused.

Source: Lithwick, D. (2014, January 28). *When Pete Seeger faced down the House Un-American Activities Committee*. Slate.

http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2014/01/28/pete_seeger_huac_transcript_full_text_of_anti_communist_hearing_courtesy.html