

Humor with a Bite

Peter Seeger

1967

A middle-aged friend of mine helps keep his sanity by giving, on occasion, an extra 25 cents to the man in the toll booth on the bridge. Then he says, "This is to pay for my friend who is in the car behind me." As he drives away he can look in his rear view mirror and laugh to see the policeman and driver of the following car gesturing and scratching their heads.

Undoubtedly there are times when humor is quite out of place. But my guess is that it can be used more often than at present. At its best it is not frivolous; it is not just a giggle. It is humor with a bite; the kind one can hear often from American Negro humorists. Rev. Ralph Abernathy told me that once he was attending a conference in Atlanta and a long distance phone call came from his wife. "Ralph, our church has been bombed!"

"Just sit tight, honey, don't get alarmed, wait until I get there."

Rev. Abernathy then went back to his conference but an hour later another long distance phone call came. "Ralph, our home has been bombed!"

Again the Reverend told his wife to just sit tight and wait until he got home.

One of the other ministers said to him, "Ralph, how can you simply tell your wife 'Wait until I get there.' This is serious."

Abernathy said, "Well, it's like this. There was once a woman whose husband died. She wanted to do right by him. She gave him a fine funeral with all the trimmings and a big stone with the inscription "Rest In Peace." About one week later she heard rumors that her husband had once been playing around with other women. She investigated, found it to be true, and was mad as hops. She went down to the gravestone company and said, "I want you to change that where it says 'Rest In Peace'." They said, "But madam, this can't be changed. It is carved in imperishable granite. Forever."

"Well, then," she said, "Underneath, I want you to carve, 'Until I get there.'"

The best thing about the Amsterdam Provos is their sense of humor. You have heard of their white bicycle plan. And when the police arrested them because the law says that all bicycles should be locked, they put combination locks on but painted the numbers of the combinations for all to see. And then there was the time they announced in the newspapers that they would be distributing scandalous leaflets at 6 p.m. one evening at a certain public square. The police were ready and when the Provo's skipped and danced into the square handing out pieces of paper, they were promptly collared. Then one of the policemen looked at the paper. It was blank on both sides. The Provo's were shouting gaily, "Make your own leaflet...make your own leaflet."

The United States has had its share of practical jokers. Have you heard of the man who built a bench looking exactly like the official park benches? He and a friend then started carrying it through Central Park and were arrested. "But this is our bench."

"Tell it to the judge."

Sure enough, in court they produced bills of sale, photographs and other affidavits, and the judge had to release them. They went right back to the Park and started carrying their bench down another path and were arrested

again. The third or fourth time it happened the judge got furious and made sure that the entire Park Department was alerted to the two jokesters, who were then able to pick up any park bench anywhere in the park.

Then there were the two guys who put on overalls and got hold of an official Con Ed sign saying “Dig We Must” and proceeded to put a hole in Times Square, and walked away and left it there. For several days traffic skirted the hole until someone tried to find out what the delay was in filling it.

What is needed now is the power of positive fun. Anyone seriously concerned about the traffic problem in some of our cities might consider the following possibility. We all know that there is such a thing as a citizen’s arrest. How about a ‘citizen’s tow’? Rent a tow truck with a winch and a hoist and go down the street towing away cars that are illegally parked. Now here is a noble task for the teenagers of America.

Reprinted from *Win* (N.Y.) — Underground Press Syndicate

fifth Estate

Peter Seeger
Humor with a Bite
1967

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/39-october-1-15-1967/humor-with-a-bite>
Fifth Estate #39, October 1-15, 1967

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net