

Yippies Defined Politics of Dope

This somewhat irreverent, nationalistic late sixties piece is reprinted from Canadian Dimension.

Down the street from the newspaper office where I work, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce has dug the world's biggest hole. It takes up most of a city block. If you push a button on the hoarding, a loudspeaker plays the recorded announcement from "the general contractor's project engineer." He opens up with a little parable:

"Here on this site, 330 men from different countries are striving to complete a building that will be the focal point for downtown Toronto and a monument to their skill. From coast to coast in Canada, the same story can be told as men from many lands labour to build a nation.

"Here on this site before you, activity is being hidden from view as the structure rises toward street level..."

Sounds a bit like a capsule history of the country. Immigrants from all over the world come here and lay the foundation for a nation and just as the foundation is finished and their children are ready to move in and occupy the building, "activity is being hidden from view."

Somewhere inside there, in the mysteries of Bay Street and Ottawa, somebody is selling out the country, allowing it to become an economic, cultural and spiritual colony of America. It's hard to see clearly who the enemy is.

On the left, allow me to introduce Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman.

In his book, "Do It!", Jerry describes himself as "Scrips Howards' brightest young journalist transformed into a dope smoking, shaggy haired unwashed, riot inciting freak."

The description will probably do just as well for Abbie although he was transformed from a practicing psychologist.

They were the heart of the Youth International Party, the Yippies. Last February, they were convicted of crossing state lines to foment a riot during the 1968 convention of the Democratic party. Jerry and Abbie were only 25 percent of the famous Chicago Eight, but they came to dominate the trial. Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis who came to revolution through the holiday, let their hair grow and began to dress like street theatre players. Sainly Dave Dellinger who came up through Christian pacifism began to curse the judge.

The Yippies have been the most successful at defining a revolutionary lifestyle.

Jerry and Abbie are our allies. Like them, hate them, turn up your nose at their freakiness — they are still fighting our battle.

If we are ever going to construct a separate and distinct Canadian way of life, we have first got to liberate ourselves from the American way of life.

Jerry and Abbie are trying to pull the American way of life down around their heads. If they succeed — even if they succeed only here and there and in bits and pieces — they can only help us. We are all anti-imperialists.

Read their latest books, Abbie's "Woodstock Nation" and Jerry's "Do It!" These are important documents in the history of the New Left.

I think they may also be testaments to a failure, a noble, heroic and bitter failure.

FILL IN THE BLANKS

I am playing pop sociologist now. This is the era when every journalist in his own cultural historian. Last night, 1,760 people on the Island of Manhattan crossed a police barricade to watch a dirty movie called "Dirty Movie." This is a major new cultural trend. From this it can be deduced that modern marriage is breaking down, that the Vietnam War will spread to the Isle of Capri and that Mrs. Spiro T. Agnew injects ketchup in her veins to give her cheeks a little color.

Fill in the blanks. Everybody knows what is happening. If anybody could tell us what is really happening we'd probably all build bomb shelters.

Still, a few qualifications, if you please, sir.

Lived on the upper west side of Manhattan for a year. Went to Chicago as a reporter, ran in the streets with the Yippies and wrote a book about the terrible week. Thought about it a lot since the book was finished. Knew a few people here and there. Came back to Canada last June. Couldn't hack the States anymore. You were either a chickenshit liberal copout or worse or you were a revolutionary talking about getting into bombs or worse. Came home because there still seemed to be some middle ground here, some space to manoeuvre between alternatives.

Loved her, hated him.

But time and space and running out here too. And Jerry Rubin says, hey, join me and you can be a hero. Dig it: 'We create reality wherever we go by living our fantasies,' and 'We want to be heroes like those we read about in the history books,' and 'You are the star of the show and everything you were once taught is up for grabs.'

And on the other side of the street, America says join me and you can be a hero too. Join the army and see the world. Act out your wild west fantasies by killing people. Kill enough of them and you'll get a medal and a good job in the aerospace industry and all the prettiest girls will fall down and spread their legs for you.

Decisions are hard to make these days. There were some 400,000 people at Abbie's Woodstock Nation and, at the same time, there were some 500,000 odd people of the same age being soldiers in Vietnam.

There is, rest assured, one very significant difference between acting out your fantasies with Jerry Rubin and acting them out with General Abrams.

JERRY THE BENEVOLENT

Jerry will let you smoke dope. In fact, he'll roll the first joint for you himself. And he'll give you acid or meso or anything else he may happen to have at the apartment when you drop by.

Dope, more than anything else, is what Abbie and Jerry and the Yippies are all about. They were trying to create politics of dope.

If there is one truly real experience that people under 30 shared during the 60's, it was dope. Even if they were all over muscular Christian and turned up their noses at the very idea, they were taking normal choices and entangling themselves in the new dope culture.

Abbie Hoffman says, "A new culture with psychedelic songs and big ears for heavy sounds was perched on the telephone wires."

And, "It's only when you get to the end of Reason you can begin to enter Woodstock Nation." And, "I'm not angry at Vietnam, and racism and imperialism. Naturally, I'm against all that shit, but I'm really pissed because my friends are in prison for dope and cops stop me on the street because I have long hair." And, "But they (the kids) took off from Desolation Row every time they snuck a joint in the afternoon when mom was down at the laundromat."

Jerry Rubin says, "For years I went to left wing meetings trying to figure out what the hell was going on. Finally, I started taking acid and I realized what was going on: nothing." And, "The new left says I protest, the hippies said I am." And, "We are constantly tripping on every drug known to man."

What was happening on those trips?

IT BLOWS THE MIND

The more you real learned exposition on the dope experience, the less you know. The popular phrase still strikes me as the best description. IT BLOWS THE MIND!

The mind is blasted loose from its cultural moorings. It is floating around reorganizing

states of consciousness, telescoping all the senses. But the mind is still aware of and still reacts in the context of previous experience.

If your previous conditioning has been in any sense religious, you will probably say you are experiencing God. If your previous experience has been only life in modern Canada or the United States, the doctors will probably diagnose your condition as schizophrenia.

Traditionally, the right to go crazy has been carefully guarded. You had to be initiated into the magic mushroom and all other cults built around dope.

The priests and medicine men didn't hand that stuff around like candy.

You had to be prepared for the psychedelic experience. If we follow the American Indian cults and we believe the current theory that similar cults existed in the ancient middle east and Greece — was Christ himself stoned on peyote? — then we see that you had to be brought by careful stages to that awesome moment when you finally took dope.

Then, suddenly, in the mid-sixties, everybody's doing it. Dope is everywhere, permeating the most secluded nooks and crannies of even the most middle class suburbs. A trip cost a week's allowance. Mysticism is now mass produced, a triumph for democracy and capitalism.

The dope culture breaks out in San Francisco in 1966. The hippies, the first acid heads, hand out flowers and talk about love. They are trying to act out that feeling of total openness that comes with dope. They come on preaching a Christian message of brotherly love. The American Christos beat the hell out of them.

Christianity had become a safe religion. Even the blood soaked Rockefeller could endow a church overlooking the misery of Harlem and go there to pray for eternal life. Christianity was no longer, as Simone Weil once called it, "a religion of slaves." In America, it had become a religion of producers and consumers.

So the long hairs gathered at the Pentagon for the long night of the rifle butts, and they were, by all accounts, some of the bravest people there.

Jerry and Abbie and others, most notably, Keith Lampe and Ed Sanders and Paul Krassner and Allen Ginsberg, saw the potential. They started the Youth International Party, the Yippies. Rubin once described it as "pot and politics." It became an attempt to make

THE NEW HIPPIES

When the hippes gave away flowers, they attracted one of the root myths of American capitalism. The first freaks, giving away flowers, were a vivid rejection of exploitation as



political action sound, and more importantly, feel like an acid trip.

At Woodstock, Abbie found, "Straight dudes like office secretaries and shoe salesmen and teachers getting their minds blown out and ending up swimming naked in the lake or fucking in the grass or trying acid for the first time.

There were people who carried out in ecstasy and people who did nothing but smile the whole time." And in Abbie's vision, "With our free stores, liberated buildings, communes, peoples' parks, dope, free bodies and our music, we'll build our society in the vacant lots of the old and we'll do it by any means necessary. Right on."

And Jerry says, "Our politics is our music, our smell, our skin, our hair, our warm naked bodies, our energy, our underground papers, our vision." And, "Yippies believe there can be no social revolution without a head revolution and no head revolution without a social revolution."

And, "What's happening is energy exploding in thousands of directions and people declaring themselves free." And, "When guerrilla war comes to America, it will come in psychedelic colours."

In this new politics of dope, you act the way you feel, not the way you think because, when you are tripping, there is only feeling and intuition. You are beyond the power to reason. Being part of a guerrilla theatre action is as good as being stoned. The "explosion of energy" that you act out on the streets is the kind of energy you get when the dope explodes inside your head."

Long hairs became "street people" and formed "affinity groups," which were street gangs that were going to "liberate" whole city blocks and fight the cops to a standstill. Jerry Rubin became the vice-presidential candidate of the very oldish, leftish Peace and Freedom Party. The head of the party's ticket was Eldridge Cleaver. A new coalition was being born. Everybody turned on and grooved on the public image of the Black Panthers and the white motorcycle gangs.

Everyone who had been made an outlaw by the American way of life would join hands. And in Chicago, it worked. Maybe it worked in Berkeley too.

ALTMONT, THE END

But on the Lower East Side of New York, it was a fiction right from the start. The bikers preyed on the long hairs and the Puerto Ricans preyed on everybody. Some of my best friends in the movement were raped in what was supposed to be a living community on the lower east side. Two or three times. Communally.

The end of it was Altamont. Altamont was like a morality play, an obscene morality play with everything that should have been turned upside down and horrible.

At Altamont, in the California country, the Rolling Stones gave a free concert. Some 250,000 people came. The Rolling Stones brought the Hells Angels to protect them from their fans. The Hells Angels brought pool cues and beat up on the long hairs. Finally, according to reports, the Angels attacked a 17-year-old black man. He pulled a gun. There were too many Angels for that. They got the gun away from him. Then they stomped him and stabbed him to death.

Altamont was Waterloo. If the young had really been forged into a revolutionary class as Jerry and Abbie so fervently claimed then the Stones would have needed no bodyguards and the Angels would have embraced the long hairs and the blacks would have left their guns at home.

Remember Altamont. Woodstock was a fantasy. Fuck Woodstock. Altamont was the one that counted.

Altamont was the end of Jerry's and Abbie's attempt to develop a new political style that would ally the dope freaks with everyone else who is being oppressed in America.

The trouble is that the different groups, the blacks, the students, the acid heads, the pacifists, the communal farmers pose different kinds of threats to America.

The repression hits them in different ways and at different times. And repression has not so far been a universal enough or a bitter enough experience to forge a strong, enduring coalition.

It wasn't until this spring, when Bobby Seale had been on trial with white revolutionaries in Chicago and then gone onto another trial right on the doorstep of Yale that the white, middle class students mounted a major, national demonstration of sympathy for the Panthers.

The Panthers have yet to show up en masse at an anti-war demonstration.

Some of the hippies are in the country now, gathering up horseshit to spread on their crop of peas.

And the bikers are roaring off down the highway. As long as they do not rip off a significant amount of middle class money — or rape any middle class girls — the cops leave them alone. The cops understand the difference between the outlaws and revolutionaries. They leave the thousands of bikers in California alone, but when a few hundred kids turn a vacant lot in Berkeley into a peoples' park, the cops go after them with shotguns and murder one young man and blind another.

The most damaging testimony against Jerry Rubin in Chicago came from a cop who had been playing undercover agent and assigned himself to be Jerry Rubin's bodyguard. He managed to make his way into the throngs of street people by infiltrating a gang of bikers called the head hunters. The Headhunters accepted him without question. The cop and the bikers talked the same language.

The revolutionaries are divided. Yet the revolution proceeds. The revolutionaries are on their own, yet they share at least a common purpose. And they attack America on many fronts.

Children raised the clenched fist. Tear gas fills the air. Women scream. Search lights cut through the choking fog. The pigs are coming now. Their guns make flashes in the night. Split down the alleys. Gather on the street corners. Is it moral to blow up a bank if you warn the night watchman first?

QUINTI-ESSENTIAL FIVE O'CLOCK

But now, here, it is five o'clock in the morning. It is the quintessential five o'clock in the morning. All dreams, even the dream of being a part of history, are over by five o'clock in the morning.

Outside my window, birds are singing. The sun is coming. This is one of the things I like best about Toronto. In the early morning, you can still hear birds in the heart of the city.

I am alone and chilly now, wrapped in a blanket, drinking coffee under the poster of Allan Ginsberg in my kitchen. A very brave man, Ginsberg. In Chicago, he walked right in under the cops and sat down in front of them and let the crowds in chanting Om. He cooled the crowds out. But the cops had already taken off their nameplates. If they had charged then, they would have caught Ginsberg helpless and God only knows what they would have done to him.

The fierceness, the passion, the exhilaration of the New American Revolution all seem distant and dreamlike now.

Shall I go out this morning and chant "Om" back at the recorded voice of the "general contractor's project engineer" at the Bank of Commerce? Anybody want to go out there and chant along with me?

Oddly enough, Jerry does have a little Canadian number in his book. It's about the time he came to speak at the University of British Columbia and led a group of students in liberating the faculty club.

I remember him tearing around his little apartment on the lower east side showing me the clippings of this action and explaining how significant it was, how Canadians didn't have pressing social problems like racism and Vietnam so student rebels wouldn't get trapped into making demands that authorities could meet but student uprisings in Canada would be "pure," and therefore, Canada was way ahead of America.

It all sounded like very heady stuff on the lower east side.

But I'm home now; Jerry doesn't sound like the troubles we have at home.

I wish we didn't have to go it alone. Turning on and fighting in the streets with Jerry and Abbie is a lot more fun than trying to analyze percentage points of investment and worrying about water resources or trying to argue with the Canadian Yankophiles about the need for a new Canadian nationalism.

It would be much easier to fall in with Jerry and Abbie and feel that whatever happens, I will at least be a part of history. The desire to be a part of history drives some people mad with frustration. And history seems a long way from downtown Toronto at five o'clock in the morning.

But what the hell? Algeria was outside history and Cuba was outside history and French IndoChina was outside history until they began to struggle for freedom. Maybe all colonies are outside history until they become anti-colonies.

Maybe he will be able to invite Jerry and Abbie up here for our independence day celebrations.

They have been good allies, true comrades, brothers.

But they are not, they cannot be, our leaders.