



Testimony of Lee Hays before the House Un-American Activities Committee August 16, 1955

MR. TAVENNER: What I am trying to get at, Mr. Hays, is to learn to what extent the Communist Party has used you in its program to advance the cause of the Communist Party in this country.

MR. HAYS: I don't know what you mean, sir, by the use of the word 'used'.

MR. TAVENNER: I mean used in the sense that you contributed your talent and your services, and your time, and your effort knowingly to assist the Communist Party in the field of your talent.

MR. HAYS: You are asking questions which to me are highly argumentative and debatable, and I don't propose to get into that debate and argument because it is an area that deals with associations and beliefs and so I do decline to answer that under the reasons stated.

CHAIRMAN WALTER: You decline to answer because of the fifth amendment, is that right?

MR. HAYS: Under the privilege of the fifth amendment.

The Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, also a section in the Bill of Rights, states that no person "shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself." This gives defendants the right to refuse to testify if there is a possibility that answering the question may be self-incriminatory.

Testimony of Pete Seeger before the House Un-American Activities Committee August 18, 1955

MR. TAVENNER: 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: 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.

MR. TAVENNER: I have before me a photostatic copy of the April 30, 1948, issue of the Daily Worker which carries under the same title of "What's On," an advertisement of a "May Day Rally: For Peace, Security and Democracy." The advertisement states: "Are you in a fighting mood? Then attend the May Day rally." ... Then follows a statement, "Entertainment by Pete Seeger." At the bottom appears this: "Auspices Essex County Communist Party." ... Did you lend your talent to the Essex County Communist Party on the occasion indicated by this article from the Daily Worker?

MR. SEEGER: 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.

MR. SCHERER: Let me understand. You are not relying on the Fifth Amendment, are you?

MR. SEEGER: No, sir, although I do not want to in any way discredit the witnesses that have used the Fifth Amendment.

MR. TAVENNER: Did you participate in a program at Wingdale Lodge in the State of New York, which is a summer camp for adults and children, on the weekend of July Fourth of this year?

MR. SEEGER: I have sung for Americans of every political persuasion, and I am proud that I never refuse to sing to an audience, no matter what religion or color of their skin, or situation in life. I have sung in hobo jungles, and I have sung for the Rockefellers. That is the only answer I can give along that line ... I am proud of the fact that my songs seem to cut across and find perhaps a unifying thing, basic humanity, and that is why I would love to be able to tell you about these songs, because I feel that you would agree with me more, sir. I know many beautiful songs from your home county, Carbon, and Monroe, and I hitchhiked through there and stayed in the homes of miners.

MR. TAVENNER: I hand you a photograph which was taken of the May Day parade in New York City in 1952, which shows the front rank of a group of individuals, and one is in a uniform with military cap and insignia, and carrying a placard entitled CENSORED. Will you examine it please and state whether or not that is a photograph of you? (A document was handed to the witness.)

MR. SEEGER: It is like Jesus Christ when asked by Pontius Pilate, "Are you king of the Jews?"

CHAIRMAN WALTER: Stop that.

MR. TAVENNER: I have here photostatic copies of the Daily Worker indicating such programs were conducted in Detroit in 1952, at Greenwich Village on May 10, 1947, and again at another place in March of 1948. Did you entertain at functions under the auspices of the American Youth for Democracy?

MR. SEEGER: I take it that you are not interested in all of the different places that I have sung. Why don't you ask me about the churches and schools and other places?

MR. SCHERER: Witness, you have indicated that you are perfectly willing to tell us about all of these innumerable functions at which you entertained, but why do you refuse to tell us about the functions that Mr. Tavenner inquires about?

MR. SEEGER: No, sir, I said that I should be glad to tell you about all of the songs that I have sung, because I feel that the songs are the clearest explanation of what I do believe in, as a musician, and as an American...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 make me any less of an American.

Though Seeger does not explicitly invoke the First Amendment, this is the ideological basis of his defense. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, also a section in the Bill of Rights, states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."