

# Politics of Pop

“The Commandments say ‘Thou Shalt Not Kill’ and half the world is in training to annihilate the other half. Nobody would get me in uniform and off to Aden to kill a lot of people I’ve never met and have nothing against anyway. I know people say they are against wars and yet they go on fighting them. Millions of marvellous young men are killed and in five minutes everybody seems to have forgotten all about it. War stems from power-mad politicians and patriots.”

Except for the final comment, this could be a socialist speaking in Hyde Park. In fact, it is Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones giving his views on war and militarism. On many other questions his ideas come close to the arguments which socialists use. For example, he is outspokenly anti-religious and opposed to marriage. While he does not appear to relate any of this to the class structure of society, he does at least look upon private property as a curse.

“There should be no such thing as private property. Anybody should be able to go where he likes and do what he likes.”

Jagger calls himself an anarchist and, like most anarchists, his weak point is his failure to understand how capitalism works. Politicians he claims are "a dead loss" and it is they who are responsible for wars, the legal system and the rest of it.

“Politics, like the legal system, is dominated by old men. Old men who are also bugged by religion.”

Socialists would reply that it is not the individuals, such as Wilson, who administer capitalism who are to blame but the system of society itself. Nor would we accept that it is the “old men” who have landed the world in its present mess. Even Jagger must recognise that he is in the minority among young people; most youth are just as ardent supporters of private property as their fathers and grandparents. In fact, one has to look no further than some of the other groups competing on the pop scene to see just how committed they are to capitalism, religious superstitions and all.

Probably the most depressing case is the Beatles. An immensely talented and versatile group, politically they seem to be about as wet as they come. One of them, George Harrison, is convinced, like Jagger, that is the “old men” who are the cause of the world's problems.

“I think music is the main interest of the younger people. It doesn't really matter about the older people now because they're finished anyway. There's still going to be years and years of having all these old fools who are governing us are bombing us and doin' all that because, you know, it's always them.”

Confronted by this, Harrison's philosophy is to shut his eyes and pretend it isn't there. He sees an individual way out in meditation. Everything in the material world is superficial, he argues; it is only by burrowing deep inside yourself that you can find god and personal fulfilment.

“If you can contact that absolute state you can just tap that amazing source of energy and intelligence. It's there, anyway you've just got to contact it and then it will make whatever you do easier and better. Everything in life works out better because everybody is happier with themselves.”

This might be a comforting creed to someone with Harrison's wealth but unemployed workers in Birmingham or hungry peasants in Bengal are likely to be slightly less impressed by the miraculous powers of meditation. The Beatles' spiritual mentor, the so-called Maharishi Mahesh Yog, obviously has a shrewd

understanding of this and restricts his missionary efforts to the clientele of the London Hilton and such places. The Maharishi, a sort of latter-day Rasputin with mental powers seem to be in inverse proportion to his impressive title, is at least a magnificent showman. Some of his profundities have to be heard to be believed:

“I think ladies meditate comparatively more successfully because the quality of heart is more developed in the ladies than in the men, and therefore the waves of joy are more aroused, and that's why the joy is felt more. The heart is more—a mother's heart is much more wavy—more waves, deeper waves rise in mother's heart than in the father's heart. An experience of bliss does need a more capable instrument of emotion.”

People who fall for this sort of rot will obviously be taken in by anything and, like Rasputin, the Maharishi seems to have a low opinion of those who provide him with a comfortable living. Interviewed recently in Bremen (West Germany) he was reported to have laughingly remarked that “no matter where I am people will find in me the commodity that they want.”

As well as their hatred of the “old men”, Jagger and Harrison have another trait in common—their dislike of oppression. Yet there are plenty of pop singers with other ideas—some openly racist, others advocating dictatorship. P. J. Proby, for example, is fond of making half-witted generalisations about negroes—“They're always asking for handouts. They don't have any real dignity.” Another singer with totalitarian sympathies is Scott Walker who, like Harold Wilson, has a passion for telling the working class what is wrong with them. According to Walker we have all gone flabby in the West and we ought to have this knocked out of us by a good dose of Stalinism.

“Russians have an unbelievable strength, nothing shakes them. The workers here should have the same opportunities, they should be educated on radio and television. They need a good dose of propaganda and more than anything else they need a form of dictatorship again . . . then we'd be all right again.”

The politics of pop are worth looking at not because pop singers are anybody in particular but because most of them are from the working class and, to a certain extent, their ideas are typical of the lines which young workers think along.

One of the most widespread of their illusions is the feeling that the fundamental division in society is between young and old, rather than between the working class and the propertied class. Prejudices such as this are just as dangerous as racialism because they obscure the fact that the real conflict in society is between classes—not generations. The gulf which separates a young worker from a young capitalist is immeasurably wider than that which exists between two workers of different ages. Whatever superficial differences

there might be in styles of dress or tastes in music, working men are united as a class by the fact that each one of us has to sell his labour power to the capitalists. In the same way the capitalist class stand together, whatever generation they might identify themselves with as individuals, because collectively they live off the surplus value which they wring out of the working class. It would be nice to have a few politically conscious pop singers who recognised this but, in the end, it doesn't matter that much. After all it is not a few individuals like George Harrison or Mick Jagger who are going to win the revolution but the millions of working men and women, young and old, who make up the working class.

Let's finish by giving the floor to Jimmy Savile—one of the most successful DJ's in the pop business. Preaching in a church near Halifax just before Christmas he sent up a prayer to capitalism which would have warmed the heart of any Victorian mill owner or steel baron.

“For the first few years, I worked down a coal mine. Now I have hit this 'gold seam' and I say, ‘Thank you, Lord, business is good.’”

For the rest of us, who are still working down the mines, or in the factories and offices, how many of us feel like echoing Jimmy's pious gratitude? The only "golden seam" we are ever likely to hit is socialism. And that won't be thanks to any gods but just to our own revolutionary initiative.

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