



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on July 18, 2022

Oklahoma Newspaper Praises Woody Guthrie on 110th Birthday

At one time *The Oklahoman* was a newspaper with a conservative reputation, but since ownership passed from the Gaylord family (E.K. and his son, E.L.) and is now part of the *USA Today* “network,” it has moved inexorably leftward. A case in point was Monday’s article, covering most of two pages, singing the praises of Woody Guthrie on the occasion of his 110th birthday (which was actually July 14th).

According to *The Oklahoman*, “His art and commitment to social justice continue to reverberate.” The article continued with a reference to his most famous song, “This Land Is Your Land,” by saying, “The song — which many consider an unofficial or alternative national anthem — has been showcased at President Biden’s inauguration, during the 2017 Super Bowl halftime show and in countless grade school musical performances.”

The paper continued, “He also penned novels, newspaper columns, short stories, letters and essays.”

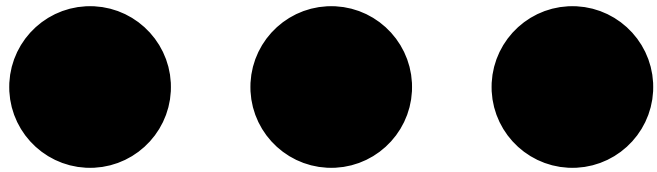
Those newspaper columns are part of what *The Oklahoman* left out in its praise of Guthrie, who died in 1967. After Joseph Stalin’s Soviet Union attacked Poland in 1939, Guthrie wrote a column in an official Communist Party newspaper defending the invasion — arguing that Stalin had gone in to help Polish farmers and workers. It was one of several columns, known as “Woody Sez,” that Guthrie penned for the Communist Party organ *People’s World*.

It is not clear whether Guthrie ever officially joined the Communist Party, but he never recanted his support for Stalin. In July 1945 Guthrie wrote, “I have rolled the whole thing over in my mind and have come to believe that we need to have the CP [Communist Party] back again.” He added, “I felt when we had our Party that I had found the one organization that I could stand up and feel proud of.”

Guthrie even recalled carrying around a pocket-sized “Constitution of the Soviet Union, USSR,” adding that the “best thing” he had ever done was “to sign up with the Communist Party.”

One has to wonder. If an American musician had publicly backed the invasion of Ukraine by Vladimir Putin, would *The Oklahoman* be praising him? Yet, the leaders of popular culture in America think nothing of honoring the ideologically communist minstrel Woody Guthrie on his 110th birthday, or at other times.

And, what about that song, “This Land Is Your Land,” which *The Oklahoman* offers up as an “alternative” to our national anthem? Guthrie wrote the song in angry response to “God Bless America,”



Woody Guthrie (AP Images)



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the patriotic ballad by Irving Berlin. Joe Klein, a sympathetic biographer of Guthrie, said Guthrie's song was "originally intended as a Marxist response" to "God Bless America."

An early version of the 1940 edition of "This Land Is Your Land" contained two additional verses not usually sung today. One verse specifically attacked the very concept of private property. The omitted verse went, "Was a big high wall there that tried to stop me. A sign was painted said: Private Property, But on the back side, it didn't say nothing — This land was made for you and me."

From shortly after Oklahoma's statehood, the Gaylord family had owned *The Oklahoman*. The founder, Edward K. Gaylord, was known — and feared — by Oklahoma politicians who veered too far to the left. After E.K. Gaylord died in 1974 at 101 years old, his son, Edward L. Gaylord, took over the paper and continued its strong conservative positions. But the next generation of Gaylords had little interest in continuing what their grandfather had started, and sold the paper. Now, it is in the hands of Gannett newspapers, the parent company of *USA Today*.

Instead of being a voice for conservatism, today the paper is a mouthpiece for the same type of liberal stories one gets from *USA Today*. For example, after Oklahoma adopted what was called the most restrictive anti-abortion law in the country, *The Oklahoman* ran several articles essentially bemoaning that fact. In a recent page letting readers espouse their views on the abortion issue, the paper did have a few words from one reader that supported the pro-life law — but in contrast, five pro-abortion readers got to have their say.

That is "balance" from today's *Oklahoman*. Nothing was mentioned in Monday's positive article on the songwriter about the pro-communist views of Woody Guthrie — an avowed Stalinist. Not one word about his writing for a Communist Party newspaper, or his praise for Stalin. Nothing about Guthrie's song "This Land Is Your Land" disparaging the concept of private property.

In addition to articles praising an openly communist songwriter and supporting abortion, *The Oklahoman* now runs stories and editorials favoring more gun-control laws, for example.

I am sure that the Gaylords would not approve of the progressive left swing of their family's newspaper. But if Woody Guthrie were alive today, perhaps he could write for the Gannett version of *The Oklahoman*. He would fit right in.



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