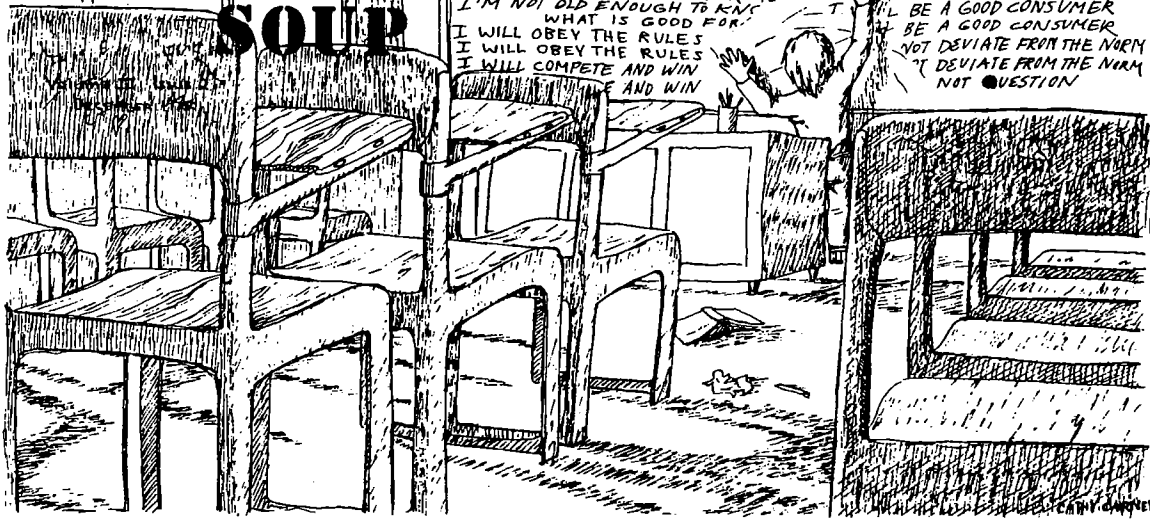


PEOPLE SOUP



Return to:
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LET THE FLAME SPREAD - liv

....from the small light of this candle, which is my life, I can see within myself. I see joy and excitement. I see good intention. I see balance and movement. I also see how I am cut off from what I could be. I see how my mind has been shaped by forces I do not fully understand, to be something I do not want it to be.

In school I have learned to disregard my feelings and obey the rules. The alternative was to be punished and if I persisted I would have been locked up. At home I have learned to hide away my sexuality. I have learned to not express anger. I have learned that I must wait until I'm older... always waiting... and yet I see when I am older things are just as bad.

Well, I have pain and I have anger. And I hereby declare my intention to unlearn every goddam trait that limits me: the feeling of powerlessness, the not taking myself and my feelings seriously, the competitiveness that shows itself when I interrupt someone or don't listen to someone but instead formulate what I'm going to say in a conversation.

....from the small light of this candle, which is my experience, I see the limits imposed on me from the outside. I see laws making it a crime to just walk away from school. I see that soon I will be forced into working for someone else's profit, in a situation where they make the decisions about if I can work, when I can work, what conditions I work under. They give me the choice between many different jobs - different versions of the same situation; and they call that freedom. I see that as an individual I have little power to make social changes.

....from the small light of this candle which is my understanding, I see the relationship between these external and internal limits. I see that it is useful to employers to have workers who are obedient and don't get angry, which I have learned at school and at home. I see that someone is making a huge profit at my expense, at all our expense. And I see that I am bribed with small privileges so that I don't step out of my place. Being middle class, I am able to get a better job than a person who hasn't been taught to speak as articulately as I. Being male I'm able to walk down the street without fear of being raped, and I can marry if I wish and come home to a clean house, or I can talk more than most women in a serious conversation, because I have been taught to dominate and be in the center, while women have been taught to take care of my ego. Being white and heterosexual I can be relatively without fear of the police. I can hitchhike. I can go just about anywhere.

And it is tempting to settle for these and other privileges because social change is so far away.

....from the small light of this candle, which is understanding of the whole, I see how race, sex, class, and age have been used to divide us, giving small privileges to one half so that the other half fights with the first half to get the privileges and the first half fights to defend them. That way no one is strong or united enough to challenge the people who control the wealth and institutions of this country: the banks, the corporations, and a handful of rich white men. I see how they exploit people all over the world for their own profit. People are starving and yet on their land instead of protein they are forced to grow coffee and sugar for the United States.

I see that settling for a less horrible job than your neighbor, or making democracy in the schools and at work in America while still exploiting people all over the world, that these are no solutions. And here it is: it is a leap from the consciousness of "I" to the consciousness of "we". Personal solutions have never worked, they have never gotten rid of pain; at best they dull it. And that's why we must plant the seeds of social change.

....from the small light of this candle, which is my struggle, I see that changes must come both within our heads and outside in our social structure. I see the handful of people making a profit off our pain; and I see how organized and powerful they are. I see we are divided. I also see that they will not voluntarily give up control: that is a lesson of history. And so we must learn to cooperate with each other towards the common goal of control of our lives. That is not a short or an easy process- yet it is essential. It doesn't mean smoothing over disagreements and differing needs or wants. I mean learning to deal with these differences constructively, in a way that keeps us committed and connected to each other. It means saying what we want and trusting that if we are seeing ourselves as a group we will individually as well as the group, get a high percentage of what we want. It means not coping to personal individual solutions that leave somebody on the bottom still. It means striving to make the process reflect the goal. It may mean at times working separately but connected, and at other times working within the same group. It means studying together the roots of our problems and figuring out together what the next step to do will be. And it means doing it and learning from our mistakes, through self criticism along the way.

Let, then, the struggle and resistance begin. Against exploitation, competition, school, the corporate giant; let us be gentle with each other in working towards changes in our own heads.

Let us be together and be strong. This flame is the burning of my soul. It is my pain and my struggle, it is my power. Alone it means little. Let it spread like a prairie fire.