

The Revolutionaries of Columbia

Ralph J. Gleason

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LIBERATION News Service — Columbia Records is owned by CBS. It owns the Yankees and God knows what else. Its offices are at 51 West 52 Street in New York in a new skyscraper whose walls are already peeling and cracking.

Right now it is the home of the revolution.

Or almost. It is certainly spending more money promoting the Youth Revolution than one would think possible for a standard American corporate enterprise. Columbia ads divide the world into “we” and “they,” with the “we” including the longhairs, the youth and Columbia and “they” including anyone you want to include because you happen to be against him or he against you.

The most recent of the Columbia ads, running in full page spread in college papers and underground papers all over the country, is the one which shows seven guys in a bare room with bars at one end. They are sitting on a bench, standing around.

One is crouched on the floor rolling what I, in a charitable moment, not wishing to infer that Columbia Records Inc. is advocating an illegal act, assume to be a standard cowboy cigarette with Bull Durham and white Zig Zag papers. You think it's something else? Smile, when you say that, Padnuh.

Some of the guys are listening to a phonograph via earphones and the caption on the layout is BUT THE MAN CANT BUST OUR MUSIC.

Well, padnuh, I don't know, I just don't know. The name of the game, seen from one point of view, is steal the rhetoric of the revolution like the poverty program stole the organizers.

It is hard to think of revolution being advocated from the architectural prize of 51 West 52 Street, from the record company which withdrew Bob Dylan's John Birch lines. But the times they are a-changin' and this may be part of the change.

On the other hand, I am inclined to think only that there's money in revolution and Columbia is smart. “The only legal trip you can take,” it says under the picture of a Terry Riley cover. They gotta be kidding. But no, maybe they aren't kidding, only smart.

Is there that much to be made from revolution? Marx sells in paperback like the *Daily World* never did. Marcuse sells in paperback in quantities sufficient to frighten those fearful of the power of the young.

No, the more I think of it the more I am convinced that it is only that Columbia is smart and smells money. And it only proves what we know already about America, even if we sometimes find it hard to spell out in words.

In this society, if you can make enough money out of it you can go a long way towards making it legal.

If American Tobacco had decided to market pot in the mid-thirties and saw how it would sell from a sampling, it would never have been made illegal. And the day they do decide to market it, the day they do decide the possibilities of profit make it worthwhile enough, the wheels will start turning to make it legal again.

Remember, J. Edgar Hoover said that the primary thing was lawnmorder; justice was incidental.

Lawnmorder means good business and justice sometimes does not. When it becomes good business, it will become legal.

Lenny Bruce's bit about the lawyers who smoke pot becoming judges will help and so will a number of senators' sons busted. But basically it will be economic.

Back to Columbia and its rock revolution rhetoric. I am mistrustful. I doubt. This is CBS. This is the Yankees and long hair and sideburns are OUT for professional ballplayers, the sports pages say.

But then again it was Columbia who let Bob Dylan define in song the implications of that advertisement, the bars, the music, the long hair, the rolling of the joint in the joint and the endless sense of waiting.

Didn't Dylan sing of the Chimes of Freedom tolling "for the lonesome-hearted lovers with too personal a tale an' for each unharmed gentle soul misplaced inside a jail."

I like that, it makes me think that Columbia, out there on the tube and in the big tall building is worried about us all and on our side. It's nice to have a big corporation on your side with its ad agency and its budget. Gives you a sense of power.

But I really wonder. If the revolution means what it says it means, it is aimed at the protection of the artist from the exploitation of the machine and the corporation; it is aimed at the personalization of life and against the machine; it is aimed at making human values more important than property values and human rights more important than property rights.

And I think it is also aimed at Walter Cronkite and the CBS news.

I have trouble, when I think of this, thinking further that the Columbia accounting department grasps that the advertisement they are putting through that voucher for, is designed to help put them out of business.

For that's where it all goes eventually. The long hair, the grass, the music, the new attitudes. It goes towards completely taking apart the system that now exists and which is founded on the money and profit mythology and replacing it with something else which is not clearly defined as yet but which is evolving, slowly perhaps but evolving none the less, from those very things the Columbia advertising budget is advocating. I suspect they are calling him Whirling Karl about now.

"The man can't bust our music." O.K. That's great and I'll go along with it and even hail it. Thank whoever you thank these days that there is money in revolution and that there continues to be. Hopefully there will continue to be and if there is enough it can be used to bring down the very system which produced it in the first place.

Trojan horse? Man, Trojan horses went out with the rest of the Trojan products, and horse is habit forming. What is going on is the inevitable cannibalism practiced by civilizations in the early but accelerating stages of decay.

We are screeching downhill baby, like a runaway truck on a downhill grade. Out of control. It could be that something can be done about it. I wouldn't know what.

Abolish the school system, the education conference at U.C. Berkeley said, in essence, late last month. Well, that's not bad for a starter.

Make music that is a real revolution. That's a good one too.

And Columbia is right as far as it goes. The man CAN'T bust our music.

Editors' Note: Apparently CBS has figured out where their money for their hype ads has been going. All of the TV network owned record companies, CBS's Columbia, ABC's ABC Records, and RCA Records which owns NBC, have decided to stop advertising in underground papers.

That's cool; just remember the "revolutionaries" the next time you go out to buy an album and how easy it is to tape records from the radio.

fifth Estate

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