

Governor Atiyeh

March 23, 1982

Bob Oliver

The Dalles Meeting

On March 22, Bob Montgomery and I met in The Dalles with the three commissioners of Wasco County (Judge Rick Cantrell, Virgil Ellett and Jim Comini). Bernie Smith, district attorney, was on vacation and was represented by his deputy, Joe Larkin. Various news media persons were there, and about 20 local residents -- including two from the City of Antelope. Also present in the capacity of an observer was John Sheffner (spelling uncertain), a follower of the Bhagwan. (Bob Davis told me the other day that he and Sheila Silverman are married.)

Over the weekend, Judge Cantrell told me this was not to be a meeting between the Bhagwan's followers and local officials, as I had understood. The locals wanted a chance to communicate their concerns about the situation to the Governor. I do not know whether I misunderstood Judge Cantrell's statement of the purpose last week, or whether politics got shuffled around in the courthouse over the weekend. Anyway, on Sunday, after having talked to Cantrell, I told Davis of these conversations. He reaffirmed an earlier decision that it would not be productive for him to be present at a meeting where he would not be allowed to speak. I told him I agreed the meeting had little chance of being productive -- but having met previously with Davis and his clients, I did not feel I could decline to meet with the local officials.

The commissioners seemed in accord that the followers of the Rajneesh keep their word, keep open communications, etc. The individuals claiming to represent Antelope said, "They don't know the meaning of truth," and have sinister motives. Commissioner Comini commented that the newcomers "move too quickly," and would have much less trouble if they gave people time to accommodate to what is going on. (He is the one who voted against holding an election to incorporate Rajneeshpuram.)

When Commissioner Ellett observed he had been to the Big Muddy Ranch and they seemed to be doing a good job of developing things out there and increasing productivity of the land, one of the representatives from Antelope began to curse and swear, and left the room shouting, "That attitude is what is wrong around here!" (Judge Cantrell told me after the meeting that the individual has the hottest head in Antelope, and if anybody organizes trouble it may be him.)

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John was given an opportunity to provide factual information. He said by the year 2000, it is projected that there will be between 2,000 and 3,000 persons living in Rajneeshpuram. He said there currently are 273 individuals residing there, of whom about 150 are registered voters. He said he could not be certain, but he suspected all of them would vote for incorporation at the election on May 18. He once again denied that he and his associates plan to infiltrate Antelope to influence outcome of the disincorporation election scheduled for April 15.

A public hearing is scheduled on April 7 for a permit with respect to the July religious festival. John said about 3,000 people are expected, but there could be more. They will be housed in tents. Under state law, Wasco County has authority to regulate outdoor mass gatherings, subject to appeal to the courts.

Ed Sullivan has been hired by the group as its counsel for land-use proceedings.

The latter part of the meeting found Bob Montgomery and I responding to various questions from the commissioners on unrelated subjects. The commissioners expressed concern that the county is receiving less by way of receipts from traffic citations, and I told them of your struggle to maintain the State Police budget. Bob was asked questions about several pending applications for grants of interest to the county.

When the meeting adjourned, I was approached by the Antelope representative who had remained, Don Smith. He is the brother of Earl Smith, a member of the State Board of Agriculture. He said he wanted Bob and me to come and meet with the Antelope residents to hear their side of the story. I told him I thought that had been made rather clear in the course of this meeting, but we would take it under consideration. John repeated his invitation that I come visit the Big Muddy Ranch, adding the new argument that it was only fair, since I had gone to The Dalles to meet with local officials.

Finally, on the way out of the meeting room I was met by a gentleman named O'Brian from Dufur, who told me to convey to you his appreciation for solving his problem. He said you would know what he was talking about, and I hope you do. Candice Coover, your co-chairman for Wasco County, asked me to tell you that she thought your speech at Celilo was wonderful.

cc: Gerry Thompson
Denny Miles
Paul Phillips
John Williams