



STATE OF OREGON

INTEROFFICE MEMO

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TO: Governor Atiyeh

DATE: March 23, 1983

FROM: Bob Oliver

SUBJECT: Rajneeshpuram

Over the weekend of March 19 and 20, my wife and I were in Central Oregon visiting Rajneeshpuram. This was by prior invitation of Swami Prem Jayananda (formerly John Sheffner, who was active in New York and San Francisco international banking circles). He is President of the Rajneesh Investment Corporation, and husband of Sheela. He had given assurances that our visit would be treated simply as that of sightseers, that it would not be publicized, and that serious official business would not be discussed. However, I advised Jayananda my job is full-time, and in fairness he should be aware that whatever I saw or heard might be reported to my employer.

As I indicated during staff meeting on March 21, I believe there are two issues involved in evaluation of the Central Oregon situation. The first concerns application of land-use planning principles -- what is the group actually doing as it affects pre-resident individuals of the area, and the environment? Second, what is the character of the group?

Rajneeshpuram the City.

I am not an expert in land-use planning or relevant laws, so far as procedural requirements are concerned. My ignorance allows me to stand back and assume (perhaps naively, but not facetiously) that the purpose of land-use planning is to facilitate orderly development of land in such a way as to achieve optimal use of its natural resources and esthetic characteristics, all looking toward a legacy for coming generations.

Prior to two years ago, the Big Muddy Ranch had been used for the grazing of cattle and sheep. A succession of owners had found it economically unprofitable for such operations -- whether through their lack of expertise, or other conditions, I cannot say; but it was overgrazed, and was entering a phase of destructive erosion. Prior owners apparently were happy to dump it at a price that enabled them to get away with little more than they had put into it.

Access to Rajneeshpuram is not easy. One first drives from US 97 more than 10 miles on a narrow, winding road to Antelope; then another 12 miles on a well-maintained but unpaved, narrow and winding road to the community. The countryside along the way is rocky, supporting sagebrush and a few junipers.

Grass is sparse. Crossing into Rajneesh property, things looked much the same except there is a green carpet of grass coming up, even beginning to smooth out the criss-crossing cattle paths running along the slopes. The transition is striking (Followers of the Bhagwan do not eat meat. They have some dairy cattle but are not using the vast bulk of their lands for grazing at this time.)

Coming down into the valley of the Big Muddy, one sees an impressive array of structures spaced for several miles along the road. I took numerous pictures of these individual structures, but none will capture the panorama of intensive development. Nearly all the residences are smaller "Aframes" set up along the hillsides -- the bottomland is mostly under cultivation. Expensive construction equipment is much in evidence. There are machine shops, warehouses, a furniture factory, a landing-strip with two planes ("Air Rajneesh"), a large cafeteria, a community hall, and several office structures. Toward the east is an enormous building used to house the festival last summer, which is intended to be turned into a greenhouse after the festival coming up next July. There are about a dozen other, smaller greenhouses smaller only by comparison with the big one. Further to the east there is a large dairy barn, and additional facilities for raising poultry (the Bhagwan allows his followers to eat eggs and consume milk).

In the area of the original ranch house, there are trailers set up and used as a temporary City Hall, Post Office, Planning Department, Geological Analysis Laboratory, auto repair shops, etc. Jayananda and Sheela live in a luxurious residence nearby made up of several large trailers. The Bhagwan himself lives in a similar facility on a hillside nearby -- the area around his residence is magnificently landscaped and is staffed, in addition to several gardeners, by a flock of peacocks.

We were shown through some of the business offices. As you would expect, the men and women working there have the very latest in computerized office equipment. Knowing a little about such things, I have no trouble accepting the assertion that 10 people using this equipment can do the same amount of "paper work" for which 100 people are required in more conventional offices. Although we were not told so specifically, I suspect this is the headquarters of their world organization -- the repository for membership information, financial transactions, publication distribution, etc.

We visited the clinic, which is run by Puja. She is a licensed nurse-practitioner. (In Oregon, this means she can perform some of the functions of a physician -- within limits, she can diagnose illnesses and write prescriptions.) Three Oregon-licensed physicians, one licensed chiropractor and two registered

accupuncturists also reside in the community. They have regular office hours in the clinic, and are available on-call around the clock. Persons having more serious illnesses or injuries requiring hospitalization are flown to Redmond -- the clinic has no in-patient beds. Judy, who is familiar with such matters, says the equipment is the latest and best, and it is her opinion that any Oregon hospital would be anxious to hire someone of Puja's training and skill.

In the greenhouses, seedlings are raised for transplantation outdoors (or for consumption as sprouts). Each greenhouse has a double-thickness of plastic, and its own heating system.

The dairy barn is incredibly clean, and we did not see a single fly. I am not qualified to assess agricultural equipment, but the milking machinery and facilities for pasteurization were impressive. Each cow is individually tagged, and appropriate mixtures of feed are delivered to it. The chicken yard also is clean, and there is a wide variety of fowl used for egg-production and experimental breeding. (The flocks include a pair of emus, a huge bird like an ostrich. I thought they were extinct, but obviously they are not!)

The first sheep had been delivered a few days before. They are to be used for wool production at some time in the future. There was talk of spinning the wool and weaving on the ranch for boutique sale.

The community's sewerage system is under construction. They have one lagoon in use, and another, larger lagoon in progress. The Health Division and DEQ have approved all the work, which was designed by resident engineers and constructed by resident labor. (There are members of the community who are registered professional engineers.)

The city is patrolled by a "peace force" of several officers. Two are graduates of the Police Academy at Monmouth, and three more are scheduled to attend the next course. The two whom we met -- one male, the other female -- wore badges and were armed, and looked like ordinary policemen except for the (red) color of their uniforms. They discussed their duties in professional terms. They claim their work consists mostly of giving directions to motorists passing through the property on the county road, and encouraging hostile visitors to move on. They claim they have no occasion to provide services to residents of the community (although Jayananda, at another time and place that day, remarked that the peace officers sometimes intervene to calm domestic quarrels).

All things considered, I would say Rajneeshpuram is a clean, orderly, prosperous community. In physical terms, it is oriented primarily toward rural and agricultural pursuits. Obviously,

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a lot of other business goes on which could just as well be transacted in downtown Portland. This may violate strict application of land-use principles, but in my opinion it is unrealistic to argue these business activities are harming the quality of the area. A poet might say they are "making the desert bloom." One must recognize that many can argue persuasively the desert should not be made to bloom -- any more than the wild coast of Oregon should be lined with resorts. The thought that comes to my mind right now, is that anybody has to take a great deal of time and go to considerable trouble, journeying far out in the boondocks, to be offended by activities at Rajneeshpuram.

Rajneeshpuram the Community.

Having been favorably impressed by developmental and conservation activities on the old Big Muddy property, I came away with a distinctly more negative impressions about the social dynamics of the group. I had told Jayananda that Judy and I are not philosophical people, so neither he nor anyone else tried to proselytize us. I cannot claim to have any deep understanding of what the Bhagwan's philosophy is, or how it is perceived by his followers (if, in fact, all perceive it the say way).

In this connection, Jayananda and Sheela told us the followers of the Bhagwan all think with one mind, and strive in unison to achieve a more complete understanding of their Master's enlightenment. We were assured there were not disciplinary problems involving members of the group. Nevertheless, on page 5 of the Rajneesh Foundation International Newsletter dated March 15, 1983, there is a "message to all "sannyasins" (copy attached) indicating the existence of factionalism -- warning faithful followers of the Bhagwan not to associate with "a few people, who had been hanging around without growing at all," and who are referred to in the notice as "ghosts."

Hardly for a moment during our visit were we without the escort of some senior member of the group. If one was called away, another suddenly appeared as if from nowhere. To the best of my recollection, we were alone on an individual basis only with Jayananda; Sheela; Swami Krishma Deva, the Mayor of Rajneeshpuram; Puja, the nurse-practioner; and a woman whose name I forget, who is Mayor of Antelope. There was no opportunity to converse with any of the hundreds of other residents unless at least one of these senior members was within earshot.

Although followers of the Bhagwan describe themselves as living "communally," it became quickly apparent that their life-style is not according to Marxist traditions. Marx taught that in an ideal community each will give according to his or her abilities, and each will receive according to his or her needs.

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The result, he declared, will be disappearance of all social classes. There are distinct social classes in Rajneeshpuram.

At the top of the heap is the Bhagwan himself. (In their publications, his followers capitalize the pronoun and would write, "The Bhagwan Himself.") His residence, as described earlier in this memorandum, is luxurious and includes such amenities as a heated, indoor swimming pool and a completely equipped medical clinic with X-ray. Everyone has heard about his automobiles. He goes for daily rides, and is adored by people lining the roads. Nevertheless, he remains a shadowy figure -- having contact with the group only through Sheela.

We were told the Bhagwan does not deign to concern himself with business matters involving Rajneeshpuram, but thinks solely about spiritual matters. It is claimed that he stopped speaking publicly or publishing about two or three years ago, and no one knows whether he will become communicative again. He still communicates on some matters, however. As we were being driven around the city by Jayananda and Sheela, Sheela was contacted on their radio. (Naturally, the group has an excellent communications system -- I recall Major Watson telling me last year that their radios are more sophisticated than those of the State Police.) At any rate, Sheela was summoned to meet the Bhagwan as he returned from his daily drive. Jayananda nearly drove the car off the road in his haste to be there, and Sheela literally leaped out of the car to run over and speak with the Bhagwan. We learned later, in a tangential manner, that the Bhagwan had changed his mind about which car he wanted to purchase next.

We were told the Bhagwan's health forced him to leave India, and he came to Central Oregon so that he could be away from pollution and consume more natural foods. Based on what they said, and numerous subjective impressions including his lapse into silence, Judy has hypothesized that the Bhagwan may have "slipped a cog" -- and that his isolation and silence is encouraged by his senior followers to preserve his image as a Great Master. On the other hand, Bob Davis met with the Bhagwan a few months ago when preparing to terminate his employment. Bob says the Bhagwan is one of the best-read and most articulate individuals he ever met, although quite naive about worldly matters going on around him.

Sheela appears to be the conduit for spiritual leadership of the group. She conveys to others whatever messages the Bhagwan cares to utter. She claims to be of East Indian birth -- her speech is that of a person who has learned all the rules of English grammar well, but thinks in some other language and has to translate when speaking. It is obvious she enjoys luxurious living. Judy, who is a good judge of expensive

household items as well as expensive medical equipment, says the table settings, furniture and other trappings in Sheela's residence are top quality. There were three or four people preparing the food and serving the table when we ate. They were not exactly servile, but their attentiveness was almost embarrassing. Although meat was not in evidence, the food otherwise was of gourmet quality and the wine was first-rate. Shoes and smoking are not allowed indoors, but there is a carpeted porch immediately adjacent, provided with ashtrays for barefoot smokers. Others sharing the table included a gentleman whose name I forget (East Indian names do not stick easily), now vice-president of Rajneesh Investment Corporation and concerned with property acquisition and management; the Mayor of Antelope; a Soviet emigre who manages their data information and computer systems; a German who is in charge of their communications network; Swami Krishna Deva ("K.D."), Mayor of Rajneeshpuram; and Puja, the nurse-practitioner.

The table conversation went on pretty much as if Judy and I were not present, and involved such matters as the splicing of a telephone cable just inside the city limits, whether there should be a state lottery in Oregon, etc. It was the same sort of urbane and sophisticated table conversation one might hear at the Arlington Club, except that women were permitted to participate. Sheela sat at the head of the table, and clearly was the subject of special deference. Most of the time she was inclined to let the conversation wander from one subject to another, with only an occasional comment. Once or twice she apparently grew bored and brought up something else, and whatever was under discussion instantly was dropped and the others chimed in on the subject addressed by her.

Jayananda was identified earlier in this memoranda. He and Sheela were married two years ago. From other sources I have heard he is the financial expert of the community, and is known to be a frequent visitor to Zurich. He embraced the Bhagwan's teachings about six years ago. We had the impression that while he is adept at restating the Bhagwan's general philosophies, he is not much into spiritual matters and occupies himself as a vice president for operations.

Jayananda and Sheela showed us their office/bedroom. The room had one of the omnipresent portraits of the Bhagwan on its wall, but otherwise there was no sign of religious or philosophical materials. His desk had a copy of The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Barron's, and a couple of foreign-language journals. Behind his desk, of course, was a computer terminal -- I would be fascinated to know what informational resources he can access through it. Sheela claims to prefer working on the floor, and part of the carpet was occupied by piles of pamphlets, proof-galleys, etc.

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Within their residence were about two dozen other individuals -- some of them cooks and servers, but the majority involved in administrative activities which were not explained to us. Telephones were everywhere, and there was a two-way radio just off the living room.

At some point during the early stages of our visit, I had expressed an interest in the geological formations of the valley. (I started college as a geology major prior to seduction by the legal profession, and for two decades Oregon geology has been a hobby. I suppose I can claim to be a well-informed layman on the subject.) The city geologist, Ritan, suddenly appeared out of nowhere. He is a professional geologist who joined the movement in Australia. For months he has been conducting exploratory drilling as part of a survey of the ranch's water resources, and claims to have found vast and unsuspected aquifers. He says the successful wells have been capped for future use, all in accordance with state law (I have no reason to doubt this is accurate). In his spare time, Ritan has been collecting fossils, and some of his specimens are impressive. He speaks with authority about Miocene fauna and Clarno strata. However, he apparently is an individual who, for some reason or other, is not authorized to speak privately with outsiders. Our attention was distracted to some other subject, and a few moments later Ritan and his specimens had disappeared as completely as if they had never been there!

Then, and on some other occasions, Judy and I had the creepy feeling that our hosts were sorcerors who conjured the presence of interesting people to entertain us for a period, then whisked them away as soon as our heads were turned momentarily.

Sheela and Jayananda conducted us on a tour of the ranch -- in a Mercedes-Benz. I have described most of what we saw earlier in this memorandum. Each work program appears to be under the leadership of a "coordinator", who oversees a varying number of individuals depending on the activity. Jayananda seemed intimately familiar with each operation and the coordinators; Sheela appeared to be sight-seeing as much as we -- her only expressed concern was that everything be "tidy." At one place -- the greenhouses, I believe -- the coordinator was not present when we arrived, and I thought I detected a bit of irritation in Jayananda's voice when he insisted that he be sought. The coordinator appeared shortly thereafter, and conducted us on the tour. Even then, we did not have an opportunity to speak privately with him, much less the numerous workers in the facility. As everywhere they appeared "happy, happy, happy." When we asked questions -- always in the presence of Jayananda or Sheela -- we did not detect fear on the part of those with whom we spoke but I sensed a degree of nervousness on many occasions.

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All the residents, except for the senior members, eat communally in a large cafeteria and dining hall. We toured the kitchen, which is the cleanest I ever saw. (As a former Administrator of the Health Division, I would give it a double-A rating, if such existed.) Because of their custom of eating in common, there is no need for kitchen and dining facilities in the individual residences.

We were taken by the school. As you know, State Board of Education standards for private schools are "loose" at best. There were perhaps two dozen children of kindergarten or primary age. The school house, like everything else on the ranch, is immaculately clean. There were no classes in progress at the time. We were told middle-and high-schoolers have jobs part of the day, and attend school the rest. A question about graduation requirements or equivalencies evoked an answer that glided off into incomprehensibility. I believe one can say objectively and impartially that formal education, in the conventional sense, does not have a high priority among followers of the Bhagwan -- even though the ones with whom we spoke obviously were well-educated.

This brings up another point, which did not jell in our minds until we had left. Although the overwhelming majority of the residents of Rajneeshpuram are young men and women under 40, there is a virtual absence of small children -- the youngest we saw was a toddler, perhaps 18 months of age. Judy remarked that among all the hundreds of young women around and about, she did not observe a single one who appeared pregnant. Though it is not uncommon to see couples embracing and being affectionate almost anywhere within the community, and the Bhagwan's teachings do not place a premium on chastity, children do not seem to be a part of the plan.

The end of the tour came with a visit to the newly opened "disco." The facility has a beer-and-wine license from OLCC, and a full-service application is pending. One of the peace officers was stationed at the door. It could have been a disco anywhere else, except the music was not quite so loud and everybody was dressed in red. A rock band performed what I presume to be standard works (I am not a rock fan myself), but ended with a composition of their own -- the dancers gyrate to a monotonous repetition of the lyrics, "Yes, Bhagwan, Yes! Yes, Bhagwan, Yes! Yes, Bhagwan, Yes!", and so on. We were told that persons attending the disco are expected to limit themselves to two beers or glasses of wine -- that occasionally some lose count, but Rajneesh taxis stand by to be summoned by the management and drive the confused customer back to his or her residence, even assisting them to bed.

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There are shops in the main part of the city where outsiders can buy clothing, souvenirs, books, etc. -- Visa and Mastercharge accepted. Prices are comparable to those in tourist shops elsewhere. For residents, so far as food, clothing and other necessities are concerned, there is no medium of exchange (there is no cash register in the cafeteria, for example). We asked Jayananda how they might deal with a situation where a resident is perceived not to be putting out his or her fair share of work, but continues to consume food and expect other perquisites of membership. Jayananda said attempts are made to counsel these individuals, and attempts are made to assign them to jobs more suited to their inclinations and talents -- unless they are disabled because of age or illness, in which case the community will assume responsibility. I posed the problem of an individual who gains residency through deceit and turns out to be nothing more than a freeloader. Jayananda was somewhat rambling in his answer -- alleging this simply didn't happen, that in such a case the individual would not feel at home and would be "spun out" of the community. (With respect to this and other occasions, sometimes our specific questions received non-specific responses. Judy says she has heard the same thing from me sometimes when I am asked a question on a political issue which I prefer not to answer. She says my response is articulate and coherent, and usually seems to address the proponent of the question logically and to his satisfaction. Only later, she says, does she realize I really have said nothing of substance, and the questioner has received no useful information whatever. Come to think of it, I suppose I do that on occasion -- and I believe the same technique was frequently used by our hosts at Rajneeshpuram.)

As I said at staff on Monday, it is not my concern if people want to donate their labor to some cause which appeals to them. Though I do not feel drawn to the monastic way of life, I do not find fault with the Benedictine monks at Mt. Angel; and though I am not attracted to the Bhagwan's philosophy, it is equally hard to find fault with those who are. Some of them have been on other "trips" -- we heard references to So-and-so, who had "been through scientology"; and Thus-and-such, who had "tried EST" or other disciplines. Perhaps these remarks were intended to have us conclude those other schools and practices certainly must lack merit, because such intelligent individuals had tried them and found them wanting. We believe a different conclusion can be drawn -- the individuals are of a type one encounters from time to time among highly educated people, who constantly are searching for the meaning of themselves and the purpose of their existence, and who regularly attend encounter groups, retreats, etc. seeking to "find themselves." On its face, the Rajneeshpuram society

offers escape from the pressures of the world they find troublesome; an escape from intellectual doubts, through acceptance of the Bhagwan's teachings (he still lives and has a spokesperson, so there has not yet been an opportunity for emergence of sects, heresies, schisms, etc.); security approaching that of the womb (there is always someone around to assign tasks, make decisions, take care of one's daily needs); and continued enjoyment of comforts and luxuries (the A-frame cabins are electrically heated, the dining hall is clean and nourishing food is served, and workers have the best of tools, whether earth-movers or word-processers).

In chatting about his break with the group, Bob Davis told me he sensed -- without being able to define -- an undercurrent of potentially suicidal thought among those with whom he spoke. We cannot say we sensed this in any degree among the senior members -- all of whom appear to be pragmatic, rational individuals (they do not sing and leap in the air when the Bhagwan drives by). I am not so sure what might happen among the hundreds of workers, however, if the Bhagwan and the senior members took a notion to harm themselves.

Additionally, if some confrontation with another group arose, I am confident the Bhagwan's followers would not provoke violence -- but turning the other cheek is not part of the Bhagwan's teachings.

The dynamics of this group are complex, and I am not certain anyone can understand them fully without being a member of the group -- and a member of the senior group, at that. My general conclusion is the group consists of hundreds of young idealists who have taken up the movement as a means of escaping troubled lives -- and who can say they are not better off for it? They are led by a very small group of brilliant, highly competent and apparently stable individuals who profess obedience to the Bhagwan's teachings, but do not seem very excited about philosophy as compared with their preoccupation over running the movement and building a city. Your guess as to the nature of their individual and collective motives is as good as anybody's, in my opinion.

Earlier, I referred to the "happy, happy, happy" demeanor of everyone we saw. When we left the ranch and began to exchange impressions, we agreed this prevailing attitude was becoming depressing after only a few hours of exposure. We agreed it lacked spontaneity -- it was as if there was a general agreement to chop off half the range of normal human emotions. Occasional spells of irritation, grouchiness and being down-in-the-dumps makes all the more meaningful those occasions when we really are prompted to be joyous.