

The Youth Culture

An Anarcho-Communist View

Murray Bookchin

1970

We must break away from the traditional Marxian outlook, with its limited interpretation of the class struggle, of the motive forces for revolution, and of the revolutionary process, to understand the revolutionary implications of the Youth Culture. ...

Nourished by the relative abundance produced by a new, potentially revolutionary technology, young people began to develop a post-scarcity outlook—however confused, rudimentary, and intuitive its forms—that has been slowly eroding the ages-old psychic complicity between oppressor and oppressed—a complicity that had made hierarchy, domination, patriarchy, renunciation, and guilt a condition of the human spirit, not only the institutional and psychological instruments of class-rule and the state. It is difficult to convey what a historic breach this emerging Youth Culture produced in the social desert that was once America. ...

The explosion of the Youth Culture shattered this decade-long edifice and its mythology [*i.e.*, *the social conformity of the 1950s—RA*] to their very foundations and, almost alone, is responsible for the massive alienation that permeates American youth today. For the first time in the history of this country, every verity not only of bourgeois society but of hierarchical society as a whole is now in question. Mere critique of the kind so endearing to the orthodox Marxists might have produced nothing more than a sense of cynical engagement, so similar to Salinger's young hero in "Catcher in the Rye." But the Youth Culture went further—into the realm of positive, utopian alternatives. In its demands for tribalism, free sexuality, community, mutual aid, ecstatic experience, and a balanced ecology, the Youth Culture prefigures, however inchoately, a joyous communist and classless society, freed of the trammels of hierarchy and domination, a society that would transcend the historic splits between town and country, individual and society, and mind and body. Drawing from early rock-and-roll music, from the beat movement, the civil rights struggles, the peace movement, and even from the naturalism of neo-Taoist and neo-Buddhist cults (however unsavory they may be to the "Left"), the Youth Culture has pieced together a life-style that is aimed at the internal system of domination that hierarchical society so viciously uses to bring the individual into partnership with his/her own enslavement. ...

The Youth Culture has spread from the Haight-Eastside axis into the most remote towns of the United States, areas that no radical movement in the past could have hoped to colonize, disrupting all the time-honored ties, institutions, and values of these communities. Owing to its increasing influence on working class youth, the culture has now begun to rework the labor re-

serves of bourgeois society itself—the reservoirs from which it recruits its industrial proletariat and soldiers—until recently, perhaps the most intractable element to radical ideas and values.

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