

Next newsletter

2504 York Ave  
Vancouver 9, B.C.  
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DashyCathy,

I've just read your open letter in the July Nutshell in which you criticize the cultism of the radicals in MPA. Although you don't use the term, I think you are attacking an in-group snobbishness toward those who disagree with communal living, socialism, women's lib etc. You fear MPA contains the seeds of becoming another missionary group, albeit one with a secular holier-than-thou attitude.

Because I feel that underneath it all you and I respect each other, I am tempted to take your complaint lightly and say "I wish it were true that there were a larger core of proseletysing radicals in MPA." But at a deeper level, I believe you are troubled by the soft-sell radicalism and my flippancy doesn't do you justice.

I know MPA is important to you; it is equally important to me. Having been stifled for so long in so many other endeavours, I feel that MPA is the only group (other than my commune (?)) that I have been able to believe in. I want very much for MPA to succeed, whatever that means. But whatever it means, it must include the notion of a group of people working together for collective goals. God, am I sermonizing already? I wanted to put it off for a few paragraphs at least.

You imply in your letter that a group should have a "common purpose" and I interpret that to mean the group needs to evolve shared values and principles. But how can it do so without making dissenters feel like outsiders? That is not a rhetorical question. A solution must be found so that members are not faced with the unsatisfactory choice of conforming to "official ideology" or shutting up.

There is, I think, at least one difference between religious and political missionaries. Both try to "convert" others, but most radicals who fail in this regard regard the failure as their own, not the others'. The validity of political attitudes is inseparable from their credibility, for these attitudes should not be pious abstractions, but readily understood flesh-and-blood views about our very real lives. By this definition, I feel MPA radicals, including myself, have failed. We have not "converted" many people. What I am saying is that if we fail to be convincing, the fault is ours, not our audiences. Our views are not superior if others reject them. Therefore, from my point of view, our radical beliefs are not snobbish, or in-groupy or elitist, but inadequate.

From a different direction than yours, I entirely agree with you that a small core of "proper thinkers" who make others feel excluded is a bad thing for MPA and I am glad that you attack the earliest signs of its emergence . . . damn you.

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But I really don't think you have much to worry about. The openness of MPA's structure ( a structure very consciously developed by the group) is not conducive to brow-beating by a small sub-group. Everyone, you foremost, refuses to be intimidated by dogma. It is well known that people at MPA can and do say "no." Through an ironic, and alas unfortunate, twist, the radical core stimulates an even greater independence.

So from my point of view, something is wrong. I'm writing this letter because I want to make clear my uncertainty about my political views. If most members oppose them, and 500 mental patients can't be crazy, there is some inadequacy in my beliefs and their expression. Ah, self-criticism, how you do fortify me!

So I invite you to continue rejecting the radicalism, openly and vocally (and pig-headedly); also, to continue attacking whatever missionaryism and snobbery you feel exists. I do believe everyone at MPA, radicals and others, must feel free to express their views and not be cowed into silence. This I suppose is what is meant by democracy, an idea we heard fairy tales about as children. And we must also be prepared to listen to each other and allow for the possibility of change on both sides.

I sometimes feel you cling so tenaciously (and admirably) to your independent views that the only way you would ever change them is if everyone else suddenly agreed with them. "My God," I can hear you saying, "all you ever get on this blasted radio is 16th Century Gregorian chants." Then you'd start playing old Elvis Presley records at the center, boring the pants off everyone.

I do admire your independence. In a world filled with mindless and cruel conformity, it's courageous to live in accord with your own moral views. But I don't believe non-conformity is valuable just for its own sake; not if it blocks the development of a "common purpose" in a group which is struggling against the dominant stupidities of this society. I think a common purpose will develop through a long process of discussion, argumentation and action in which people feel free, not coerced, to participate in forming collective ideas and goals. But I fear that the closer you personally find yourself to the center of MPA or any group, the stronger will be your desire to pull out.

But, Cathy, there's nothing wrong with a group of people freely sharing common views. As Marx said, or perhaps it was Lenin . . . no, I think it was Mao quoting Engels . . . anyway, one of them said something that was very true. But, to paraphrase Sir Figby Snort, what should I tell you? You'd only reject it. I don't expect anyone to change her opinions overnight. If you're not ready to move into a commune yet, I'm prepared to wait impatiently till you are. (By that time I'll probably be living alone in a housekeeping room, cursing the damn N.D.P. government 'cause the old age pension is only \$800 a month.)

I think the fear of joining a group is at least as strong as the belief in an enveloping philosophy is comforting. In reacting against the destructive pressures toward uniformity, a romantic myth has developed which glorifies the loner, the outsider, the individualist. The myth, however, clashes with what I think is a natural need to belong, to have