

UNPROVOKED

BY HOPE MARSTON

I went to Portland for the Bush protest Thursday, August 22. It was enormous — there were thousands of people. Hundreds of us began at Waterfront Park, marched up to Burnside and Park where we met thousands more activists from a wide range of groups. We took the streets, stopping traffic as we marched to the Hilton, where Bush was to speak to a \$25,000 per person event. Suddenly, the crowd behind me stopped. We were split into two or more groups. Although we didn't know it then, the crowd behind us was stopped for Bush's motorcade.

We marched to the police barricade between 5th and 6th Avenues on Taylor Street. I squeezed up to the front, proudly draping my corporate flag over the barricade. I had decorated the red and white stripes with plastic lettering, *Denying Liberty and Justice for All*. The corporate flag looks like an ordinary flag, except, instead of stars, white logos of U.S. corporations stand in the field of blue, representing selling democracy to the highest bidders.

After chanting and drumming for a half hour, most of the crowd marched to another location. I stayed. We were a small group, maybe 50. Some people verbally challenged police as "mercenaries." Others tried to educate them about why we were there. I was amazed how protected they were with helmets and bulletproof clothing, padded with polycarbonate, and Kevlar. They were dressed as if we were terrorists.

I yelled, "We're citizens. We're peacefully protesting. We are not terrorists. The terrorist landed on Air Force One, and is speaking in the Hilton." On the sidewalk nearby, the fashionable and the suited walked through police lines to attend the Bush gala. We were at least half a city block from the Hilton's outskirts.

Hundreds of people who had protested at U.S. Senator Gordon Smith's office joined us, and we stood arm-to-arm, wall-to-wall, up against the barricades. We continued to chant, holler and drum. We noticed snipers on the Hilton's roof. The police line facing us rotated about every 15 minutes. The original group was replaced by a bicycle unit, and later Darth Vader-looking riot police with kneepads and plexiglass shields in front of their faces lined up. As their name implies, they were dressed for a riot, not a peaceful protest.

Suddenly a cop with a microphone yelled, "I'm declaring an emergency. If you don't clear the area, you'll be arrested!" Before he could finish his sentence, the crowd roared, drowning out his words. Most of the people behind me never heard the warning.

As I learned later, people listening to police scanners said they heard police say the crowd was too large, and after being pepper sprayed, people would leave and find help at local hospitals. Police intent was to break us up and shut us up. They were coached by Secret Service agents who walked through police lines with cell phones attached to their little pink ears. They were probably the ones demanding the area be cleared.

I did not move at first. We chanted, "Peaceful protest! Peaceful protest!" to let the cops know we weren't threatening them. We were exercising our freedom of speech — letting the government know our dissent with Bush's fascist policies. Policies like rattling his saber about warring on Iraq, trashing our Bill of Rights with the USA Patriot Act. Policies like military tribunals, holding prisoners of war at Guantamano Bay indefinitely by calling them enemy combatants. Someone in the crowd distributed "Enemy Combatant" bumper stickers, which many stuck to their shirts.

Police told us they would arrest us — instead they shot pepper spray directly into a woman named Sharon's face, and at her partner, Pat. They pepper sprayed citizen activist Lloyd Marbet* and others who stayed in the front row linking arms to resist oppression.

They should have arrested us. If they planned to pepper spray, they should have warned us. How would Henry David Thoreau or Mohandas Gandhi practice civil disobedience with pepper spray in their faces? We have a right to practice civil disobedience. Not one protester in that crowd of more than 3,000 was armed with a weapon. We were ordinary citizens in T-shirts and tennis shoes. The riot police, dressed for combat, attacked a peaceful unarmed crowd. After that, people were angry. Those who hadn't heard the police announcement were bewildered to see protesters moving toward them, with riot police and pepper spray right behind.

The police attacked first — and everything after that was a response to what police did to break the peace. If you heard reports of protesters jumping on cars — think about it. The cars charged into a crowd of peaceful citizens.

I read an AP story with this quote from Assistant Police Chief Greg Clark: "When we're dealing with a Presidential visit, we have to draw very definite lines and if people cross them, we have to react." He's lying. Not a single protester crossed police lines.

Of the rubber bullets police used, Clark said, "It was an officer rescue. Those were not used for crowd dispersal." Which is more vulnerable — people with no weapons, or a police car loaded with armed cops driving through a crowd? Those in the



THE PORTLAND ALLIANCE

Thousands of Oregonians marched through downtown Portland on Saturday, October 5 in opposition to an invasion of Iraq by the United States. It was the largest peace march since nearly 12,000 rallied in 1991 when Portland was a major hotbed of protest against the Persian Gulf War. Police did not attack the recent demonstrators, unlike their violent show of force in August when George W. Bush came to town. Hope Marston was there and wrote this article for Eugene Weekly.

car were under no threat. People stood in front of police cars to stop the cars from hurting unprotected pedestrians.

As I backed away from the pepper spray and rubber bullets, I saw people hurt by the pepper spray attack. They washed their eyes, their faces, their necks, chests and legs. They cried; they were in anguish. Sarah told me it hurt like hell for about 45 minutes. Hours later, when she took a shower, she forgot her hair had been pepper sprayed, so she relieved the sensation as peppered water flowed down her body.

Police call pepper spray and rubber bullets non-lethal weapons, as if it's okay to use them against innocent citizens dissenting government policy. Pepper spray is the moral equivalent of the high-powered waterhoses the racist cops in the South used against people marching to be treated as human beings. There is no excuse for pepper spraying unarmed citizens.

What happened in Portland was class warfare. The rich got in, ordinary people were kept out. Money bought the unelected President's ear, lack of money brought a face full of pepper spray. Police were protected with thousands of dollars worth of boots, Kevlar jackets and face shields; people who pay their salaries were hit with rubber bullets.

An unelected President joked about protesters being killed and thousands of protesters whose message he needed to hear were shoved aside with nightsticks. Kevin Mannix fretted about the time he spent among the masses trying to reach the

safety of his wealthy friends while infants were pepper sprayed so severely that witnesses said the babies seemed to stop breathing.

"This is not what democracy looks like!" I yelled over and over as the police cars shoved pedestrians aside. Earlier we had chanted, "This is what democracy looks like!" as thousands asserted our democratic rights of dissent. When I saw my friends pepper sprayed, and heard the rubber bullets, I knew I was not watching democracy. For police to perceive peaceful citizens as a threat and attack them with chemical weapons shows they have no clue what democracy looks like.

I learned later police attacked the crowd at 6:30 p.m. because in the hotel wanted to get out on the streets. I can't confirm this because I wasn't there. By 6 p.m., I left Portland. My entire body ached from the tension in that unprovoked confrontation with police.

Before marching, many of us heard Marbet speak. He talked about the responsibilities of citizenship — in order to govern ourselves, we must work for democracy. Not only march in protest, but petition the government for change, run for office, and work on campaigns for third-party candidates to shake up the corporate status quo. He is right. I hope this protest invigorates people to get involved, opens their eyes to see the sham of our democracy, and propels them toward taking back our freedoms. For some, Portland was a start, a turning of the tide. For others it is a continuation of our many years' struggle — a struggle that must endure until we liberate ourselves and win human rights for the rest of our indivisible planet.

SAVE CAPITALISM FROM ITSELF

Corporate lobbyists are aware that Republicans can be bought, but they are more expensive than other political prostitutes and make strange bedfellows in the long run because they become so smug after obtaining an office and think you owe them a favor. Lobbyists only contribute about 85% as much to Democrats. This way they have rated the race even before it is run, regardless of who prevails. Democrats are a "cheap date," but they never love you after election day.

I learned this as a "grassroots" unpaid lobbyist in Salem. If you want to talk to an elected representative as a citizen you might get to speak to a legislative aide, if you are lucky. But a "financed" corporate lobbyist can walk into the inner sanctum, a closed committee meeting, or be called before his turn to testify in a public hearing any time. After the hired gun speaks, public input is closed and the rest of the citizens waiting patiently for their turn just get cut off. Another ploy is to have the moneyed interests themselves filibuster (because their mouthpiece is busy buying more lucrative legislation from another committee). The only reason public input is asked for is because of Oregon's open public meeting law. But that is window dressing because the issue is generally decided in closed session. Never having been called to testify in Washington, D.C., I would assume it's the same there, only larger and more expensive (and less accessible to non-lobbyist citizens).

The propaganda of a corporate purchased talk show is that media are controlled by a "liberal elite". The reason we only hear Ingram, O'Reilly, Larsen, Limbaugh and Reagan on an AM radio station like KAST in Astoria during prime time is that progressives don't rate. If this were true, all we would hear would be progressives rather than well-heeled conservatives (which is an ingenuous misnomer: they never conserve much of anything). In reality, corporate money controls both the medium and the ratings. So much for the Fairness Doctrine.

The progressive movement has lost the high ground. Big Business now dominates public perception with a truly color

blind policy: any individual may be exploited by a company regardless of race, creed or color.

In regard to bigotry, civil rights, fair play, monopoly and criminal practices, progressives (regardless of political party) have always in the past been the first to articulate issues and bring about reform. The present need is to point out how all Americans are being devastated by the shenanigans of the Big Business crowd and their paid-for political hirelings, then try to prescribe effective action pertinent to daily life. This may involve practicing martial arts (not martial law) in the new progressive agenda. The right to keep and bear arms by an individual might be an important progressive issue in consequence.

The time is ripe to regulate in order to save capitalism from itself. (Ralph Nader says corporations are doing what communism was unable to do — destroy capitalism.) Now is the time to impeach politicians who took contributions from Enron, etc. Ban paid lobbyists in general, reform political contributions and disband the Electoral College by constitutional amendment. Not only must the accountants, CEOs, financial advisors, inside traders and Lobbyists of Enron, etc., be sent to prison, but all investments of shareholders and IRA accounts of employees be returned. Only progressives have the credibility to exact justice and restore confidence in the government and economy.

The problem with the Democratic and Republican parties is one of corporate mandate. Let's see if either party returns the purloined assets, let alone put any but a few scapegoats in jail. It won't happen because both parties gladly took tainted contributions. To pursue Enron, etc., would point directly to themselves.

Let us shed light on these issues, just as we did with civil rights and Vietnam more than thirty years ago. Now the corporate collective owns both political parties. That shall be changed.

—LESLIE MILLER

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