

Tear gas justified to disperse crowd

Police officers make difficult decisions everyday and last Friday was no exception. The police used tear gas to break up a drunken crowd. Some claim that the police went too far when they used the gas to disperse the crowd. However, the police had no other option and their actions were justified.

Consider what the police were up against.

Officers on a routine patrol observed a number of people drinking outside — a violation of city law. Minutes later, police responded to a complaint of a loud party. People from a number of locations in the area threw bottles at the two officers, who then called for backup, hence the large number of police officers responding to the party.

Police estimate that between 200 and 300 people, who appeared to be drunk, congregated near East 17th Avenue at Hilyard Street. The responding officers were outnumbered and needed to disperse the crowd with minimum injury to everyone involved.

Several hundred people gathered at the intersection near the Hilyard Street Market. While police repeatedly warned the group to leave or be dispersed by tear gas, an individual from the crowd started a fire in a trash can in front of the market. Others damaged street signs and recycling containers. After another warning, police fired a smoke grenade at the crowd. The smoke didn't clear the crowd, so police launched the gas.

Using tear gas to disperse a crowd is unusual in Eugene — it was last used to break up a party five years ago. However, the police had few options. They ordered the group to leave the area a number of times, at one time reading the group the riot act — literally. All attempts to prevent the use of gas were exhausted.

What else could the police have done?

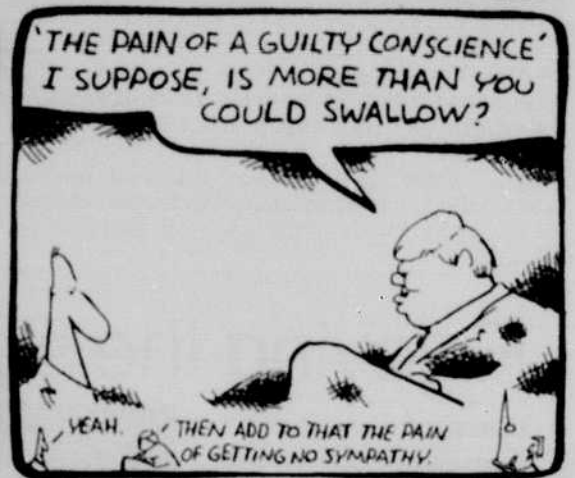
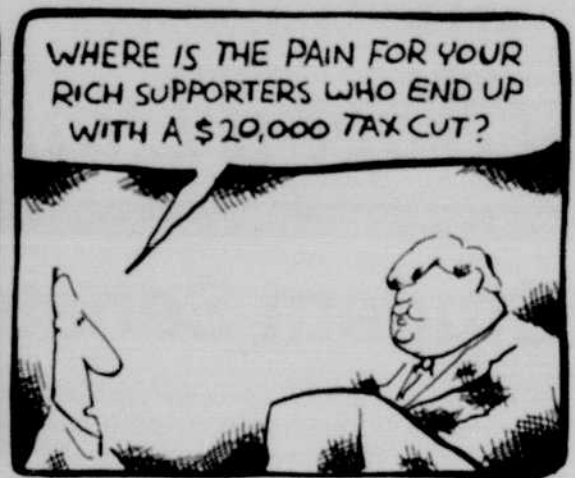
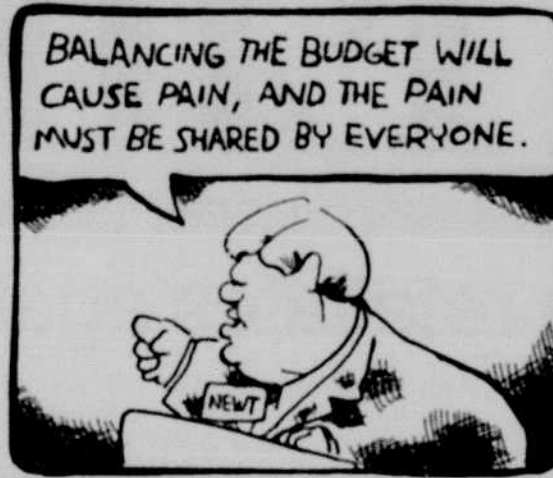
They could have tried to enter the crowd and arrest people, but both the outnumbered police and the crowd faced injuries if the crowd resisted. They party-goers were breaking the law by drinking outside, throwing bottles and starting fires and the police needed to intervene. Homes, businesses and cars faced damage if the crowd was allowed to continue on its rowdy way.

The most viable option was to make the crowd disperse immediately. By doing so, the police prevented a more violent confrontation.

Several people suffered the effects of the tear gas, which is unfortunate. However, had the crowd obeyed police orders, no one would have been hurt.

Eugene police deserve credit for bringing a potentially dangerous situation to an end.

The responding officers were outnumbered and needed to disperse the crowd with minimum injury to everyone involved.



OPINION

Aims of conservatives differ over time



PRIMO A. J. FONTANA

In this day and age it is hard to call oneself "conservative," as competing and, at times, incorrectly stated definitions are tossed back and forth.

Many conservatives, including those in the Republican Party, say they wish to get government off of people's backs. This is a worthy goal. The government is certainly too intrusive in our lives and taxes are certainly too high.

If conservatives are worried about the government having too much entry into people's wallets, they should be even more worried about the government being too involved in people's personal lives. This seems perfectly rational, doesn't it? "Government off of our backs" should mean, quite simply, government off of our backs, nothing more or less.

Now the phrase, "government off of our backs," quite obviously, has some limits and must be thought of in a practical sense. We do need some level of government to run the country, and if we thought differently, we'd be Libertarians.

So, it would seem appropriate that since we cannot have government completely uninvolved in our lives, as conservatives we should want it to have as little influence as possible.

Unfortunately, this is not the case in some factions of the Republican Party, which, while still concerned about keeping the government out of people's money, are quite willing to let it into people's bedrooms.

The abortion issue is a perfect example. The crux of the argument for or against the practice is, "When does life begin?" If it

begins at conception, as some believe, abortion would have to be considered murder. If it begins when the child leaves the womb, as others believe, it would not. Because science cannot give a definitive answer, this has become the most contentious political issue of our time.

Let us remember, our goal as conservatives, as we say so often, is to get government off of our backs. If we believe this, should we allow the government tell us when life begins, which is a personal and moral decision? Of course not. Our clergy, families and friends may attempt to do so, but the decision must, in a Jeffersonian Democracy, lie with the individual.

What about homosexual behavior? Should it matter to a conservative what consenting adults do when they are alone? Now, once again, I remind all of you who consider yourselves conservative that the goal, as we have defined it, is getting the government off of our backs, so it should not matter at all.

Those who think that they are conservative, while in reality they are merely socially conservative, are sadly mistaken in their definition of themselves. The true goals of the movement — free markets, low taxes and appropriate, limited government — are bastardized by those who are only concerned with overturning *Roe v. Wade* and gay rights.

If we look at the Republican forefathers James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, when they fought the Federalists so many years ago, they considered the pursuit of personal liberties of primary importance. Some in the GOP must have forgotten this rich history in the present, which is to the detriment of the party, especially as 1996 approaches.

The values, as they call them, of the so-called Christian right are destined to fail nationally for the following reasons:

First, they are based on a history that does not exist. Many members of the Christian right discuss restoring values in America. Such speeches usually point to the 1950s as the high point of such values, which must seem painfully ironic to African-Americans who were facing the pains of segregation and to women who could not even think of competing with men in the job market.

Second, they are not appropriate for the political arena. According to Adam Smith, who is the father of conservatism, the government should do four things: establish and operate a system of justice, compensate for the externalities of the market, provide defense and break monopolies. The Christian right would add, "keep the rules of Christianity," which is absolutely ridiculous. America is not a theocracy, and evangelical Christians have no right to treat it as such.

Third, they spring from a leadership that is unreliable to say the least. The main organization of the Christian right is the Christian Coalition, a subsidiary of the 700 Club, which is led by Pat Robertson. Robertson has written a book that blames Jews for a world banking conspiracy. Once during a speech once Robertson said feminism leads women to become Socialists. It is sad and frightening this sort of thinking comes from the mouth of a powerful national leader. It is simply unacceptable in rational discourse and will eventually cause the GOP more trouble than it could ever be worth.

America's history is rich in Christian tradition, and it is important socially and morally for our nation, but we are under the flag of democracy, not a religion. Thomas Jefferson said, "a wall of separation between church and state," is essential, and this wall must stand firm.

Primo A. J. Fontana is a columnist for the Emerald.

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