

Earth Read-Out

Keith Lampe

1969

BERKELEY—About 2,000 persons attended—off and on—a six hour teach-in on “Ecology and Politics in America” May 28 at the U-C Berkeley campus.

The idea was to relate the People’s Park issue to broader questions of planetary survival.

A lot of language under a hot sun—but hopefully the thing will get made into a book to help people past the old politics and into a root politics of ecology.

Sponsors were American Federation of Teachers locals 1474 and 1795. Their leaflet for the occasion put it succinctly where it’s at:

“The battle for a people’s park in Berkeley has raised questions that go far beyond the immediate objects of public attention. They are questions about the quality of our lives, about the deterioration of our environment and about the propriety and legitimacy of the uses to which we put our land. The questions raised by this issue reach into two worlds at once: the world of power, politics and the institutional shape of American society on the one hand, and the world of ecology, conservation and the biological shape of our environment on the other.

“The People’s Park is a mirror in which our society may see itself. A country which destroys Vietnam in order to liberate it sees no paradox in building fences around parks so that people may enjoy them. It is not at all ironic that officers of the law uproot shrubbery in order to preserve the peace. It is the way of the world! Trees are anarchic; concrete is Civilization.

“Our cities are increasingly unlivable. The ghettos are anathema to any form of human existence. Our back country is no retreat; today’s forest is tomorrow’s Disneyland. Our rivers are industrial sewers; our lakes are all future resorts; our wildlife are commercial resources.

“The history of America is a history of hostility and conquest. We have constituted ourselves socially and politically to conquer and transform nature. We measure ‘progress’ in casualties, human and environmental, in bodies of men or board-feet of lumber.

“Ecology and politics are no longer separate or separable issues...”

Biggest mind-blow of the day came from Robert Greenway, vice president for academic planning at U-C Santa Cruz. Greenway’s contract isn’t to be renewed because he’s acting up—and the U-C regents got a court order forbidding him to make speeches because he’s “inflammatory.”

Greenway told his audience “we have to go down to People’s Park Friday with our women, children and neighbors and we have to say we’re going to pull up the fence—gently—and then say to the National Guard “Go ahead and shoot.”

Greenway said the fight for People's Park is part of a larger fight for physical and psychic space: "We must take every shred of university land that's not already built and make it a park."

He invited everybody down to Santa Cruz "where we have 3000 acres for dancing and singing and holding each other—and it would take them a year to fence it."

Prof. Sim van der Ryn, a member of the (U-C Berkeley) Chancellor's Committee on Environment, explained why we often have heavily polluted air in the Bay Area even during early morning hours: the air-pollution surveillance bureaucrats do only a 9 to 5 thing, so most of the biggest industries release their poisons after dark or in early morning.

Van der Ryn reminded everybody that DDT is killing enormous numbers of crabs on the West Coast, that high concentrations of DDT have been found even in High Sierra lakes—and that lots of people get busted for LSD, but nobody for DDT.

Dr. Tom Bodenheimer warned that DDT may get banned but be replaced by something even worse—that there are certain pesticides in use now (e.g., Parathion) which originally were developed as nerve gases. He said pesticides are the direct cause of about 150 deaths annually in the U.S. He said the nerve-gas leak which killed 6000 sheep in Utah last year might well have wiped out much of Salt Lake City also if it hadn't been for a shift in the wind.

Bodenheimer said the concentrations of CS gas on the Berkeley campus are probably still so great that "next time it rains it'll be like a gas attack." He said the regime possibly soon may try to control demonstrations entirely from the air. He said the regime considers students, like insects, to be pests.

Cliff Humphrey of (Berkeley) Ecology Action said he plans to turn his auto into a piece of sculpture so it can't continue poisoning the air. "My Rambler is a pig," Humphrey said. "There are all kinds of pigs."

Dennis Maynis, a mountain climber, told the audience he's been watching Yosemite being destroyed. "They've paved trails, ripped out trees and flowers—but we're watched by telescopes to make sure we don't break any rules."

Barry Weisberg, of the Bay Area Institute, said 95% of all fresh water on the planet is being used faster than it's being replaced. He said Amerika constitutes only 7% of the world's population—but is presently consuming about 70% of the world's resources.

Landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, who was busted several weeks ago trying to stop Army Engineers from wrecking Tamalpais Creek in the name of flood control, equated the creek with People's Park: "each little blade of grass is important."

Wolf von Eckhart, architectural critic of the *Washington Post*, sent a wire saying "the city belongs to the people." Folk singer Malvina Reynolds sang "God Bless the Grass."

Paul Goodman sent a wire from New York expressing outrage at "the vandalism committed by the authorities."

Jane Jacobs sent a wire from New York saying universities traditionally have used parks as a cover story for land grabs in order to "lull ivy liberals." To those battling for People's Park she said "be brave but be careful: against armor and sadism; your weapon must be ingenuity."

Among many other speakers was Stanley Smart, a Paiute who recently was busted for—dig—hunting without a license. "We don't believe in the white man's law," he said.

Forester Don Harkins urged street people to spend some time in the wilderness. He said he knew that some street people thought the wilderness was counterrevolutionary—"but they'll pull a lot of power into themselves by getting out there." He offered to teach street people how to move through snow and storms in the mountains.

Poet Gary Snyder stressed our responsibility to all other species we share the spaceride with. "Each of them," he said, "is on his own trip through millions of years and may have some unknown future evolution we have no business interfering with."

Snyder said we must "recover the knowledge of our relationship to nature" through which "nature becomes the supernatural." He called for establishment of an "Earth People's Park because nations and corporations are not going to do anything because it calls for renunciation instead of profit and growth."

He said the Soviet Union, China, Amerika and Europe are all equally culpable.

Of the Amerikan scene he said "the materialistic, exploitative, white-western mentality swept across the continent east to west destroying the passenger pigeon, the bison, the Indian and the topsoil till finally it came right up to the Pacific and polluted the offshore waters there.

“Now it is time for us symbolically to become Indians—people of this land—and take Amerika back from West to East. People’s Park is the first little piece of liberated territory in Amerika and I hope we keep going and take the whole thing.”

Poet Lew Welch said: “My goddess is Mt. Tamalpais and I sit on the rocks of her slopes and ask her questions and she gives me answers...the last cliff on the continent...This Is the Last Place...There is Nowhere Else to Go...There is Nowhere Else We Need to Go.”

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