

YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION - OR DO YOU?

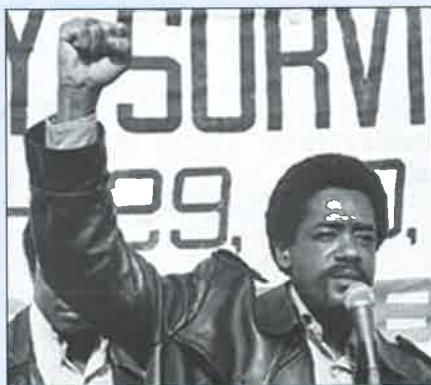
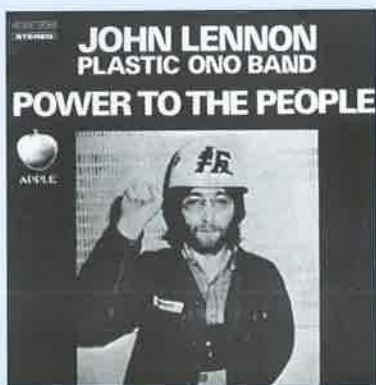
The Politics of John Lennon

PART FIVE: 1970-1971

On 9 October 1970, John Lennon's father and his wife Pauline visited John and Yoko to celebrate his son's 30th birthday. According to Pauline Lennon in her book *Daddy Come Home*, John let out a vicious torrent of abuse directed against his father. She attributes this behaviour to his Primal Scream therapy which he underwent earlier in the year. Several scholars have speculated that John's political views did change at this time from a pacifist to a more radically active approach to current issues on civil and workers' rights, feminism, war and capitalism. In an unguarded interview in early December, John revealed his changing viewpoint to Jann Wenner, founder of the counter-culture US music newspaper, *Rolling Stone*. Referencing the 15 November 1969 anti-Vietnam war Moratorium March in Washington D.C. in which the crowds sang 'Give Peace a Chance', John stated: "I remember them all singing it...it was a very big moment for me. Why doesn't somebody write something for the people now, that's what my job and our job is. I have the same kind of hope for 'Working Class Hero'...I feel it's a revolutionary song...not the song itself but that it is a song for the revolution."

In January 1971, John invited Tariq Ali and Robin Blackburn, founders of the UK Trotskyist Left radical newspaper *Red Mole*, to his home. Discussing his 1968 song 'Revolution' which the radical left in both the UK and the US had denounced, John stated: "There were two versions of that song but the underground Left only picked up on the one that said 'count me out'. The original version ...said 'count me in' too...but I made a mistake...The mistake was that it was anti-revolution". The next day, John rang Tariq saying he was so inspired by the interview that he had started to write a song for the revolution and read out the lyrics to 'Power to the People' - "Say we want a revolution, we better get it on right away". This time John was 'in'.

'All Power to the People' was the slogan of the Black Panther Party founded in 1966 in Oakland, California by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. It is not clear when John first came across the Black Panthers but by February 1972 he was very familiar with their social welfare 10-point programme, inviting Bobby on the *Mike Douglas* talk show he and Yoko were co-hosting. As the Black Panthers were well known in both the US and UK, it is likely that John knew their slogan and it inspired his song. The raised fist was both a Black Panther and an international workers' rights symbol.



Bobby Seale

In an earlier issue on 'The Politics of John Lennon', I mentioned that John seemed to be unaware of the radical underground press such as *Black Dwarf*, a leftist publication founded by Tariq Ali (before he split with them and founded *Red Dwarf*). However, in the late 1960s, he was familiar with some of the counter-culture underground press. Barry Miles, still good friends with Paul McCartney, set up Indica Books along with John Dunbar who ran Indica Gallery – the gallery which gave Yoko Ono an exhibition in November 1966 where she and John first met. Miles also set up *IT (International Times)* which featured articles on drugs, politics and sexual issues. Another counter-culture publication was *OZ*, founded by Richard Neville in Australia and then set up in England in 1967 after he relocated. How do you describe *OZ*? Its supporters considered it ground-breaking because it dared to break all taboos current in society (and had great psychedelic illustrations by Martin Sharp). Its detractors thought it was puerile, obscene and of limited use when you had better reportage in *IT*. This was the publication John seemed to be most interested in.

John and Yoko printed a photomontage in the October/November 1969 'Beautiful Freaks' issue of *OZ* which also included an interview John gave to Barry Miles of *International Times*. In the February/March 1970 issue they took out an ad for 'Instant Karma!' and in subsequent issues they advertised John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band and 'Power to the People'. John was on the subscriber's list which was confiscated when *OZ* was raided by the police. In the early months of 1970, *OZ*'s management team, Richard Neville, Jim Anderson and Felix Dennis, placed an ad asking for under 18s to come forward to write and edit an upcoming issue. This became issue 28, the 'Schoolkids' issue, published in May. In July, the office was raided and copies seized under the Obscene Publications Act. 'Friends of Oz' was quickly set up to raise funds for the three principals' defence. One of those fundraising events was 'Ozjets d'Art' which included works by David Hockney, Germaine Greer and John and Yoko Lennon.



The *OZ* obscenity trial was the longest running in British history of that nature. It wasn't until June 1971 that the jury gave their verdict on the charges against the defendants. They were found guilty on most charges and sentence was to be passed in August. John and Yoko, stating that the verdict was "disgusting fascism", led a 'Friends of Oz' march to the Old Bailey in protest against the guilty verdict. At the same time Mary Whitehouse, social activist, protested against the protestors!

Terry Bloxham (Power to the People!)



John and Yoko for OZ (above)

The defendants: Richard Neville, Jim Anderson and Felix Dennis (above right)

Mary Whitehouse against OZ (right)