

COMMENTARY

Monday, October 13, 2003

EDITORIAL

Conference mocks goals, loses purpose in hypocrisy

Beginning last Thursday, activists converged at the University and Lane Community College for a long weekend of workshops, films, visual arts exhibits, speakers, a "peace forum" and the like.

The four-day-long "Peace, Justice & Media Conference" featured speakers including — among others — anti-war activist Andrea Buffa of the Global Exchange Peace Campaign, radio's Jim Hightower, "Labor Radio" host Don McIntosh and representatives of the Eugene Weekly and the Justice Not War Coalition. Organizers managed to import speakers from around the nation to give lectures and lead discussions on a wide range of topics, from media images of women to "media literacy" and from "war taxes" to public broadcasting. Indeed, organizers billed the conference — sponsored by the Justice Not War Coalition — as "Empowering the Movement for Fair, Accurate and Diverse Media."

Despite the conference's clearly extensive planning, which included arranging more than 40 events, something was conspicuously missing: politically conservative and even moderate elements.

Many sessions were clearly planned from a leftist — if not counterculture — slant: "We Interrupt This Empire," a video presentation credited to "Bay Area's independent video activists," recalled March's anti-war protests that snarled San Francisco's financial district.

According to the conference schedule, "Military Recruiting vs. Reality" exposed "myths perpetuated by military recruiters."

The video "Fear and Favor in the Newsroom" suggested that "ownership of the press by a small corporate elite constricts the free flow of ideas and information upon which our democracy depends."

Finally, Sunday's agenda included the self-explanatory session "How to Fight the Bush Agenda."

Now, there's nothing wrong when a conference that bills itself as fair and balanced includes politically oriented content. In fact, when tacking issues such as politics in the media, it's practically unavoidable. By not including a variety of political opinions, however, the meeting is unbalanced and undiverse, and therefore it was unfairly misrepresented to potential participants.

Surprisingly, organizers acknowledged the lack of diversity. "We did not try to get a balance," event organizer Michael Carrigan said in an Emerald interview. "We tried to get a conference that reflects what Eugene is like."

In fact, the lone apparent deviation from the otherwise homogeneously leftist speakers came in Saturday afternoon's section "Discussing Talk Radio: Is It Just Too Damn Liberal?," wherein "Ed Monks and Alan Siporin will discuss the question whether or not special guests Lars Larson from Portland and Don Carlin of KUGN accept the invitation to participate."

But even this limited approach to political diversity was apparently unethically aborted: Carrigan said that organizers had invited Larson, but Larson denied in an e-mail to the Emerald that he had ever received an invitation ("Event to analyze media bias," ODE, Oct. 9). The day after that article ran, Larson told the Emerald in a phone interview that he had received a phone invitation earlier in the day from another of the conference's planners, who told him organizers had intended to ask him to join the conference earlier, but that they had "overlooked" sending the invitation.

Whatever the details are, it's clear the conference was nowhere near as "fair, accurate and diverse" as the kind of media it supposedly sought to empower. Moreover, organizers seem to be guilty of limiting the free exchange of ideas, while hiding under the guise of fairness and balance — the very injustice that they accuse the mainstream media of committing.

While this hypocrisy is certainly unfortunate for those participating speakers whose ideas were valid and important in their own right, the real victims are the participants who weren't getting what they'd bargained for.

EDITORIAL POLICY

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com.



Steve Baggs Illustrator

Misguided memorial

I hate to say it, but I told you so.

Over the summer, the city of Eugene made the decision to change the name of Centennial Boulevard to Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. At the time, I thought that was one of the dumbest things I'd ever heard of. I haven't changed my opinion.

There are several problems here. First, if you're going to name a street in honor of something, I think it's bad form to pick a street that is already named in honor of something else. Centennial Boulevard was a tribute to Oregon's centennial anniversary. Perhaps I've spent too much time at the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretative Center, but I rather like having a reminder of those hard-working folks who converted the Oregon Territory into the state of Oregon. That was no small accomplishment.

I will, however, put that objection aside. For all I know, there may be a shortage of streets in these two towns available for renaming — that shortage would explain the inordinate amount of time I spend trying to merge onto the Ferry Street Bridge every afternoon.

No, my more fundamental objection is this: If you want to honor someone, is renaming a street the best you can do?

Martin Luther King Jr. was a charismatic, dynamic man who stirred the passions and consciences of a generation in a way few men ever have. "I Have a Dream" is arguably one of the most inspiring and



Jessica Cole-Hodgkinson
 Huh? What? Really.

moving speeches ever delivered and, had his life not been cut short, there is simply no end to the things he might have accomplished for the people of this nation and, indeed, the world.

So, the perspicacious politicians in these parts named a street after him. Ooooooh. Neat. Bully for them.

With the alteration of a street sign or two, they can now pat themselves on the back and say to one and all that they are forward-thinkers who recognize the merits of the ongoing struggle for civil rights and those who have committed their lives — figuratively and literally — to the cause. I'm sure we all sleep better at night with folks like this on the job. Yes, that's sarcasm you're hearing.

You see, I knew from the first that this was a cheesy thing to do. I've lived in other towns that have gone the same route and honored King with a street. The problem is that that Martin Luther King Jr. doesn't

quite roll lightly off the tongue. Inevitably, the street that is supposed to remind us of this magnificent man and the message he tried to pass along assumes the abbreviated form "MLK" (Boulevard, Street, Avenue, etc.). Indeed, it has already begun. Just last week a radio announcer opted for the shortened version.

Somehow, I can't believe that "MLK" strikes the same chord in the soul as "Martin Luther King Jr." After all, it could stand for anything — Martian Landing Kraft (assuming Martians can't spell), More Liberal Kooks or the ever-popular Meaty Lute-fisk Kabobs. Acronyms are always open to individual interpretation.

Now, I want to be very clear: I do think that it is right and proper to honor King's innumerable contributions and his memory. I just object generally to doing the right thing in the wrong way. Why didn't they sponsor public readings of the "I Have a Dream" speech on the anniversary of his birth or his death? I'd have happily seen a few tax dollars spent subsidizing a traveling Martin Luther King Jr. Interpretative Center. I'd even contribute to a fund that would put his face up on murals around town.

But a street? I told you that was a dumb thing to do.

Contact the columnist at jessicacolehodgkinson@dailyemerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

ONLINE POLL

Each week, the Emerald publishes the previous week's poll results and the coming week's poll question. Visit www.dailyemerald.com to vote.

Last question: Do you approve of the new sports arena location at East 18th Avenue and University Street?

Results: 91 votes.

Yes — It's the perfect location: 36.2 percent or 33 votes.

No — The Williams' Bakery location would have been best: 13.2 percent or 12 votes.

No — Next to Autzen Stadium would have been best: 12.1 percent or 11 votes.

No — The new Eugene courthouse location would have been best: 2.2 percent or 2 votes.

No — Glenwood or Springfield would have been best: 1.1 percent or 1 vote.

None of the above. Things are fine

without a new arena: 35.2 percent or 32 votes.

This week: Do you value instruction from GTFs as much as that from professors?

Choices: Yes — GTFs can better relate to students; Yes — GTFs have more current knowledge; No — I pay for instruction from professors, not students; No — GTFs don't have the knowledge or experience required to teach classes; It makes no difference to me.