

Berkeley (2)

Special to the *Fifth Estate*

Art Johnston

1969

BERKELEY—This is Wednesday, May 21. A week ago I pulled into the city in the pre-dawn hours on the back of a fifty-two Chevy farm truck laden with contraband oranges, avocados, artichokes. We were on our way home from our outlaw camp in the Baja, Mexico.

As we hauled up Highway One, watching the surf pound against the rocks below our -brothers were being routed with clubs and cyclone fence from the People's Park in Berkeley.

In the early hours of the morning, they were being driven from our communal home, our shrine to god's country in the city. It had been salvaged—a vacant lot, a swamp—from the refuse of the industrial state which owns everything else in the concrete jungle.

In the past week we have warred with the police state for this small piece of land. We watched them bulldoze our shrubbery, pull up our trees, plow under our new sod.

Racing down Telegraph Avenue, ducking into alleys while brothers fell screaming in pain from the gunfire, I realized that the Yippie philosophy of spontaneous confrontation will lead us only to graves and prisons.

I spent yesterday afternoon on the terrace of the Mediterranean Cafe on Telegraph Avenue. From behind the wrought-iron fence I could see several hundreds of police and national guardsmen.

Before one of the Alameda County cops—who looked like a medieval warrior with his helmet and visor, gas mask, armor vest, billy club, revolver, and M1—I pulled my red bandana from my levis, and dangled it before his nose.

“Here is my only weapon: a wet handkerchief!” I said. Frothing with hate, he looked me up and down, but not into my eyes and muttered, “Then you’ll have the smarts to move when the killing starts!”

From the terrace of the cafe, I watched gangs of cops jump people at random, and drag them off to the paddy wagons behind the cordons of guardsmen, who observed all this, too.

My eyes watered from the gas lingering in the air. The carrot juice I had copped from the open-air market across the street tasted like blood. I chewed my gouda cheese

In my favorite delicatessen on the Avenue works a woman in her twenties with straight dark hair. I always ask her for fifteen cents worth of “some cheese to suit the mood of the day.”

Yesterday, her breasts bulging from beneath her Scandinavian apron, she winked as she handed me a thirty cent chunk of gouda. It savored alternately under my tongue of funk—and dead flesh.

In the late afternoon, I sat with Timothy Leary on the back porch of his home in the Berkeley Hills. His beautiful wife laid out an embroidered blouse to dry on the warm wood slats.

Khole-Gopal, one of India's finest drummers, put his arm around me and asked a girl with a camera to take “a picture of two musicians.” Gopal said he would teach me how to play tabla. The girl, who had driven me up in her 1950 Willys jeep, was explaining how she studies the language of dolphins.

A mellow reprieve. From Leary's back porch, you can see the whole Bay, with the Golden Gate Bridge back on the horizon, among the clouds.

Far below, we could see wisps of tear gas clouds circling up from the campus. Helicopters were dive-bombing at groups of students, dropping grenades of a deadly gas that has been used in Vietnam.

Later that evening, down in the flatlands, a teenager with an Alabama drawl would pull up his black T-shirt before Leary, and his back looked like hamburger.

“The pellets, they been dropping out one by one,” he explained to the patriarch.

He was lucky. They fished steel balls the size of marbles out of the innards of other brothers.

With every brother’s death, I know I will have to walk by myself awhile, and ask myself the question I asked in the Mediterranean yesterday: “Is the end of history worth a single death?”

The answer comes in the form of a vision.

I know my destiny now—the destiny of our people, and our unique role in world history. I may be gunned down by a machine gun someday, but on my lips—so help me God—will be eternally frozen the word of the living:

Freedom to all Mankind!

A spectre haunts the streets of Berkeley

This hunger knows no other name

Guard against the mourning widow

The candle is lit—now the flame.

.

Fists clenched, streaked with blood

Long hair flows of love

Now git your gun.

.

URANUS! Bring it down!

The curtain rises on the heart of darkness

America

.

America

You promised us a dream, you motherfucker! Give it up!

.

(But the point of a gun

Is the only law

That Liberty understood)

.

Come a little closer, Brother

Sister—hold my hand

.

This land was borne to freedom

Our blood runs in the soil

Now Tomorrow comes on hard

Feeding on the blood of the

Fathers of its youth.

.

The time is come

Let's build the fire now the funeral

Pyre, but please don't tell a soul

It's cold, keep warm, it's cold.

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Come a little closer, Brother.

Sister—hold my hand.

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