

# New Talking Atom Blues

Gonna preach you a sermon about Old Man Atom,  
Now I don't mean the Adam in the Bible, madame,  
I don't mean the Adam mother Eve mated,  
But I do mean the atom science liberated.

Einstein said he was scared, and when Einstein says he's scared, I'm scared.

Life used to be so simple before  
When you only had to worry about nuclear war,  
Then they only had the occasional test  
And the only folks hurt was folks out west.

Back in the good old days when a nuclear reaction was supposed to be avoided. Now it's supposed to cure unemployment. One way or the other.

Now a nuclear reactor, you understand  
Is just an atom bomb in a big tin can,  
But the can is safe, you need have no fear  
It's been designed by an Engineer.

You know the guy: hard hat, sitting in the stands at the football game, singing, "We don't give a damn for any damn man who don't give a damn for us!" Throwing up on his shirt.

Plutonium is a man-made creature,  
It's not in the ground, it's not in nature,  
It's not like wood or gas or coal,  
God wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole.

This stuff is 20,000 times more lethal than cobra venom, and it stays that way for 250,000 years. This creates some difficulty when it comes to taking out the garbage.

Now Hydro has this show they send around to dispel the very anxieties I am trying to stir up. Nonetheless, it is highly educational. For instance, did you know that they have got a new thing called a breeder reactor, which takes its fuel from its own waste? It's disgusting!

Every time you use up four pounds of plutonium in one of these things, it creates another five pounds. The man from Hydro was actually proud of this. But I put up my hand and said, "Sir, excuse me, I have a question for you: what do you do with the extra pound?"

You know, making this stuff, which they do, without having a place to put the garbage, which they don't, is like putting up an outhouse without digging a hole.

The trouble with these highly technological gadgets  
Is that they're made by men and not by magic  
And you'd sooner pass a camel through the eye of a needle  
Than find a fool-proof system designed by people.

Take Skylab. Take the DC-10. Take CP Rail. Remember the *Titanic*!

Now if I appear to be unduly concerned about the human element in the nuclear equation, let me put this to you: if a man of Joe Clark's abilities can rise to be Prime Minister, by the same token he could rise to be head of Ontario Hydro. Were that the case, and if Three Mile Island happened here, Joe Clark would be in charge.

Thank God he's Prime Minister!

There's power from the sun and power from the wind  
And power from the ocean, hydrogen.  
There's power in the tide of the Bay of Fundy  
If the powers that be would only put up the money.

There's power in the honey-bucket — animal waste,  
It don't run out, it makes methane gas.  
You know it is all very simple when you boil it down:  
We need hydro from shit and not the other way round.

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*Bob Bossin and Marie-Lynn Hammond*

The original "Talking Atom Blues" was written in 1945 by Vern Partlow, an American journalist who I've been told was blacklisted during the McCarthy era. The song was sung at nuclear disarmament rallies in the 'fifties. Only the first verse remains in this version. I updated the rest for a march on the Darlington Nuclear Power Plant which is under construction near Toronto—very near. I don't know how well it will read in print without its timing, inflection and rapport with an audience, but it was a fair hit at the Winnipeg and Vancouver folk festivals.

A note to American readers: Hydro (capitalized) is Canadian for the utilities that provide hydro (i.e. hydro-electric power). Joe Clark is a Canadian politician, sort of a cross between Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford.

*Bob Bossin*

Bob Bossin sings and plays with Stringband. For anyone who may not have encountered Stringband's music, it can be described, in Bossin's words, as "Folk, sort of. Eclectic. Canadian. Songs with a sense of place." Much of their time is spent touring in Canada, and currently (March) they are in B.C. The group's records, *The Maple Leaf Dog*, *Thanks to the Following*, *National Melodies*, and *Canadian Sunset*, are all produced by themselves and can be obtained for \$7.50 each by writing to Bob Bossin, Stringband, 44 Sussex Ave., Toronto, Ontario M5S 1J7.

Bossin has written a number of songs, including his recent "The New Talking Atom". Any readers who do not know the talking blues form should ask their friends, or seek out a recording of Woody Guthrie doing "Talking Dust Bowl Blues". The first four lines of each verse are spoken in a steady four-beat rhythm, while the indented sections are spoken more freely. Things to remember: keep a simple steady four-beat strum (guitar, banjo, etc.) as back-up, follow the basic chord progression, and just talk. The basic chord pattern (in key of G) looks like this for the first verse:

G	C
Gonna preach you a sermon about Old Man Atom,	
D'	
Now I Don't mean the Adam in the Bible, madame,	
G	C
I don't mean the Adam mother Eve mated,	
D'	G
But I do mean the atom science liberated.	
C	D'
Einstein said he was scared, and when Einstein says	
G	
he's scared, I'm scared.	

*Fred Weihs*

