

# Revolution as Reaction

Ralph J. Gleason

1968

The Beatles have finally dealt directly with the American radicals, politicians, and activists of the student movement who have been demanding that they say something.

The Beatles have said something and what they have said is not going to be popular with a great many. The more political you are, the less you will dig the Beatles' new song, "Revolution."

"You say you want a revolution," the Beatles begin in this first release under their own firm label, "Apple." Then they sing:

"Well, you know we all want to change the world."

Even the first refrain is within the line of politicians' reasoning:

"But when you talk about destruction, don't you know you can count me out."

That last bit is where the trouble begins. You can see the activists dropping away wholesale. How can you make omelets without breaking eggs?

The lads go on:

"You say you've got a real solution, well, you know we'd all love to see the plan."

indicating that at least they'll listen. Then they add something which speaks directly to a lot of people and their attempts to act the Beatles to do something.

"You can ask me for a contribution, well, you know we are doin' what we can."

And then they add a Joan Baez capper:

"but if you want money for people with minds that hate, all I can tell you is brother you have to wait."

Even up to here, all the disc does is nibble at the edge of putting down politics. The final verse really does it.

"You say you'll change the constitution, well, you know we all want to change your head.

"You tell me it's the institution, well, you know, you better feed your mind instead.

"But if you go carryin' pictures of Chairman Mao, you ain't gonna make it with anyone anyhow..."

So much for that. The echo which the Beatles stick into the space between the verses carries the distant refrain:

“Don’t you know it’s gonna be allright...allright?”

and in the closing moments the word “allright” is repeated eight times.

So the Beatles say put down your flags and believe that all we need is love and say the word and you’ll be free.

With the exception of the references to Los Angeles smog in “Blue Jay Way” and perhaps another which I can’t think of right this second, this song is the first one the Beatles seem to have directed towards Americans, specifically student activists, Beatles fans all.

And the American activists are going to have to deal with this if they insist on the idea that the Beatles embody the youth movement and that the movement is by radical definitions revolutionary.

They will also have to deal with what Paul McCartney told a reporter in the *New Musical Express* while discussing Apple’s plans for help to creative people as opposed to giving the money to help say, cripples.

“Cripples are not necessarily having a hard time of it,” McCartney said. “And even if they are having a hard time of it, it’s their hard time. It is, man. It doesn’t matter what you say about helping cripples or India, there’s no way to pour millions of pounds into India and make India all right.”

Then the *NME* reporter asked McCartney if he hadn’t seen starving people in India and didn’t it worry him.

“No. Starvation in India doesn’t worry you,” he told the reporter, “if you’re honest. You just pose. You don’t even know it exists. You’ve only seen the Oxfam ads. You can’t pretend to me that an Oxfam ad can reach down into the depths of your soul and actually make you feel for the people any more, for instance, than you feel about getting a new car. If it comes to a toss-up, you’d get a dew car. And don’t say you wouldn’t because that’s the scene, with you and most people. The point is also, ‘Do you really feel for Vietnam? and the answers are the same. Maybe I’d rather listen to a rock record than go there and entertain and maybe, underneath, that’s the truth in all of us. I know one is morally better than the other, but I know I’d never get around to it. I’d be a hypocrite.”

And there you have it. The answer to the questions raised by the people who wanted the Beatles to speak out against the war in Vietnam. To the people who wanted the Beatles to endorse this or endorse that cause and contribute to this campaign or that campaign.

Where does it leave everything? Well, I for one, welcome what McCartney said as a breath of fresh air. I think they are dealing with “what is” as Lenny Bruce did and not in “what should be.” And the only way we are ever going to get around to making what is into what should be is by starting with reality. For that I am grateful. Their attitude, as expressed by Paul, is much healthier than the patriotic crap ladled out by James Brown and Martha Raye and Sammy Davis, and it faces right up to the problem. Money won’t buy me love. Nor will it buy salvation.

*Editor’s note: ALL YOU NEED IS DYNAMITE!*

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