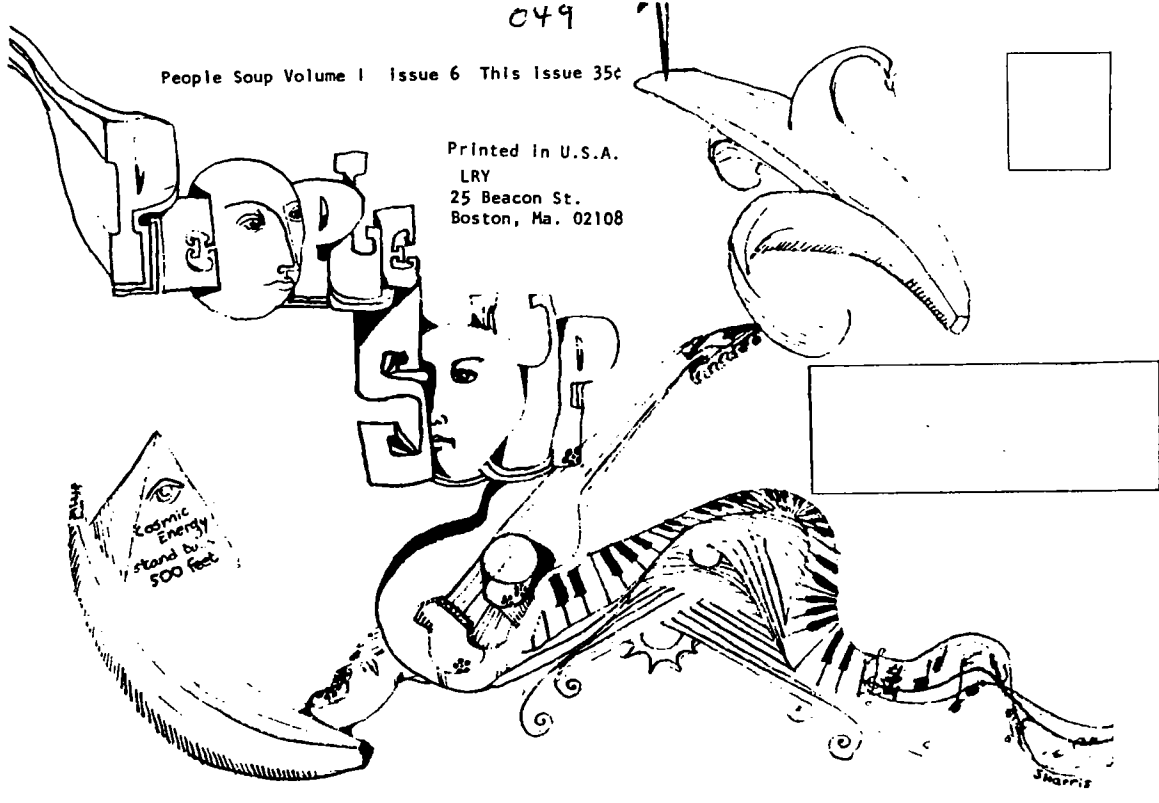


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The Power of You to Change Society

Let me share my dream with you, my new friends who have given my new hope that maybe I have finally stumbled on a group of young people who can make it come true.

I sit here right now on a rock in the middle of the river in deBonneville Pines, just above the pipe-tunnel, surrounded by trees, rocks, and a few remaining patches of snow. I listen to the river's music and wonder at some of the things that happened to me here as I helped to staff an PSW LRY conference. I remember the rap session I co-lead on "Being Free in an Unfree Environment," in which a small group of you surprised me with your togetherness. In all the so-many discussions I've run in public school classes, I've never had such a response as this.

Unanimously, you cared.

So, let me share with you my dream of teen-aged revolutionaries peacefully but effectively changing the country. I first had this dream a few years ago, but since then, experience had disillusioned me, leaving me with the idea that the youth of this culture are too screwed up and apathetic to change anything. Now a handful of people have led me to a reconsideration.

My original plan was to publish a magazine (and possibly start a TV series, but that would be harder) that would present all the vital issues which the establishment tries so hard to conceal: youth rights and responsibilities, educational reform, alternative life styles, sex, ecology, the real meaning of the American Revolution, governmental unfairness and corruption, etc. It would not only be written on about a thirteen-fourteen - etc. age level, but also would be centered around ideas that young people could put into action. Most important, it would offer a means of unification of all young concerned people, who could do experiments -- such as taking over the classroom, submit reports to be published for the encouragement of others. Hopefully, the Letters to the Editor section would become the crux of the magazine.

Unfortunately, the Youth Awareness Project (namely, me) finally conceded that the magazine would take much more money and people than were presently available.

Then came this weekend. Several things came out in that workshop:

1. Almost everyone in the group shared the resentment of having at least one class that was marked by unfreedom absurdity, uptightness, and lack of trust. (After my experiences as a substitute teacher ---- in which I asked several junior high classes what they'd change in their school if could, and finding that the two greatest issues were the elimination of dress codes and the attaining coke-and-candy machines for the halls ---- this in itself was encouraging to me.)

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2. With the exception of one guy who had helped start an alternative school, most of them had been frustrated in all attempts to fight the system. Teachers were too often hostile to them for being unsatisfied; worse yet, their peers were too apathetic to help fight for it. A number of persons said that all you can do is wait till you get a better teacher or school.
3. It was agreed, at the suggestion of my co-leader that much of the unfreedom is within us ---- our inability to make the best out of any situation we have.
4. It was also agreed that having an LRY to go to, be unified with and receive encouragement from, makes a lot of difference.
5. I then told the group that I feel ---- I firmly believe ---- that you people have more power to change society than you've ever dreamed of. My experience as a teacher has shown me, for instance, what peer pressure can do. Get yourself together and you can do almost anything.
6. Also, I told them that, although going up to a teacher and hostilely challenging him or her with a list of grievances is apt to make the teacher more defensive and hostile, I believe only the most authoritarian and uptight teacher could fail to be impressed by a dedicated student who shows that she or he is willing to do a lot of work to help improve the quality of education there.

It's not easy. Changing is never easy. But don't forget two things: If you're teacher is hostile, determined to keep you dependent, it is probably she or he is afraid you'd be irresponsible if given freedom, so your job is to prove that wrong; also, if your peers are apathetic, it is probably because they feel there is nothing they could do, so it wouldn't hurt to prepare you with examples of successful educational reforms.

This is how I envision the revolution happening. Admittedly, I am an optimist, a dreamer, an idealist, and I may be placing too much hope and faith in you. Nevertheless, I'm going to present it.

1. You isolate one problem to work on. Not "the military complex in America"; that's too distant. Not "unfreedom"; that's too general. Maybe there's a school rule you find unfair, maybe you aren't given the chance to choose your own classes, maybe your school lacks a student-membered board of grievances. Whatever's been bothering you.
2. You get sympathetic friends from your school allied with you. Also, discuss your project with your LRY group.

