

Hunger strikers on wrong path

For four days now Charles Gray has abstained from food — sustaining himself only on water. Gray, formerly of Eugene, is one of nine hunger strikers in France, Canada, West Germany and even Moscow fasting until there is a meaningful breakthrough in the nuclear arms race.

Gray, like the other hunger strikers, has expressed his willingness to starve himself until the "momentum in the nuclear arms race" is turned from escalation to disarmament. If that momentum is not turned Gray freely spoke of starving himself to death. He chose this past weekend because it marked the 38th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima (August 6) and Nagasaki (August 9).

More than 150,000 Japanese were killed in these cataclysmic events. It's gross understatement to say that when the bombs (nicknamed "Big Boy" and "Little Boy") were dropped the world was never the same. But now Gray, and the names of the other hunger strikers may be added to the long chronicle of the dead. The immediate carnage of the nuclear bombings has long ended, but the pile of incidental dead seems to be mounting.

The hunger strikers have chosen a honorable course of action — one that makes a public statement, is highly visible and involves no violence against the nuclear arms forces they wish to shatter. Still, with all its overtones of Mahatma Gandhi, Henry David Thoreau and civil disobedience these hunger strikers have embarked on a futile effort that appears more akin to masochism and suicide than to effective social protest.

Gray, and the other hunger strikers, will take food only when they see a breakthrough in the arms race, the canceled deployment of Cruise and Pershing-II missiles in Western Europe and the dismantling of existing Soviet SS-20 missiles in Eastern Europe. The idealism of these nine hunger strikers is tragic. For many years now demonstrations in Europe — large scale demonstrations — have done little to alter the planned missile deployment or to nudge the belligerent Andropov government and Reagan administration to strategic arms reduction talks. These demonstrations have involved hundreds of thousands of people in Europe.

Despite the apparent inability of these large demonstrations to change the present course of missile deployment and nuclear arms build up in Europe they do have and will wield significant influence in the coming years.

An example of the effectiveness of large scale protest was demonstrated during the Vietnam war era. In the beginning the protests were only a few hundred politically active people sitting on the railroad tracks at the Oakland (Calif.) Armed Forces Induction Center.

Gradually the protests grew — year after year, atrocity after atrocity. Eventually the demonstrations against the Vietnam war became 500,000 strong in Washington, 500,000 strong in San Francisco and thousands demonstrating in the cities inbetween. These were not only the politically active. The demonstrators represented a genuine cross section of American culture. And the numbers calling for an end to the Vietnam war could not be ignored. There is little dispute the massive demonstrations did speed the end of the Vietnam war. They may have even abetted the demise of the Nixon administration.

The dedication and determination of Gray and the hunger strikers is to be admired but not entirely respected. Bluntness cannot and should not be avoided. If Gray and the others are to carry out their threats to starve themselves to death than they are not becoming martyrs sacred to a cause — only dead fools.

We sympathize with Gray and the hunger strikers. Unfortunately, we deplore their tactics. Gray and the others would be more effective to the movement against nuclear arms if they remained alive and continued to speak to one person or whole groups of people convincing each of the nuclear arms peril. The death of the hunger strikers will not have lasting influence on many to participate in demonstrations against nuclear arms deployment or a nuclear freeze. Their deaths will only add more ashes to the mountain of past dead attributable to nuclear arms.



letters

Rationality

The Emerald editorial concerning the Christine Craft sex discrimination suit against Metromedia has all the appearances of rationality. After all, aren't we all opposed to sex discrimination and superficiality in TV news broadcasting? Wouldn't it be nice if news reporters were selected on the basis of their grasp of the body politic and not their appearance? What is interesting in cases such as these, is that those who are the first to scream "foul" at the strong-arm tactics of the Moral Majority are perfectly content shoving their morality down one's throat. I find both just as indigestible.

I don't think I need to belabor the point that there is fluff and triviality in news broadcasting. I think it would be very generous to claim that as much as one or two percent of the garble emanating over the airwaves constitutes quality programming. Unfortunately, if there is one thing that the producers of these programs are good at (and TV news is part and parcel of this business) it is responding to popular demand. No matter what the quality of the production, if it doesn't get the ratings it won't last (no matter what some District Court judge says). We may wish that popular opinion were more enlightened, more discriminating, but I think it unrealistic to expect the networks to do anything more than reflect the values of the viewers (as sad as this may be to accept). Evidently, a lot of people who watch the news like "pretty faces." This is a

shame, but is it really the role of the government to intervene and tell Metromedia how to conduct their business? How about the hiring and firing of other persons in the TV industry?

I never saw Craft delivering the news so I can't comment on her performance. I have seen Roger Mudd, and I am sorry to see him go. I think I would be even sorrier however, to see the judicial system barge in and have him reinstated.

Lowell Smith
psychology

Paranoia

George Trumbo is entitled to his beliefs. However, his blithering remark about the "communist creed" shows his argument is based on paranoia rather than reason.

Trumbo should take delight in the fact that alcohol is consumed in the U.S.S.R. in quantities great enough to induce an alcoholic death rate ten times that of the U.S. as well as an alarming fall from 66 to 62 years of age in the average life span of Soviet males.

Furthermore, Trumbo, pot doesn't ruin livers or burn out the brain the way daily swigs of vodka does. So who is more infected by decadence?

I think the Soviets have a better claim to a "capitalistic creed" ruining their homeland than Trumbo's paranoid fantasy has stated for the U.S. drug market. Trumbo should either face reality or shut up.

Andrew Beckwith
grad student, physics

One-sided

Debbie Janes' article on canvassing was both humorous and thoughtful, although one-sided. An OSPIRG canvasser speaks with 40-50 people each day about the issues our group is involved in (utility reform and hazardous wastes). Sometimes we encounter frustrating or saddening situations including poverty, apathy and occasionally even hostility.

These factors, however, are more than balanced by frequent experiences of positive interaction, including:

- elderly people expressing

faith in "the younger folk" for carrying on work they may no longer be active in.

- people with little money contributing whatever they can, glad to have a voice in the issues affecting their lives.

- meeting people with opposing viewpoints, who can be challenging or even wary at first and leaving then with mutual feelings of stimulation and goodwill.

- hearing from so many the simple statement, "you're doing good work."

Elaine Mancinelli
field manager, OSPIRG

Hysterical

In reference to George Trumbo's letter on the marijuana initiative (August 4), I would like to say this.

I have not read such a hysterical letter in a long time. I am one who is not "hooked on this poisonous hallucinating narcotic" (not that it matters), but I have already signed the petition to legalize marijuana. One of my reasons for signing the petition is the one Trumbo has overlooked, that is, if nothing is done the use of marijuana by young people will not decrease. A case in point is myself. When I was 12 years-old I was exposed to and able to acquire marijuana, and could have earlier than that if I had been so inclined. But, with legalization also come the ability to control the use of marijuana among young people. I am not so naive to think that new laws will completely eliminate the use of marijuana among young people, just as a drinking age of 21 years does not keep people younger than that from consuming alcohol. But it would be a step toward controlling that use.

As to the connection between the reform of marijuana laws and the spread of communism — I don't buy it. However, I suppose if you wanted to believe that, then you would also assume that this is all "part of the plan" as is the "infiltration of communist spies" into the peace movement. To that I say I will take my "enemies in the peace movement" to "friends" like Trumbo any day.

David Livermore
geology

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