

Society in Denial

The burgeoning terror front



As I climbed the many steps of the newly commissioned Battleship Eugene (an obscenely expensive and excessive garrison, with all the charm of Darth Vader's summer home, and only four bicycle parking spots) to attend the first in a series of sentencing hearings for the 10 "let's paint them terrorist" defendants, I felt cautiously optimistic. I'd seen U.S. Judge Ann Aiken in action a week or two earlier, sentencing some friends who had been polite but unwavering in their antiwar visits to congressional offices there. It seemed hopeful that Aiken would put this whole terrorist matter into a more appropriate context. Probably she'd spell out the difference between youthful monkey wrenchers, acutely cognizant of our planet's desperate straits and refusing to sink into apathetic denial even as they made extremely poor action choices, and actual terrorists, those who prescribe both targeted and indiscriminate murder of human life in the delusion that it advances their agendas.

Alas, the distinction still requires spelling out, I guess by non-judicial amateurs like me. Real terrorists set out to shoot, lynch, burn and blow up other people. They completely extinguish innocent life because their cause supposedly has such greater importance. The Unabomber is a terrorist. The bombers of N.Y.C., Atlanta and Oklahoma City were terrorists. The KKK and Aryan Nation and all the "pro-life" doctor shooters – duh. And it is very fair to ask, at this point, exactly why the U.S. government is interested in diluting and expanding its notion of what constitutes terrorism.

Are we soon going to have color codes to help clarify the degree of threat from all the new burgeoning terror fronts? The peace terrorists can be pink, since the Code Pinkers have already led the way with their scary presence. And of course, any vicious tree-hugger is now a green terrorist.

In our system, the courts serve to shape and amend social policies as well as enforce existing law. Judge Aiken was handed an historical opportunity to inform the world that while our community is part of the U.S., this is not Alberto Gonzales' U.S. But instead the judge opted to go with the script, with the result that we now live among terrorists. (How strange that the guy who was one of the most active perps but turned in all his friends lives here free as a bird and somehow is not a "terrorist.")

Judge Aiken laid responsibility on some of the defendants' parents, chewing them out for failing their kids. This was not only a cheap shot, it was so off-target as to be a Cheney shot. The judge should have indicted the actual failure here: a society in severe denial, intoxicated by obscene consumerism and threatening the entire planet with its selfish, bloated and wasteful ways. A society so clueless that it takes a Monday off to celebrate one of its heroes yet completely fails to transmit Dr. King's message about what works and what doesn't when it comes to social change. A society that has not even begun to educate its own people about nonviolent methods and philosophy. A society that can't go 10 years without invading and wrecking someone else's homeland.

It's always easier to punish and put away the truth-telling provocateurs, to scapegoat the canaries in our coal mine. Easier to pretend that some problem has for the moment been "solved" by labeling and demonizing individuals who are serving to symptomize the problem.

Apparently the judicial branch of our system is choosing to follow the other two (criminal executive and spineless legislative) down the road of failing its people. Failure to see the big picture and treat holistically ultimately will result in a massive systems failure (i.e. death) of the entire social organism. Ironically, this is what actual terrorists have been going for all along.

Vip Short, D.C., of Eugene is a holistic physician and nonviolence trainer.

How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DOWNTOWN CLOWNS

Sometimes change comes about because people are bored and dissatisfied with themselves and their lives. They live somewhere for a long time, and one day someone says, "I am tired of looking at that statue of Colonel Pickwick on the town square. Why don't we replace it with a newer, contemporary artwork like the people over in Alphaville just sired?" And then a lot of people look at the old Colonel, and they can see it. And they say, "John Wisebody is right!" And so, they hire a famous N.Y. art name to create something, and then, when it's done, they look at it and go "ahh." But five or 10 years later, they feel empty and depressed again because the problem with their lives wasn't out there; it was internal.

This is the whole basis of our culture: compulsive, addictive consumption. Our theory of economics and its need for constant growth feeds our disease.

When I read Jerry Diethelm's article (6/14) about changing downtown Eugene, I waded through childhood reminiscences about the good old downtowns to get to the phrase conveying the real message (and, guess what, it's about — money): "[to construct] a new kind of downtown, one that developers can help us build."

In Lincoln County, there are now 800 houses on the market because developers, in their greed, came in and overbuilt. *USA Today* rated this area of the coast as the #1 resort traffic jam in America. But still the development keeps coming. After many years of rejections and set-backs, a company has finally gotten approval and started on a development right next to the Girl Scout Camp that will be the largest in the town.

Northwest Portland reminds me a lot of the way my old home, Berkeley, used to be: laid back, home for artists, intellectuals, the unusuals. But developers have been buying up all the cheaper, ordinary properties, tearing them down and erecting skyscraper million-dollar condos. Where the energy used to be calm and human-contact-producing, it is now busy, over-crowded, frenetic. Both of these examples were created in the name of "city planning." But the real reason was to

make a bunch more money for a bunch of people who have enough money already.

And change always has consequences that are not foreseen. Building better roads causes more people to feel they need more cars, which then gluts the freeways.

If you walk around downtown Eugene, you can see that it's not a ghost town like many of our bigger cities. There are lots of people walking around, a lot of good shops and a lot of organizations promoting good activities. You can experience that the energy of this area is a good and positive, just the way it used to be in Berkeley and NW Portland. Compared to most places in this country today, there is no problem here. Therefore, there is no reason to solve it.

Abe Frankel
Eugene

MONGERING FEAR

Terrorism: Instilling in us (the general population) an overwhelming fear (terror) of speaking our minds.

Gethin Lynes
Dexter

NO ACCOUNTABILITY

In the June 14 Slant, *EW* mentions the feature editorial in the *R-G* by EPD Officer Erik Humphrey, who criticizes the City Council, defends the city manager and calls for city-wide council elections. On June 1, 1997, Mayor Jim Torrey, a proponent of citywide council elections and a strong city manager form of government, sat in his car and watched while Eugene police tortured protesters in violation of international law (Amnesty International 8/21/97) with pepper spray. The city manager let the cops investigate the police from other agencies, and the cops got away with it.

In the aftermath of the Magaña-Lara case, sympathetic police consultants were brought in by the city manager, and no one was held accountable even though numerous cops were aware of the complaints against the two sexual predators and did not respond appropriately. Under the city manager, the cops got away with it.

Erik Humphrey bemoans the appointment

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