



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on January 28, 2014

Media Encomiums for Pete Seeger Omit Radical Background

In announcing the death of folksinger Pete Seeger (shown) Monday night at the age of 94, the mainstream media applauded his lifetime of singing, [as the Washington Post put it](#), “songs of love, peace, brotherhood, work and protest” and called him a “20th-century troubadour” known for popularizing “If I Had a Hammer,” “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” and especially the “anthem of the civil rights movement”: “We Shall Overcome.”



The *Post* noted only briefly Seeger’s close relationship with Woody Guthrie, from whom he “learned to express political and social criticism through music and song.” The Almanac Singers, founded by Seeger, were given scant mention, the paper referring to members Guthrie and Seeger as “colleagues” rather than the more appropriate appellation “comrades.”

The *Post* couldn’t wait to get past all that now-irrelevant history to spend the rest of its paean of praise in how the brave new world celebrated Seeger, first by noting the honor bestowed on him in 1994 at the Kennedy Center Honors ceremony where then-President Bill Clinton called Seeger “an inconvenient artist who dared to sing things as he saw them.” Gushed the *Post*, “by the dawn of the new millennium, Mr. Seeger had become the widely acknowledged ... grand old man of American folk music.”

It was true, said the *Post*, that after dropping out of Harvard in 1937, Seeger briefly “attended meetings of the Communist Party,” and then went on to form a singing group called The Weavers after the end of the war. He was also convicted of contempt of Congress after refusing to answer questions posed to him by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), but the paper noted that his conviction was overthrown thanks to a “technical flaw” and “the government never retried him.”

But all that is forgiven, according to the *Post*, and “until the end of his life he remained a beloved figure.” So beloved was Seeger that he and Bruce Springsteen performed “This Land is Your Land” at a concert at the Lincoln Memorial during President Obama’s second inaugural celebration.

Lost down the memory hole is the background of The Almanac singers, The Weavers, as well as any mention of Zilphia Horton or the Highlander School, or the publishing company People’s Songs, which Seeger founded to promote his music.

The Pete Seeger Appreciation Page [was equally effusive](#), calling Seeger “America’s best-loved folksinger,” an “untiring environmentalist,” and a “beacon of hope for millions of people all over the world.” Its author reminded the Seeger faithful that he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1996 and, even though he never graduated from Harvard, in that same year Seeger was awarded the Harvard Arts Medal for his “contribution to the arts.” In 1999, he traveled to Cuba, that land of “love, peace and brotherhood,” to receive Cuba’s highest honor for “his humanistic and artistic work in defense of the environment and against racism.”



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The reporting by the Associated Press of Seeger's death was [scarcely any better](#) at telling the rest of his story, noting that Seeger was an "iconic figure in folk music," and that he performed with "the great Woody Guthrie" and "marched with Occupy Wall Street protesters in his 90s." The AP lamented that Seeger was "kept off commercial television for more than a decade" following his confrontation with the HUAC and noted that Seeger was incensed at the committee's questions into his Communist Party affiliations:

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.

To balance this lopsided reporting of the passing of the man, it is helpful to start at the beginning. At age 13 Seeger [became a subscriber](#) to the communist monthly publication *The New Masses*. He continued his indoctrination at Harvard before dropping out in his sophomore year. Following a brief stint as an assistant at the Library of Congress, he met Woody Guthrie in 1940 where Guthrie was performing at a benefit concert for some migrant workers. Shortly thereafter the two formed The Almanac Singers, made up of radicals, each of whom was involved with leftist political groups including the Communist Party.

In 1942, Seeger formally joined the Communist Party, serving as a staunch defender of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, calling himself one of the party's "artists in uniform" and holding the idea that "songs are weapons" in its fight.

In 1945, Seeger founded and became national director of People's Songs, Inc., which was deliberately created to "promote and distribute songs of labor." This leftist outfit caught the attention of the California Senate Fact-Finding Committee which reported:

People's Songs is a vital Communist front ... one which has spawned a horde of lesser fronts in the fields of music, stage entertainment, choral singing, folk dancing, recording, radio transcription and similar fields.

It especially is important to Communist proselytizing and propaganda work because of its emphasis on its appeal to youth, and because of its organization and technique to provide entertainment for organizations and groups as a smooth opening wedge for Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist propaganda.

In 1950, Seeger resigned from the Communist Party, but not over its ideology. Said Seeger, "I realized I could sing the same songs I sang whether I belonged to the Communist Party or not. I never liked the idea anyway of belonging to a secret organization."

In 1955, he was asked to testify before the HUAC, which event both the *Post* and the AP glossed over. According to Francis X. Gannon in his monumental [Biographical Dictionary of the Left](#), on August 18, 1955, Seeger was repeatedly asked about his involvement with the Communist Party and other communist front groups. After declining to answer, Seeger was cited for contempt of Congress and was later convicted on 10 counts of contempt in a New York federal court. His conviction was overturned, and the HUAC never sought another indictment.

[In his research](#), Gannon uncovered the following groups and organizations with which Seeger was affiliated, along with parenthetical designations from the HUAC:

Seeger, has been affiliated — as an entertainer, member, sponsor, instructor, or contributor — with the American Peace Mobilization ("subversive and Communist"); American Youth Congress



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(“subversive and Communist”); the Communist Party; American Youth for Democracy (“subversive and Communist”); the Council on African Affairs (“subversive and Communist”); the American Committee for Yugoslav Relief (“subversive and Communist”); the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship (“subversive and Communist” — “specializing in pro-Soviet propaganda”); the Civil Rights Congress (“subversive and Communist”); the American Committee for Protection of Foreign Born [Americans] “subversive and Communist” — “one of the oldest auxiliaries of the Communist Party in the United States” — under the “complete domination” of the Communist Party); the Committee for a Democratic Far Eastern Policy (“Communist”); the National Council of the Arts, Sciences and Professions (“a Communist front used to appeal to special occupational groups”); the Nature Friends of America (“subversive and Communist”); the Jefferson School of Social Science (“adjunct of the Communist Party”); the Metropolitan Music School (“controlled by Communists”); Veterans Against Discrimination of Civil Rights Congress (“subversive and Communist”); *New Masses* (“Communist periodical”); *Daily World* (“Communist publication”); the Labor Youth League (“Communist organization”); California Labor School (“a subversive and Communist organization”); the National Lawyers Guild (“the foremost legal bulwark of the Communist Party, its front organizations, and controlled unions”); Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (“subversive and Communist”); the Committee for the First Amendment (“Communist front”); the American Peace Crusade (“Communist front”); the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee (“Communist front” — “subversive”); and, the National Committee to Abolish the House Un-American Activities Committee (“to lead and direct the Communist Party’s ‘Operation Abolition’ campaign”).

As is now obvious, Seeger’s affiliations with these groups were neither transient nor light, but represent the man’s hard core commitment to forces working to destroy the United States. What’s disappointing, of course, is that this information is readily available on the Internet — all information available to writers and grieverers at the *Post* and the AP.

Those mainstream media representatives also knew, or should have known, that [the very first performance](#) of “If I Had a Hammer” was by Seeger on June 3, 1949, at St. Nicholas Arena in New York City at a testimonial dinner for the leaders of the Communist Party of the United States.

They should have known that “We Shall Overcome,” the so-called anthem of the civil rights movement, was taught to Seeger by Zilphia Horton, the music director of the Highlander Folk School (founded by her husband Myles Horton) and exposed in 1957 by the Georgia Commission on Education [in its pamphlet](#) entitled: “Highlander Folk School: Communist Training School, Monteagle, Tennessee.”

They should have known that Seeger [was a National Advisory Board member](#) of the Disarm Education Fund which seeks “to ban all private ownership of handguns.”

They should have known that in 2000 Seeger reiterated: “I am still a communist” and in 2004, in an interview with *Mother Jones* magazine expanded on that: “I’m still a communist in the sense that I don’t believe the world will survive with the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.”

They should have known, but they didn’t. Or else they do know but such information doesn’t fit the party line: Seeger is, or was, just a friendly folksinger with catchy tunes that occasionally were a little edgy. Nothing to worry about. Too bad he’s gone.

For 81 of his 94 years Seeger had bought into the totalitarianism that threatens our country today, and was promoted and lionized by the liberal media and the establishment elite behind them for his efforts.



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In retrospect, his work has successfully softened and then neutralized the hard edge of totalitarianism by trivializing it with song, turning liberty's loss into the music of celebration.

That's the real story behind Seeger's passing.

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