

Last Monday I witnessed the clearing of the PALCO Marsh by the police, city and county officials. I was one of a number of clergy and others who were invited to be there as independent observers.

The living conditions of those on the marsh is difficult to describe. It was appalling to see the filth, chaos and litter--perhaps even more appalling to think of what it would be like to live in a flimsy tent on a flooded marsh in the middle of a Humboldt winter. They did not seem like happy campers to me. There was no running water, no sewage system and no lighting, let alone gas or electricity, *trash service, etc.*

I thought the police, including Chief Mills, exercised a good deal of self-restraint and treated the occupants with respect. Chief Mills spoke to many of them personally. From my view it was a successful operation and one that has been too long in coming. I commend City Council for *finally* having the courage to act in the face of lawsuits and all the other things that paralyze us nowadays when it comes to tackling homeless problems.

Now the sequel: I have since become aware that May is national officer memorial month. So, Tuesday of last week the police were being recognized for helping us sustain a just and stable community--sometimes at great cost. During the ceremony there were many expressions of appreciation for our police force. But, there were a few who booed and shouted obscenities--^{even} specifically at the police. Chief Mills took umbrage at their expressions of disrespect. So do I.

There are some who seem to respect no one except themselves--and I wonder if they even respect themselves. Those who think the police are disgusting only need to look at real-time examples of all-out anarchy in order to wake up and smell the coffee. So, what happens when laws and peace officers are pulled back? It's not pretty! Here is my fantastical solution for the people shouting expletives at the men and women in blue. The shouters should visit southern Sudan, where there is no law and little order--genocide is the rule. They should go live in Latin America, where police so often take bribes that they are mistrusted as much as the drug lords. *or* They should go back in time and see the walled city of Kowloon outside Hong Kong; it provided a glaring example of life without law and order. The Walled City was a hideous den of violence and disrepair: a place where the law of club and fang prevailed, prostitution reigned, and opium dens compounded human misery. In sum, anarchy is what we have without a police force, and anarchy does not ^{bring} freedom, it feeds the fires of chaos and despair.

Eureka's police force is not perfect. But they are working hard at becoming better, and they are vital to the peace and prosperity of our city. Hurling insults at a peaceful assembly which honors the ~~peace~~ officers slain in the line of duty-- reveals the mean side of the human spirit, a meanness which makes the police ~~needed in the first place.~~ ^{day by day,} *necessary for civic tranquility in the first place.*

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment