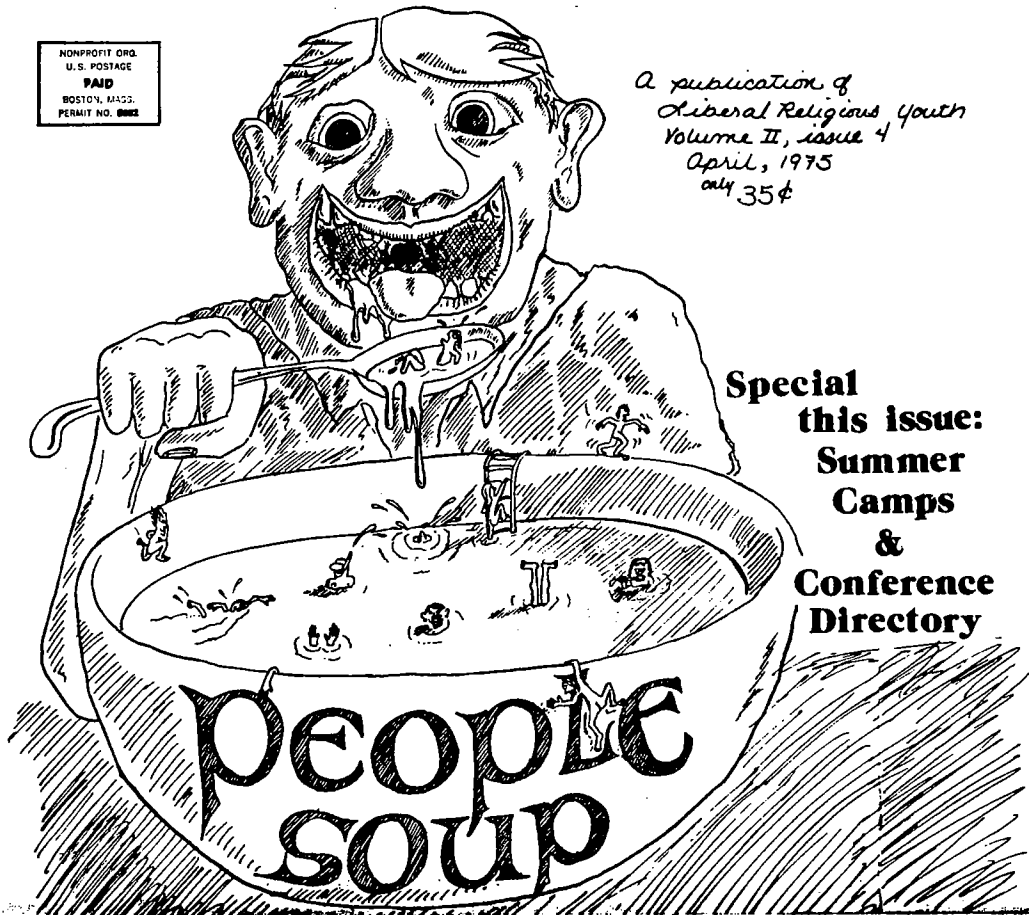


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Special
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Summer
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J.C., Disguised as A Rat, mumbles about FAMILIES

or,
"WE HAVE TO GET
A BIGGER BED"

On a crowded-knee-to-mouth Boston subway the other day, I caught sight of a kid with a simple, threatening logo stitched onto the back of his denim jacket: "The Family". This set me to thinking, because the night before I had seen a rerun of "The Omega Man" (who couldn't, of course, be anyone else than Charlton Heston; see: "Planet of the Assholes") In case you've never seen this 1971 remake of an old and half-decent Vincent Price movie, but one with a forgettable name (it had something to do with Shadow of the...., or Blood of...., orDust, and was from quite a good book called *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson) I will fill you in on the pertinent detail. The O. Man is one of yer sci-fi strange-plague-sweeps-the-world-and-almost-everybody-dies specials. The twist is that instead of just killing them, this strange plague turns almost-everybody into vampires, which, of course, leaves the world with too many vampires and not enough victims. Most of the vampires die too, it seems, (come to think of it, I'm not even sure that in this remake they're supposed to be vampires, exactly, but that's beside the point; they're still not the sort of people (?) you'd want to cultivate a warm and meaningful relationship with) but the ones that are left--more than the world needs--band together for fun and profit into a cult of homicidal maniacs called, to get back to the point of this distillation, The Family.

Now, I'm not saying that there's any connection between The two Families, except that in both cases, the very mention of the name is apparently meant to strike terror into your heart and mine. Well, hell's bells, what's so horrifying about families? Families are warm and cuddly and wholesome, right? Lookit the Partridges, Bradies and Waltons.

Wrong. Sure, look at the Partridges, Bradies and Waltons. What do you notice about them? They're family families, y'know? So tell me, if you can, when was the last time you heard a good word through the straight media for any sort of group calling itself a family that was not composed of people related through blood and/or marriage, and living in a typical "nuclear family" situation?

If that's too hard, try the other side of the coin. It's easy to find examples of non-nuclear-type families, in which the "family" aspect is played up, that are regarded with fear and loathing, to coin a phrase. Of the two that come most readily to mind, the first is the Charles Manson Family. Uh-huh: LSD-crazed hippies under the control of a bearded Machiavellian fiend, orgies, murders, nudity; uh-huh. The second is La Cosa Nostra, the patriarchal system of families that runs the Mafia (can I use that word in here?) . While the Cosa Nostra is a family linked by blood as well as custom (The Godfather, what else?), it certainly isn't a 3.9 member nuclear unit.

Another example, perhaps more revealing of the nature of this paranoia, can be found in the attitudes generated by religious colonies like the Hutterites and Mennonites. These people are regarded by many as strange and undesirable, because they refuse to conform to the values of North American society, and they're making a big economic success of it. Their traditionally collective, hard-working lifestyle lets them do more than merely eke out an existence. The Hutterites are living proof that collective farming is more efficient than the methods practiced by most North American farmers; they're making, so to speak, a killing in the market. That's pretty threatening.

Threatening. I think that word is the key to this whole phenomena. Any family with close ties, a lot of members and different interests than the mainstream of society's is a threat to that society. Any group of people that can say: "The hell with this--we don't want it, we will have nothing to do with it" is setting a mighty dangerous precedent, and an especially dangerous one if they succeed in what they do. And if people have the opportunity to choose who they want to have in their family, the number of threatening combinations possible takes a sudden jump. It's becoming increasingly obvious that the nuclear family, rather than a wonderful result of prosperity, is a tool of the forces of oppression for maintaining the status quo. Keep

the peasants busy providing in a needlessly duplicated way (how much energy, time and money could be saved if everybody on your block had a communal kitchen in which each person cooked supper once a month for the whole block?) for their ridiculously small families, and they won't even have time to think about what a strange deal they're living with.

An interesting sidelight, or more of the same: It seems that the word 'tribe' is always equated with 'primitive'...if that's not psychological conditioning, then my name isn't...

I think that in the fairly near future, one of the things that is going to change radically is society's general attitude towards groupings in which people live, because the present system is becoming steadily more impractical. Billy Graham et al insist that the family is not on the way out because people have always needed to live in close groups and probably always will. It's a mighty presumptuous and narrow-minded assertion to say, based on recent historical precedent only, that people are going to go on "fulfilling" that need in the same shitty way. It is said: "You can choose your friends but you can't choose your relatives." Horseshit! What is a "relative", anyway? Obviously, someone who is relative to you, relates to you, as it were, one way or another. When we talk about "brothers and sisters" isn't that just what we mean? I'm a hell of a lot more closely related to a whole slew of LRY brothers and sisters than I am to any of my cousins, and there are a few to whom I'm more closely related than I am to my immediate "family".

So where is this all leading to, anyway? Don't ask me, I only live here, same as you. But I know a few things that most of the North American world hasn't copped to, it seems: the family isn't dying, but neither is the commune movement dead. Ideas of community living have diversified to appeal to a wider range of people, and the extreme practical sensibility of the whole thing is going to start becoming a lot more apparent to a lot more people in these troubled times. (Maybe

