

COMMENTARY

Tuesday, July 13, 2004

EDITORIAL

Even at the Fair, laws are meant to be followed

While strolling on assignment through the Oregon Country Fair in Veneta, no fewer than three times did dealers try to sell drugs to a member of the Emerald Editorial Board. The member, who was toting a press pass and a camera, saw other dealers selling hash and marijuana. Whatever the ethics of drug use are, that narcotic vendors can openly commit felonies in a public space (and not just any public place — a fair) points to a troubling inconsistency in enforcement of laws.

A number of officials are on duty, patrolling what is for several days each year one of Oregon's largest population centers. But, if people are openly committing felonies, the relevant law enforcement agencies evidently aren't doing enough to deter crimes, creating what appears to be a law-free zone where one doesn't belong.

Some people may enjoy using these drugs, and those who do probably do so without hurting others; but the legitimacy of "consensual crimes" is largely beside the point here: This issue is a matter of officials doing their jobs, and of citizens following laws in public that don't compel them to hurt others or themselves.

To be clear, the Emerald Editorial Board supports the legalization of marijuana, at the least for medical purposes. But until the laws are changed, citizens should refrain from illegal drug use and sales, particularly in public. And officials entrusted with enforcing the law should do so.

Making de facto exceptions to standing laws for events like the Oregon Country Fair sets a philosophically murky and professionally irresponsible standard for law enforcement officials; certainly, a legally fair society must also be a legally consistent one.

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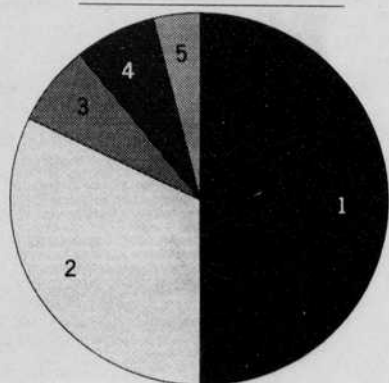
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ONLINE POLL

THIS WEEK'S POLL RESULTS



What is your favorite hangover remedy? (28 total votes)

- Greasy breakfast 50 percent
- Don't drink in the first place 32 percent
- Coffee/cola 7 percent
- Hairo'-the-dog (keep drinking) 7 percent
- Herbal supplements 4 percent
- Cactus julie 0 percent

NEXT WEEK'S QUESTION

- The Oregon Country Fair: Love it or hate it?
- Love it! Art, music, culture and community galore!
 - Hate it! It's been hijacked by capitalism
 - Love it! Let your hair down and free your mind
 - Hate it! It's dirty and dusty, and the people are too



Aaron Sullivan Illustration

A wall against terror

Israel has taken concrete steps to defend its people from Palestinian terrorist attacks, and, yet again, the world has objected.

On Friday the International Court of Justice ruled that Israel's new terror barrier — a 50-meter-wide stretch of chain-link fence, barbed wire, electronic sensors, ditches and patrol roads in rural areas and a 10-meter-high wall of concrete in urban areas — is in violation of international law because it restricts Palestinian freedom of movement and annexes Palestinian territories.

The court's decision, which calls for the dismantling of the wall, is not binding. As a result, Israel has vowed to ignore it and continue building the wall, which will be about 437 miles long and is about one-third complete.

The Israelis are correct in weathering the storm of world opinion and building the barrier. The wall — which the Israelis say has reduced attacks inside Israel by Palestinians by 80 percent this year, according to a Los Angeles Times article — is, as Israel contends, a nonviolent defensive measure that protects its people from the horrific attacks on civilians that Palestinian terrorists have committed for years.

Obviously, Palestinian leaders applauded the world court's decision. Ahmed Ghannaim, a Palestinian legislator from Jerusalem and an influential leader in Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, said Palestinians now expect the United Nations Security Council to impose sanctions against Israel if it doesn't comply, according to an article in The Globe and Mail newspaper.

This is a praiseworthy case of Palestinians using diplomatic means to reach their goals. Here's another: The Palestinian Liberation Army lobbied heavily and is the reason the United Nations forwarded the case to the world court in the first place,



JARED PABEN
 HELP WANTED

according to the article.

But, after calling for diplomatic action, Ghannaim warned that any veto by the United States — a longtime supporter of Israel in its fight against terror — would encourage moderates, like himself, to act violently.

"A veto by the American will send the message for the Palestinians that armed struggle is the only choice," he said in the article.

This is a disgusting threat echoed by a people who know no compromise, but only violence.

Luckily, the wall seems to be working against these people. According to the article, Israeli security officials report that "only three Palestinian suicide attackers succeeded in reaching their targets from the northern West Bank in the past 11 months, compared with 73 attacks in the 34 months before the barrier was built."

"The fence works. It is a temporary, non-violent security means, and it saves lives," the Israeli government said in a statement quoted in the LA Times article. "So long as terror continues, Israel will continue to defend its citizens."

The wall may not be completely legitimate, however. Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Jonathan Peled said the world court completely ignored the fact that Israel needs to wall to prevent attack by Palestinian terrorists when delivering its

verdict. This is true, and I support Israel in its fight against terror; however, Peled fails to mention that the placement of parts of the wall did intrude into Palestinian territory, resulting, effectively, in the annexation of Palestinian lands.

The Israelis can't dispute they irresponsibly placed the barrier. Last week, their own high court ordered the government to re-route a 30 kilometer stretch of the wall that created unnecessary hardship for local Palestinians and encroached on Palestinian lands. The wall went well beyond the boundaries of Israel's supposed pre-1967 frontier, called the Green Line, and into Palestinian territories, according to the LA Times article. It pressed nearly 800 kilometers into West Bank territory in an effort to encompass Israeli settlements, according to The Globe and Mail.

This is counterproductive and only hurts the quest for peace in the region. The wall should have been placed on the traditional border and not miles into Palestinian lands where it could protect Israeli settlements that probably shouldn't be there in the first place.

"In spite of my objection in principle to the fence, if Israel really wanted one, it could have built it on its own territory and no one would have made a peep in the entire world, because it wouldn't have made Palestinians' lives a misery," Ahmed Tibi, an Israeli Arab who serves in Israel's parliament, told the LA Times.

Israel's high court needs to continue delivering rulings that ensure the wall doesn't needlessly impede on the lives and territories of the local Palestinians. But, in the end, Israel does have a fundamental right to build a barrier that has been proven to protect its innocent civilians from madmen with bombs strapped to their chests. The wall has worked, while years of arrests and retaliatory killings have not.