

Seeger is sailing Hudson to stop pollution

By ALLEN YOUNG
Liberation News Service

COLD SPRING, N.Y. — A graceful sloop, with a 106-foot mainsail, an interracial crew and the songs of Pete Seeger, is plying the waters of Hudson River these days as part of a campaign to make its water run clear once again.

Much of the 315-mile river is now polluted with industrial waste and the unprocessed sewage of dozens of towns and cities.

The idea of the boat, Seeger says, "is to bring tens of thousands of people to the waterfront. We've got to get the patient to admit there's a disease. Many people say, 'It's a sewer, so what?' We bring 'em down and they are reminded of what a beautiful river the Hudson is and there's no more of that 'so what?' stuff."

The approach of the Clearwater, its crew and the association that raised \$180,000 to build and outfit the sloop is hardly militant.

They feel that the people who live in the towns and cities along the river need to be awakened about the problem. Those immediately responsible for the pollution of the river, of course, are industrial magnates who own the factories which dump waste into the Hudson, and the politicians, bigtime and smalltime, who do not allocate appropriate tax money toward sewage treatment plants and who refuse to take necessary measures against the offending corporations.

A few years ago, New York state voters approved a \$1.5 billion bond issue to help finance sewer plants. Most of the money has gone unused, however, because local municipalities must raise 50 per cent of the cost of such plants in order to tap the state aid — and most cities are unwilling to make this outlay.

Ultimately, Seeger and the Clearwater sponsors would argue, action against the industrialists and the politicians will come only when the people are aroused.

Mixed reception

Some of the people are aroused, all right, but against the Clearwater. When the boat was tied up to the small wooden pier at Cold Spring, a lily-white village of 2,000 in rural Putnam County, only 50 miles north of New York City, right-wing hoodlums hassled the crew. They stood on shore swearing at them and said they didn't

want the "communist" boat in their town. "If you want to clean up the river," they shouted at the boatmen (most of them black people and hip people), "just get off it!"

The sloop's reception has been mostly positive, however. Some of the money for the project ironically comes from old WASP families who live in big old Hudson Valley mansions. (Seeger and his family have lived for years in a comfortable log cabin in Beacon, N.Y., but have known decades of red-baiting from neighbors.)

Among the contributors to the Hudson River Sloop Restoration, Inc., the 2,500-member group which owns the ship, are the Rockefeller, the Ottinger Foundation, and Reader's Digest. Old-fashioned conservationists, such as the Scenic Hudson Preservation Association (which has been successfully fighting Consolidated Edison's plan of building a power plant on Storm King Mountain), have also shown support for the Clearwater. Most of the money was raised at folk song concerts, however.

Population pollution

Before sailing south to Cold Spring, the Clearwater visited Newburgh, an old river town which was once George Washington's headquarters and now has one of the worst black ghettos in the Hudson Valley. Thousands, black and white, young and old, came down to celebrate at the Newburgh waterfront (guess who lives in the buildings around the decrepit waterfront). The crew of the Clearwater is hopeful that the presence of the ship at the waterfront made more Newburgh people aware not only of the filth in the river but of the plight of the city's black population.

The Clearwater is a new kind of counter-institution. The captain of the ship is Allan Aunapu, 28, who has years of experience manning pleasure schooners in the Caribbean. A confirmed pacifist, Allan watches over the ship's amateur crew with a friendly eye and a calm voice. Seeger, 50 years old but not showing it, leads sea chanteys and puts his own muscles to

work as all on board hoist the mainsail: "Heave away, haul away, we're bound from Haverstraw to New York City."

Seeger was one of the main architects of the Clearwater project and knows almost as much about sailing the boat as the captain. He loves the Hudson and has spent several years dedicated to the project.

Will the people listen?

The idea was first conceived in 1966 and the boat left the Harvey F. Gamage shipyards in South Bristol, Maine, on May 17. Seeger is chairman of the board of the sloop association and is currently leading a battle to place the ship firmly in control of the young politically-minded crew.

There are those in the association, Seeger says, who don't like the idea of an amateur crew (they want to have experienced professionals running the boat), who want the boat to spend more time in scenic upstate and less time around New York City (there are fewer blacks up there), and who want to keep children under 12 off

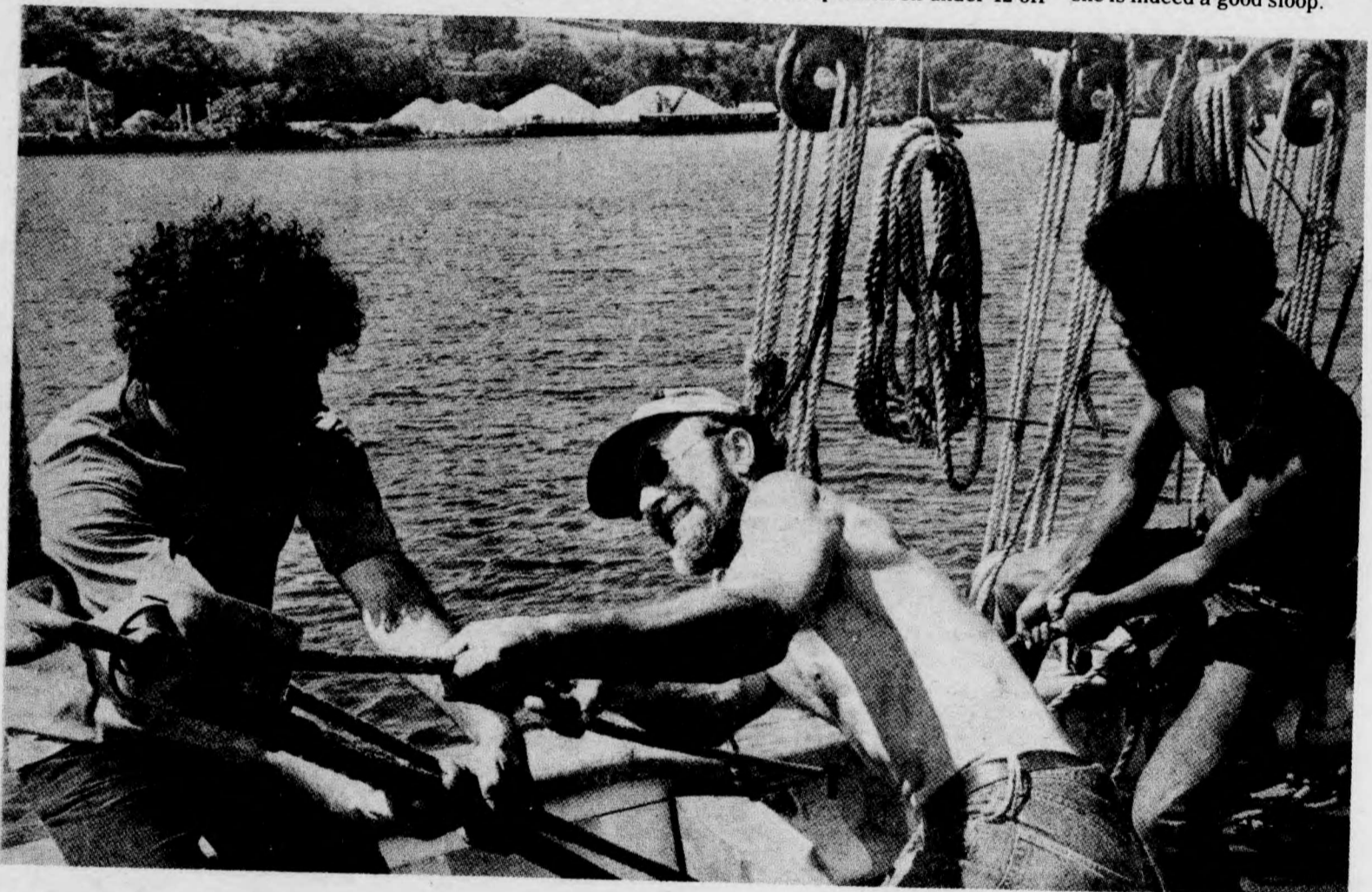
the ship while it is sailing.

(One of the most pleasant things about the sloops was the way the crew treated the dozen children on board: they were given work to do and they did not have to be told every minute to get out of the way or to be careful.)

When the Clearwater visits a town, school children visit the sloop and learn about its history. Displays tell about the problem of water pollution. Seeger, Allan Aunapu and others entertain with songs.

Will the people listen? The beautiful sloop Clearwater, Seeger's charming songs and the crew's peaceful commitment to their task can only be a beginning. This fall, the Clearwater will continue its sail up and down the river with the expectation that thousands of school children will visit the boat and learn about its history and purpose.

The fight to clean up the Hudson is part of a larger fight to clean up the filth and sickness across the nation; if the Clearwater helps to win people to that greater fight, she is indeed a good sloop.



Pete Seeger (center) and his crew on the sloop Clearwater

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