

# Movement Gone Astray

Consequences of a wrong turn

As someone who was involved in the early stages of the Warner Creek campaign (and happened to create the “wild and free” blockade banner on the opening page of “Flames of Dissent”), I would like to affirm the wonderful idealism of many participants. However, an unfortunate potential consequence of this series is that the exposure given to the history leading up to sabotage may tend to only increase an already existing fragmentation of Eugene’s activist community.



Activists at Warner Creek were tapping into the strength of nonviolent resistance – what Gandhi called *satyagraha* or moral power of truth. This philosophy sees our entire society as trapped within the spirit of violence and those who implement its policies as simply captured as well. Nonviolence seeks the liberation of all from this system, including those currently blinded by it.

**What power would the mega-corporations have if we developed a truly eco-sustainable culture which turned its back on mass consumerism?**

I believe the victory at Warner Creek was attributable to this approach. But I also saw it unravel. Forest Service law enforcement officers began to become de-humanized as “the enemy.” This led later to an even more complete demonizing of Eugene police officers by some anarchists in the “wars” which ensued in the Whiteaker neighborhood. When the commitment to nonviolence devolved into a hostile dichotomy of “us versus them,” its power was forsaken.

For this reason, describing this period as the “eco-radical era of Eugene” makes a fundamental error. My dictionary defines “radical” to mean “going to the root, foundation, or source.” The activism depicted does not address the source at all, but instead is trapped within the superficial levels of an old paradigm that can only lead to polarization.

In no way do I defend heavy-handed police actions or extremely excessive sentences. I only try to make two points. In tactics involving arson, it is all but inevitable that people will eventually become either maimed or killed. As was the case when someone was accidentally killed by a bomb in Madison, Wis., to protest the Vietnam war, such an incident would be used to totally discredit whatever cause with which it is associated.

Secondly, such tactics are counter-productive. If activism is based on hatred, it is going to invoke those same kinds of hateful energies in response. Rather than lift all of humanity to the higher place we all need to go to in order to avoid a planetary eco-catastrophe, such tactics only deepen divisions and squander precious energy toward symptoms rather than causes.

David Korten, author of *When Corporations Rule the World*, recently spoke to a capacity crowd in Eugene to promote his new groundbreaking book *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*. In his stirring presentation, he described the stark decision humanity now faces in whether it will continue to support a worldview/paradigm driven by the imperatives of empire or choose to non-cooperate with and disempower that mentality. Many points of this quite important book are succinctly summarized in an article by Korten available online (at [www.yesmagazine.org/article.asp?ID=1463](http://www.yesmagazine.org/article.asp?ID=1463)).

The modus operandi of empire is violence. Only through the infliction of violence on a mega-scale can the empire be upheld. It has become the master of such application and will not be defeated by any strategy attempting to pick up this self-destructive tool. It can only be overcome by an energy more powerful, which is what would be embodied in a mass movement dedicated to the unswerving application of active nonviolent resistance, non-cooperation and boycott.

Gandhi’s movement is the best example of the power of such resistance in confronting an empire. His thesis that all power is ultimately held by the people was proven correct. When enough people of India non-violently refused to cooperate with the British system, its hold was broken.

Similarly, what power would the mega-corporations have if we developed a truly eco-sustainable culture which turned its back on mass consumerism? This is a societal paradigm shift that will require several generations to accomplish. But is it not better to model the positive alternatives and take the first faltering steps of a movement that could actually succeed than engage in polarizing actions which do not address the source and are therefore destined to fail?

Rather than looking backward, it is far more important to learn the lessons being offered and move forward. If we are ever to break free from the empire mentality that dominates the planet and gravely threatens its future, it is my hope that such will be the case.

Spruce Houser has participated in the organizing of several campaigns based on the principles of Gandhian nonviolence, addressing such issues as nuclear energy (Trojan), nuclear weapons, forest protection and corporate power.

## How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### UNFAIR SENTENCES

After following the saga of “Flames of Dissent” and reaching what appeared to be the conclusion (12/7), my heart sank as I read the sentencing.

I was looking at a list of apparently ordinary people — most of them educated — getting a “recommended sentence” of sometimes more than 14 years! As much as I don’t like to see vandalism, especially in the form of arson, I cannot help realizing that whatever brought these folks to act like they did was pure despair and very likely not being heard. We have not even talked enough about the fundamental reason why they felt compelled to act like this; we just focused on the destruction of private and federal property. It sounds and looks better on the news. These very people had only one message in mind: “This is the only earth we know of; we don’t want it gone!”

The message of Authority is clear: hard cracking down in order to make examples and discourage others to follow in the tracks of the “eco-terrorists” — how convenient a word. Don’t get any ideas, now! Go back to your homes; everything is going to be all right. Come on! We all know there are so many worse crimes out there that hardly resulted in two or maybe three years in the can!

One thing is sure: For the “eco-terrorists,” they will find jail room. Maybe by releasing a dozen sex offenders or corrupt politicians. (Oh, that’s right! The latter get promoted.)

I send a message to whoever rejoiced at seeing the sentencing: Don’t you like to breathe clean air? Don’t you enjoy walking in our magnificent nature? When was the last time you (not your landscaper!) planted a tree? What would be your reaction if someone was threatening the life of your mother? Look at the big picture and understand. Your Mother is everything around you: the air you breathe, the water you drink, everything!

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### IT TAKES SOME TIME

Regarding Ann Tattersall’s letter, asking “Where are the 150 state troopers you promised to deploy right after the election?” (12/7): That is in the governor’s proposed budget for 2007-09, which must first be enacted by the Legislature and signed by the governor before it goes into effect on July 1, 2007.

We’re currently still operating on the 2005-07 budget, which was enacted by the 2005 Legislature on the basis of revenue forecasts made in late 2004 and which has to last until next June 30. In any event, creating the positions, advertising for them, taking applications, doing background checks, hiring

them, buying them equipment, cars, etc., and doing any necessary training, takes a while, too. You don’t just hire them from the people loitering on the corner looking for day labor. I drive the freeway every day (in a carpool!), and I too would welcome

more enforcement of existing laws. But you can’t fix overnight budget cuts from the past 20 years.

For the past three or four months, employees in all of the state government’s departments have been working on their budget requests for 2007-09. That’s right; they have to decide now how much money to ask for to get them through the next 30 months or so. Then they send their requests to the governor, who works over the numbers with his own priorities in mind and draws up his own “governor’s proposed budget.”

In January, the Legislature meets and spends about four months doing various politicking until a budget forecast comes out in about mid-April, and that’s the “crystal ball” number they’ll work with to put together their own budget, which they hope to send to the governor for his signature sometime before July 1. And then they (and all of us) hope that there’s no major downturn in the economy, a major disaster, an unforeseen rise in petroleum