

Woody Guthrie, Vanzetti's Letter

The year, it is 1927, an' the day is the third day of May;
Town is the city called Boston, an' our address this dark Dedham jail.
To your honor, the Governor Fuller, to the council of Massachussetts state,
We, Bartolomo (sic) Vanzetti, an' Nicola Sacco, do say:
Confined to our jail here at Dedham an' under the sentence of death,
We pray you do exercise your powers an' look at the facts of our case.
We do not ask you for a pardon, for a pardon would admit of our guilt;
Since we are both innocent workers, we have no guilt to admit.

We are both born by parents in Italy, can't speak English too well;
Our friends of labor are writin' these words, back of the barsin our cell.
Our friends say if we speak too plain, sir, we may turn your feelings away,

Widen these canyons between us, but we risk our life to talk plain.

We think, sir, that each human bein' is in close touch with all of man's kind,
We think, sir, that each human bein' knows right from the wrong in his mind.
We talk to you here as a man, sir, even knowing our opinions divide;
We didn't kill the guards at South Braintree, nor dream of such a terrible crime.

We call your eye to this fact, sir, we work with our hand and our brain;
These robberies an' killings, were done, sir, by professional bandit men,
Sacco has been a good cutter, Mrs. Sacco their money has saved;
I, Vanzetti, I could have saved money, but I gave it as fast as received.

I'm a dreamer, a speaker, an' a writer; I fight on the working folks' side.
Sacco is Boston's fastest shoe trimmer, and he talks to the husbands and wives.
We hunted your land, and we found it, hoped we'd find freedom of mind,
Built up your land, this Land of the Free, an' this is what we come to find.

If we was those killers, good Governor, we'd not be so dumb and so blind
To pass out our handbills and make workers' speeches, out here by the scene of the crime.
Those fifteen thousands of dollars the lawyers and judge said we took,
Do we, sir, dress up like two gentlemen with that much in our pocketbook?

Our names are on the long list of radicals of the Federal Government, sir,
They said that we needed watching as we peddled our literature.
Judge Thayer's mind's made up, sir, when we walked into the court;
Well, he called us anarchistic bastards, said lots of other things worse.

They brought people down there to Brockton to look through the bars of our cell,
Made us act out the motions of the killers, and still not so many could tell.

Before the trial ever started, the jury foreman did say,
An' he cussed us an' said, "Damn they, well, they'd ought to hang anyway."
Our fatal mistake was carryin' our guns, about which we had to tell lies
To keep the police from raiding the homes of workers believing like us.

A labor paper, or a picture, a letter from a radical friend,
An old cheap gun like you keep around home, would torture good women and men.
We all feared deporting and whipping, torments to make us confess
The place where the workers are meeting, the house, your name, and address.

Well. the officers said we feared something which they called a consciousness of guilt.
We was afraid of wreckin' more homes, and seein' more workers' blood spilt.
Well, the very first question they asked us was not about killing the clerks,
But things about our labor movement, and how our trade union works.

Oh, how could our jury see clearly, when the lawyers, and judges, and cops
Called us low type Italians, said we looked just like regular wops,
Draft dodgers, gun packers, anarchists, these vulgar sounding names,
Blew dust in the eyes of jurors, the crowd in the courtroom the same.

We do not believe, sir, that torture, beatings, and killings and pains

Will lift man's eyes to a highest of view an' break his bilbos and chains.
We believe that you must struggle for freedom before your freedom you'll gain,
Freedom from fear, sir, and greed, sir, and your freedom to think higher things.

This fight, sir, is not a new battle, we did not make it last night,
'Twas fought by Godwin, Shelly, Pisacane, Tolstoy and Christ;
It's bigger than the atoms an' the sands of the desert, planets that roll in the sky;
Till workers get rid of their robbers, well, it's worse, sir, to live than to die.

Your Excellency, we're not askin' pardon but askin' to be set free,
With liberty, and pride, sir, and honor, and a pardon we will not receive.
A pardon you given to criminals who've broken the laws of the land;
We don't ask you for pardon, sir, because we are innocent men.

Well, if you shake your head "no", dear Governor, of course, our doom it is sealed.
We hold up our heads like two sons of men, seven years in these cells of steel.
We walk down this corridor to death, sir, like workers have walked it before,
But we'll work in our working class struggle if we live a thousand lives more.