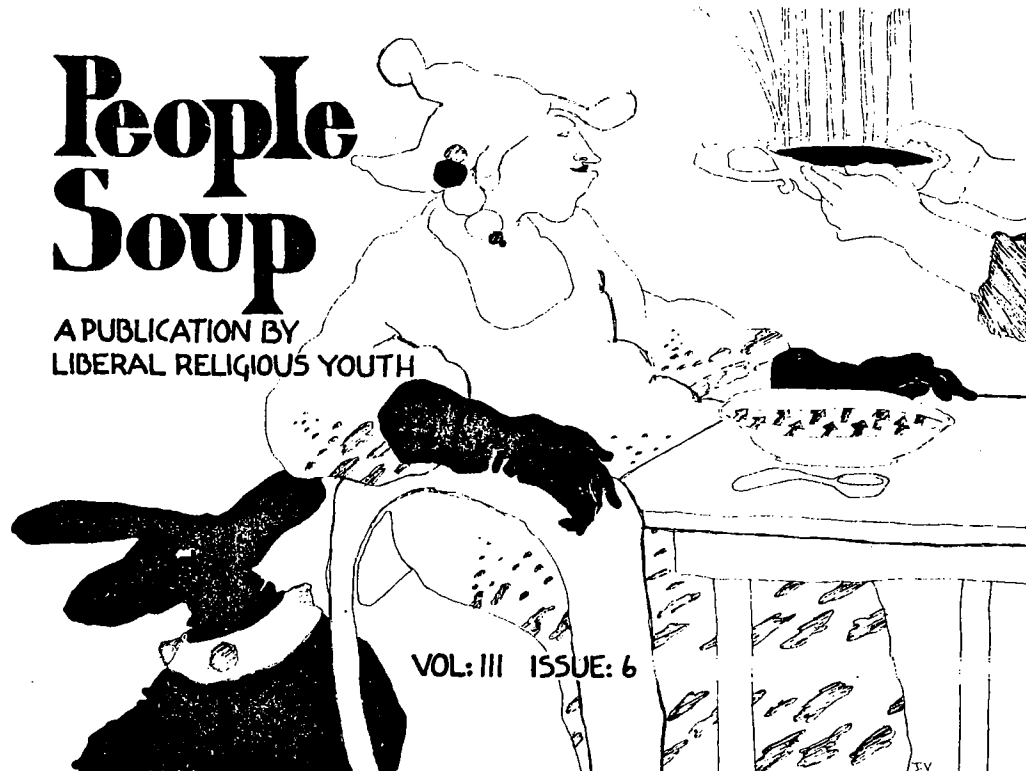


People Soup

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LIFE AT BOSTON CITY HALL or, A MASSACHUSETTS HIPPIE IN KING KEVIN'S COURT

John G. Beebe Center III

It's hard to say exactly why I started working at City Hall. The physical reasons are simple; my school said "If you want to graduate you have to work at some place 'meaningful' for a month." So I was left to the defining of "meaningful". As I have always been interested in politics, I turned in that direction immediately. It wasn't until I got a strong matriarchal suggestion from the home front that I headed towards City Hall. In other words, I owe this all to my mother...

At any rate, I put on my suit and tie, pulled back my hair and went downtown to apply for a job as an intern in a city councilman's office. Said plainly, I was scared. I had been to City Hall many times before but it had always been with a picket sign in my hand and a battle cry on my lips. I was worried as I went under the closed circuit TV cameras, that I might be recognized. I moved unobtrusively to the special "councilor's elevator" and pushed the button. I began to feel better. I was half way there with only an elevator trip to go. The door opened and I stepped inside. There was only one person in the elevator, a small older woman with a fancy hairdo and glasses. I stopped dead in my tracks and started shaking. It was Louise Day Hicks standing in front of me. I could feel myself cringe. Would she recognize me from the year before, when I had been part of a small but loud pro-desegregation group that had front row seats at a public address she had given?! My right hand quickly scratched my nose. It took eight seconds to get to the council's floor and I sweated as many gallons, with Louise's eyes boring into me but with no light of recognition. I made a break for the elevator door and made it, thanking my suit and tie with every breath.

The interview went fairly well and two days later I was called and informed that I had the job. Two weeks later I went back to City Hall and was given a desk, a legal pad, a telephone, a little blue book, and three triplicate forms which stated "constituent complaint forms". That is in a nutshell, problems that citizens of Boston have had with some department of the city. One woman had a basement swimming pool that hadn't been there three days ago, courtesy of the Boston Water Department. Another woman was beaten up each day on her way to school. And finally a man who wanted back \$300 he had paid into a city retirement plan before he quit his job.

I asked my manager what to do. "What do you think you should do?" he replied. I soon learned that this man said little else. Which is unfortunate, however, it did give me a free license to handle the problems as I saw fit. Yet I still didn't know what to do. I took the first "constituent complaint", reread it and then looked in my BLUE BOOK. In it was a number for the water department. I decided to take a chance and give them a call. A male voice answered and identified itself as "the commissioner's secretary." I almost hung up but decided against it, and then explained who I was and why I was calling. He thanked me very much for my information, called me "Sir" and assured me that the problem would be taken care of immediately.

Feeling a little more self-assured I decided to take on the problem of the woman that was beaten. I called the transit authority and (figuring if something works once it might work again) explained who I was and why I was calling. The man who answered seemed very upset at what I told him and said that he would assign two subway police to that station. Great. Two down, one to go. I

called the City Retirement Board and asked if they could give this man back his money. They declared that they would and thanked me for calling the problem to their attention.

I leaned back in my chair, put my feet up on the desk and lit a cigarette. The next day I was to find all of the problems had been solved. All that was needed was for some fool like myself to say that I worked for some fool like my councilman to some fool like a member of the water department and something gets done for some fool like you...or me.

City Hall does good things for many people but not at the level of the mayor or councilman. Their legislative activities include tennis, handball, and cashing paychecks--unless you bump into a really good councilman, which I was lucky enough to do. Even so, the necessary functions of City Hall are done by the office managers and the people that work for them. What really surprised me was the ease with which a person could get something done at City Hall. As a long-term veteran of several groups that tried, I know you can't fight City Hall--but you can use it.

If you write, call in, or the best--walk into a councilman's office, they can't afford to refuse you any help they can possibly give. Remember to see yourself as the councilman will see you--as a vote! Dress up a little and try to look official. In City Hall, if you look official you can get anything you want and I mean just about anything. I now have a collection of original press releases which I procured merely by stating that I worked for a city councilor.

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