

THE BRITISH COUNTER-CULTURE, 1966–73

The British Counter-Culture, 1966–73

A Study of the Underground Press

Elizabeth Nelson

M
MACMILLAN

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For Danielle and Roger

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Preface

The revolution begun as a dove, with a CND sign on its breast. It became a peacock, fanning out a psychedelic rainbow of bells, beads and Beatles. But for many it eventually became a hawk, whose outlook was that of stormy Weathermen, the Angry Brigade, or even the IRA.

(*IT*, no. 129, 4 May 1972)

More than a decade after the fading away of the counter-culture, it is clear that it failed to achieve its objectives, and it is too early for the historian to be able to judge how it might have affected the world.

Nevertheless, it might be argued that the counter-culture was important historically, not merely because it covered a period of approximately a decade of the Western world's experiences, but because it was a social movement with explicit and fundamental criticisms of modern capitalism, which offered an alternative vision – regardless of whether this was attained or attainable – of a millenarian type.

The intellectual, cultural and political forms which were employed to articulate the alternative vision were often disturbing and quite profound, and may indeed have contained the seeds for the success of future insurrections of a counter-cultural type.

The counter-culture was, however, in many ways a mood, expressing what might be termed the 'spirit of the times' in which it existed. For the now mostly middle-aged adherents of the counter-culture, it remains a vivid if often confused memory, arguably something much more than a mere nostalgia for lost youth. For the researcher, the counter-culture is an elusive phenomenon, and one which frequently slips through the fingers just when one seems to have captured its forms and meanings.

Fortunately, the counter-culture in Britain did have its documentalists: the underground press writers. Equally fortunately, the underground publications have been meticulously assembled and microfilmed by the Harvester Press, providing

the researcher with a coherent body of primary source material. It has often been observed that the underground press was in effect the only viable institution created by the essentially anti-institutional counter-culture. In Britain, the underground press's history began with the publication of *International Times* in October 1966, followed by many others. This publication and two of the other key underground publications, *Oz* and *Friends* (which later became known as *Frendz*), form the basis of the study of the counter-culture in this work. Through these publications, the British counter-culture is examined in its own terms.

Whilst one must be aware of the many-faceted nature of the counter-culture, we are presented, through the underground press, with its areas of major concern and interest. The underground press functioned in many ways. It was designed to both serve and promote the counter-cultural community and its ideals. Although the 'news' and other articles presented through this medium were articulated by the seemingly committed intellectuals of the movement, the absence of a strict editorial policy – or any editorial policy at all – enabled a variety of often conflicting views and emphases to be expressed. In a very real sense, these publications have recorded a process of dialogue between the writers and the community, and as the opening quotation indicates, they have also recorded the various phases in the counter-culture's development and decline.

Future generations wanting to learn about the hopes which the counter-culture dared to hope will need to listen to the music which expressed its mood and visions: it is in this music that the counter-culture's poets are to be found. For more tangible evidence about the counter-culture, future generations will be able to turn to the underground press where the social history of the movement has been documented by some of its members.

Writing from the perspective of the mid- to late-1980s, where the whiff of conservatism is in the air again, and the counter-culture seems light years ago, a sympathetic observer of the counter-culture might be excused for hoping that the spirit of the times in which the counter-culture existed will endure sufficiently for a future generation to build upon the foundations which may have been laid.

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Every effort has been made to contact all the copyright-holders but if any has been inadvertently overlooked the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangement at the first opportunity.

List of Abbreviations

<i>AC</i>	<i>Ahimsa Communities</i>
Ads	Advertisements
AHIMSA	Agriculture and Hand-Industries Mutual Support Association
<i>A.L. Newsletter</i>	<i>Arts Lab. Newsletter</i>
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BIT	Binary Information Transfer
Co-op	Co-operative
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
GNP	Gross National Product
H-bomb	Hydrogen bomb
IFP	International Free Press
IRA	Irish Republican Army
<i>IT</i>	<i>International Times</i>
LBJ	Lyndon Baines Johnson
LSD	Lysergic acid diethylamide
MGM	Metro–Goldwyn–Mayer
MP	Member of Parliament
n.d.	not dated
n.p.	page un-numbered
NY	New York
<i>TW3</i>	<i>That Was the Week That Was</i>
UFO	Unidentified Flying Object
VCM	Vegan Communities Movement
YCND	Young Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament