

# YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION - OR DO YOU?

## The Politics of John Lennon

### PART SEVEN: 1971

*Standin' on the corner, just me and Yoko Ono, we  
was waitin' for Jerry to land*  
(lyrics from 'New York City', *Some Time in New  
York City*)

In 1972, John Lennon sang about his first meeting with the activist Jerry Rubin. He and Yoko had left England suddenly in August 1971. Tariq Ali of *Red Mole* said that he and John had been in discussion about setting up a tax-exempt foundation in England to carry out both political and cultural work to help the Left. "And then one day when I rang, he said, 'We're leaving, we're going off to New York, I'm fed up'". Jerry Rubin spoke of his meeting the Lennons in New York in September 1971: "I was depressed... Everyone in the Movement was condemning everything, condemning the Chicago Conspiracy trial, condemning our whole history". Then he heard 'Working Class Hero' and when he read in the New York *Daily News* that the Lennons had arrived in New York, he rang Apple and spoke to Yoko. They arranged to meet that Saturday in Greenwich Village (on the corner).



*Abbie Hoffman, John and Yoko and Jerry Rubin*

Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman were major players in social and political activism in the United States. Abbie Hoffman began agitating for better working conditions in his home state of Massachusetts, making his way down to New

York City in the mid-1960s to begin a cooperative, enabling the poorer sectors of society to exchange goods for food and clothing. Jerry Rubin got involved with the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS - leading members of which were Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis) at the Berkeley campus of the University of California. While there, he was instrumental in setting up the peace organisation Vietnam Day Committee (VDC). Jerry Rubin and his fellow activist, Stew Albert, moved to New York City in 1967 and quickly hooked up with Abbie Hoffman. Both Rubin and Hoffman adopted the guerrilla theatre antics of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, combining humour with protest to highlight the government's actions against the Civil Rights movements and their abusive measures towards anti-Vietnam War protestors.

They released hundreds of dollar bills on the Wall Street Exchange trading floor, founded the Youth International Party (the Yippies) and tried to hold a 'Festival of Life' gathering of protestors and musicians in Chicago during the Yippie named 'Festival of Death' - the Democratic National Convention in August 1968. Mayor Richard Daley's decisions to not grant a permit for protestors to use Lincoln Park and to send in his over zealous police force resulted in a gross show of police brutality which was televised, filmed, photographed and reported on in the press internationally - 'the world is watching'. John and Yoko Lennon were watching. They also watched the reports on the subsequent 'Chicago Conspiracy Trial' in which seven activists - Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin (Yippies), Tom Hayden, Rennie Davis (SDS), Dave Dellinger (MOBE), John Froines and Lee Weiner (academics) - were tried on charges of conspiring to cause a riot over state lines by setting up their 'Festival of Life'.

The authorities also charged Bobby Seale, founder of the Black Panther Party, who had only

flown in to give a 20 minute speech and then left. So, John and Yoko were fully aware of these major players in the United States protest movements.

As an aside, Abbie Hoffman was the man who interrupted The Who's set at Woodstock when he jumped up on the stage, grabbed the microphone and started telling the crowd about the imprisonment of Michigan activist John Sinclair and calling for people to protest against it. Townsend hit him on the head with his guitar and Abbie left the stage. Abbie also features in the film *Forrest Gump* in the scene of the Moratorium March in Washington DC. He invites Gump to tell the crowd of his experience in Vietnam.



*Scene from Forrest Gump featuring Abbie Hoffman*



*The real Abbie Hoffman at the Moratorium March*

John's first demonstration took place in October in Syracuse, New York, when he and Yoko were setting up her exhibition, 'This is Not Here', at the Everson Museum of Art. The Lennons met up with Oren Lyons of the Onondaga Indian Nation who asked him for their help. The Onondaga Nation were fighting the government's attempt to expand Interstate Highway 81 through their lands, in direct violation of a treaty

which had granted their land protection. John stated: "Everybody knows you people have been robbed and slaughtered since the Europeans moved in here." John and Yoko gave their support, appearing in a short film which was shown to members of Congress. The protest was a success and the highway was not extended.



*Tadodaho Leon Shenandoah, Yoko and John and Oren Lyons*

Jerry Rubin, who was at Syracuse with the Lennons at the time, stated: "Yoko says that they want to be part of the movement for change in America. John says he wants to put together a new band, he wants to play and he wants to give all the money back to the people". Since arriving in New York, the Lennons had been asked by Jerry, Abbie and Rennie Davis to perform in a concert tour around the country, to culminate in August at the Republican National Convention in San Diego. The November 1972 presidential election would be the first one where 18 to 21 year olds would be allowed to vote.

The concert tour aims were to get the youth to register to vote, to increase their awareness of the issues at hand (human rights, the Vietnam War), to benefit local causes with the concert profits and, ultimately, to prevent Richard Nixon from being re-elected as president. Flushed with the success of the Onondaga Indian Nation protest, this gave John the confidence to 'join the movement'.

*Terry Bloxham (Power to the People)*