

# The Coat Puller

John Sinclair

1967

I was speaking of the change taking place in this nation, and would say that in America the change is most evident in two sectors or subcultures of the civilization. In the black stinking ghettos of the poor and exploited, and in those sections of cities and land where the enlightened young have gathered for all intents and purposes *outside* the rigid general social framework of this America. These two sectors illustrate the two “major steps” outlined in this column last time.

I have dealt somewhat superficially (for lack of time and space) with the happenings in the ghettos in this column last month; right now developments in their sector are very interesting and portentous, especially here in Detroit, where change has to be imminent. But before I go any further, I have to say that what happens in one of these subcultures does not go without a significant change and effect in the other—it is important that we remember this at all times. As a friend in New York put it, “Diggers are niggers; niggers are diggers!” That is to say the social forces that create a desperate need in the culture for “niggers,” i.e. an “inherently inferior” race of people whose inferiority (so-called) stems from the fact that they *look* different from those in power (and this IS such a visually-oriented culture), has also created a growing group of creative drop-outs from the power structure whose major sin seems to be (as their fathers see it) that they refuse to *look like* “normal people,” i.e. white middle-class businessmen. The significant thing here is that both subcultures are the result of the “normal” white culture, are entirely created and nurtured by that culture, and have come to want nothing to do with its meanness. Both groups are after something else altogether different from what they are ‘supposed’- to want.

In Detroit then, the one group (poor blacks) has made it apparent that it would tear down all this city has come to stand for, with no really articulate alternative but the full belief that the city and the culture as it stands *is not right* and should then no longer exist in its present form; the other group, a coalition of visionary young people centered at the Artists’ Workshop / Trans-Love Energies complex, the *Fifth Estate*, Mixed Media, the Grande Ballroom, the Highland Park Draft Resistance movement, the Detroit Committee to End the War in Vietnam, and related groups / areas of concern, is working to transform the present social structure by infiltrating and manipulating its various popular institutions to their ends, that is, for the good of all men, and not just those who “qualify” by means of their appearance, ideas, money, etc.

One major change in this scene lately has been the transfiguration of the Grande Ballroom from a primarily teen-age dance hall with three bands and a light show, to a community showplace and center which should have a profound effect on the city’s brightest and most active white youth in terms of preparing them for the new civilization. The “psychedelic revolutionaries,” who are the vanguard of the (white) society, are in many cases already living as if the great change had already taken place. They thus serve as examples to their younger counterparts, who aren’t yet really sure that the change is real, that it can really happen, and who in any case need to see with their eyes that there *is* a viable life style other than that which their parents make available to them.

They can see this at the Grande, thanks to the efforts of Uncle Russ and some others. They can see that a ballroom owner, and an obviously successful one, doesn’t have to be a fat cigar-chomping cockroach and is in fact a very honest and beautiful person. They can mix freely with people their parents tell them are dope-fiends and

degenerates and find out first-hand that their parents are the liars the kids suspected them to be. These “undesirables” are smiling and laughing and dancing and freaking freely and *doing their thing* with no dangerous natural consequences other than harassment from the “solid citizens” and their police forces.

They can see and hear and learn that there *are* standards of excellence which are based on originality, energy, sincerity, vitality and reality rather than mediocrity, dullness, hypocrisy, greed and illusion, by listening to the bands contracted to play there and feeling in their music a force for life and wholeness their parents won't even admit *exists*. It's all right there in front of them, and nothing anyone will want to tell them after that will make any sense to their ears and eyes. You can only keep lying to people as long as you keep reality out of the realm of their possibilities—once they get their hands on the truth for themselves no lies will convince them.

I speak of all this because the recent changes at the Grande are representative of the general spirit of cooperation and togetherness that is revitalizing the city of Detroit after a terribly barren summer. There is a beautiful electric feeling in the air now, the summer lethargy and despair is dissolving in the face of new and vital activity all over town, and people are beginning to realize after one year of an open scene here that there is a lot they can DO to make the scene a happier and more productive one. A year ago all the people who are active in the community now were scuffling, not sure if they could keep it up, feeling powerless, fragmented, overpowered by the image of force the establishment had put in front of its bumbling and unworkable social structure. Now they have learned—we have learned—that we can take care of plenty of business by, for, and with our own people, and possibilities are becoming apparent where no hope existed before.

The Grande started to make money this summer after a long period of barely breaking even, and Uncle Russ was able to look out from a different perspective. His Jefferson Airplane concert at Ford Auditorium the end of June was a huge success, both musically and financially, and this, plus a fast trip to San Francisco, opened his eyes to the real and inevitable possibility of bringing good bands into Detroit on a regular basis. This policy started with a booking of the Grateful Dead last month, the Chambers Brothers at the start of this month, and a full line-up starting next month with the Cream (October 13, 14, & 15), Lothar & the Hand People from New York, the Paupers of Toronto, the Youngbloods, James Cotton's Chicago Blues Band, and others into the winter, including Jimi Hendrix after the first of the year. He is negotiating with the agents of every good rock band in the country and in England and will book every group he can afford. This includes a possible November concert with Donovan (whose agent wants \$10,000 for one night!), if it proves feasible.

At the same time the Grande has reformed its local booking policy and is now booking only the strongest bands in the area—concentrating on the MC-5, the Rationals, the Scot Richard Case, the Spike-Drivers, Billy C.'s new big band, the Up, and others who have proved themselves over the last year. This means that the Grande is *the* place to go every weekend if you're into music at all, and that couldn't be said a short time ago. Money that is made at the ballroom is being pumped back into the scene in order to improve it, and that's how it should be. The ballroom will also be the scene of at least monthly benefits in the future, starting with a Trans-Love benefit the 24<sup>th</sup>, a benefit for DEVA newspaper the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, a Grande birthday party October 8<sup>th</sup>, and more.

Again, I go on to such length about the music scene because it is my feeling that music, and all art, must be a primary term in the life of the present-future. I couldn't live without it, in the sense that I wouldn't bother to stay on this planet without music. It wouldn't be worth it.

Hear all the music you can, people—it helps keep you alive!

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