

'Peace lovers' question authority with violence

OUR OPINION: Police were justified in using pepper spray on crowd

The Eugene police department has taken a few hits lately ... literally.

An unofficial gathering of "peace-loving" people last Sunday at Maurie Jacobs Park sucked the city's public safety officers into a vortex of controversy about the police's use of "excessive force" and agitated accusations that Eugene is rapidly becoming a fascist police state.

Please.

Once again Eugene's question-authority-at-every-opportunity population has warped a routine action by the police into a rallying cry for the oppressed reggae aficionados and hemp sellers of this otherwise harmonious community. The facts, however, suggest a different interpretation of the events.

The reggae festival that took place that afternoon had not been approved by the city, and vendors had not obtained permits for their for-profit dealings.

The police were responding to complaints from neighbors and park officials. They made no attempt to end the festival or make any arrests of attendees. Vendors were given one hour to stop their dealings or be cited.

When police returned they allowed the vendors who had complied with the law to "trade" their wares and accept "donations."

One man, selling hemp smoothies, continued to sell them without a permit. He refused to give his name to police for a citation, leaving them with no other option but to arrest him. He, in classic war-protest fashion, went limp and forced the police to carry him out of the event.

At that point the crowd of soon-to-be victims of police brutality gathered around the officers, shouting epithets and blocking the offi-

cers' progress to their car. After telling the crowd to move back, the police ducked a bottle thrown by one of the attendees.

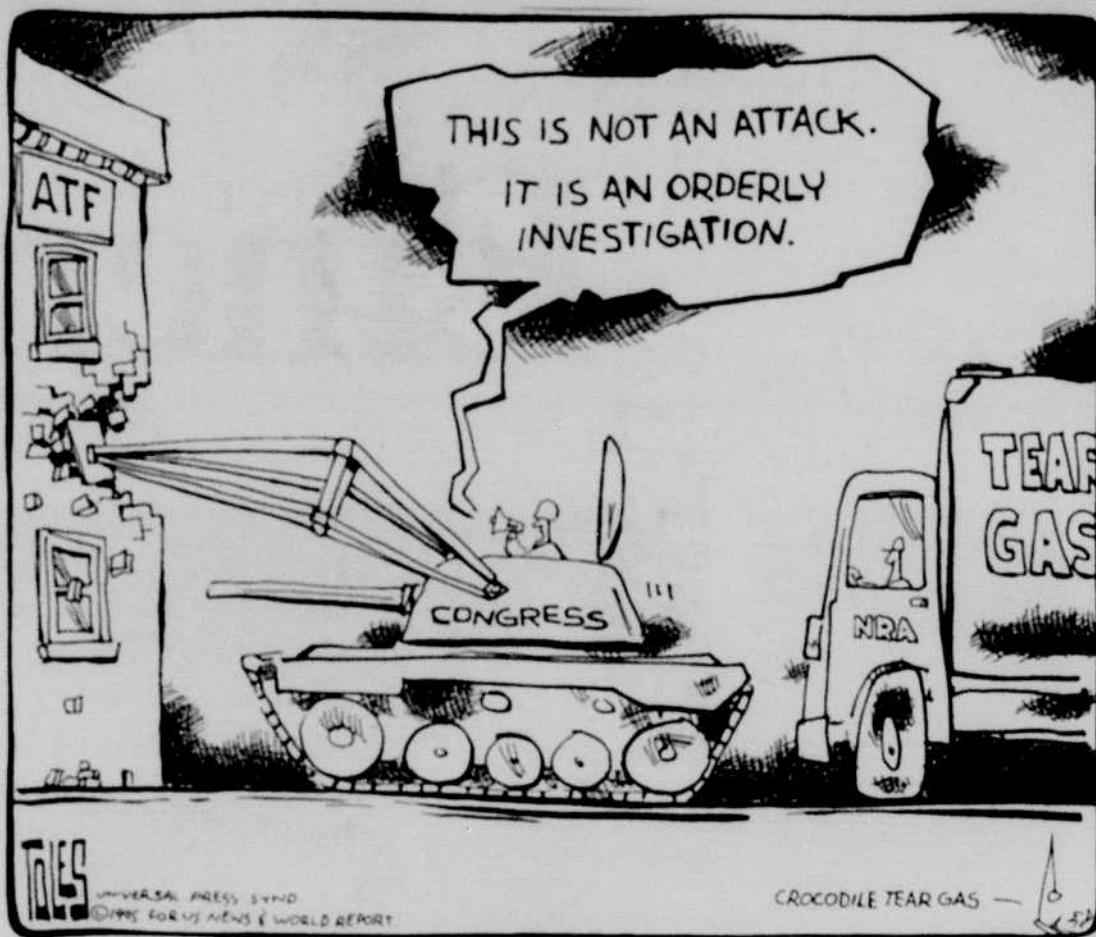
The officers sprayed pepper spray into the crowd, and that's when the mayhem started. Six officers were injured, including one officer who was hit in the jaw by a flying rock. One of the "victims" of this police action threw a skateboard through the window of the police car.

Now, festival-goers are complaining that their children were hurt and that police overreacted to the crowd.

Let's see. A mob screams at the police for arresting one man and prevents police from getting safely to their car. Parents keep their children close to the action instead of moving to a safe area because dissent needs to be taught early. And the police overreacted?

The same controversy arose last spring when police used tear gas to disperse a large crowd at a University-area house. In both cases, the police were responding to citizen complaints and were enforcing city laws. If violators of those laws refuse to comply with police demands, police can either go back to the police station and sulk or they can act. In this instance, the police chose the latter option.

While it may be convenient to criticize the officers' actions and hypothesize about what they could have done differently, the focus is misplaced. The real question should be why the people at this event found the need to get involved in a situation that did not concern them and turned a routine citation over a permit violation into an opportunity to bully police officers. Perhaps it's time to question the people who question authority without probable cause.



OPINION

Legislation threatens America's children

By Marian Sigman
Guest Columnist

Where will I eat now? This is the question that 10-year-old Johnny recently asked his teacher when school let out for the summer.

Johnny is one of 14 million children who receive free or low-cost lunches during the school year. But now that school's over, he may join the 12 million children with no place to go to eat. Because of limited outreach or lack of community summer food programs, Johnny may not be one of the two million lucky ones who have access to a well-balanced meal.

And the story may get worse. If the recent legislation passed by the House of Representatives is any indication of where our priorities lie, children like Johnny and their families are headed for disaster.

Soon, the Senate will debate changes that could transfer federal funds to the states to pay for nutrition programs like summer food service, child care, and food stamps, while cutting funding for them significantly. Not only will the decrease in dollars make food less available, but it will increase the number of families not eating when school is out.

What will this mean for our children?

First, the quality of children's diets will go down markedly as families, child care centers, and school districts get less money to buy food from the many sources needed to ensure good quality diets.

Second, families will experience regular, periodic food shortages. Right now, while families on low incomes often run out of money by the end of the month, they can at least

rely on meals provided by day care centers, schools, and food stamps — remedies that will, without a doubt, be less available under the proposed cuts.

Finally, serious malnutrition resulting in physical wasting, stunting, and mental retardation is likely to increase dramatically. Current surveys indicate that more than one million children consume less than 70 percent of the calories recommended on a daily basis, and more than 25 percent of poor children suffer from iron deficiency.

What's more, the transfer of school breakfast and lunch programs from the federal government to states may increase problems of undernutrition, particularly if funds are reduced and states are allowed to use 20 percent of the monies for other concerns. The loss of a crucial nutritional "safety net" will mean that the increase in federal funds that now accompanies periods of economic recession will no longer be available to families. And that's not all.

Since the welfare funds will be provided for shorter periods of time, parents unable to find jobs will have little income left to pay for food. Nutritional programs for pregnant women and for preschool children in day care are also slated for cuts. Families will not be able to rely on food stamps because all able-bodied adults age 50 and younger will lose their food stamp allowance after 90 days without employment. Also, food stamps will be denied to legal immigrants.

Making sure children get good nutrition is critical not only for their physical growth, but studies show that it affects their cognitive and social development as well.

For example, toddlers who don't get enough of the necessary vitamins and minerals play and talk less than well-fed toddlers. Better-fed school

children are more active and socially engaged in the playground, more focused in the classroom, more able to think, and more literate than poorly fed children. Undernourished children may be in school "in body," but they're not really present "in mind."

There's also good evidence that besides food quality, occasional food shortages can hinder children's learning. When their food intake is cut, they often need to take on more family responsibilities as their parents attempt to find more food. So it's not surprising that their attention in the classroom and their activity and social involvement on the playground go down too. They fall behind in their academic skills and have trouble becoming productive members of society.

It's time for Congress to see the link between nutrition and learning and to consider the long-term consequences of denying our children the proper nutrition they need. If we ignore the health of our greatest resource — our children — we're sure to pay the price later.

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