

Reader in Utah comments on police raid

31 August 2005

To the editor:

On August 20 in Utah County, Utah (40 miles south of Salt Lake City) an event occurred indicative of a nation on the verge of becoming a police state. It was on this night at 11:30 p.m. that 90 members of the Utah County police department raided a “Rave” taking place on private land in Spanish Fork Canyon. Police raiding the party looked more like National Guard than local police, equipped with Kevlar vests, army fatigues and automatic weapons.

Conflicting stories have emerged in the ongoing controversy. Utah County claims that the organizers of the event had not obtained a “mass gathering permit” which is required if said event will have more than 250 attendees and will last longer than 12 consecutive hours. With this in mind, Utah County placed undercover officers inside the party to verify that more than 250 attendees arrived, at which point they decided to shut the party down.

Not surprisingly, the organizers claim they received all necessary permits, including having licensed EMTs (Emergency medical technicians) on the scene as well as outdoor restrooms for all party-goers. As of this writing legal proceedings are under way to resolve the dispute, but there is a greater underlying issue here. What about this situation justified the large reaction from the Utah County police department?

Utah is a relatively quiet American state, with very low crime rates and very little resistance to police actions. During the course of this year many parties in Utah County have met with police resistance. Whatever the legal stance of the department may be, a story in the local *Salt Lake City Tribune* may be more telling:

“Police in Utah County have monitored several raves this summer and have grown increasingly concerned about their legality and safety, Gilbert said. When detectives got word that another party was planned for Saturday, they set to work to make sure they got their point across that such activity was not welcome in their

area.”

The activity that they mention is quite severe, according to their accounts. Throughout the article it is mentioned that sexual assaults occur at these parties as well as drug use. Raves are notorious for drug use. However, the sexual assault claim is relatively unsubstantiated. In either event, the actions taken by the police department during the raid, as well as the appearance of the officers during the raid, do indicate the department’s desire to get “their point across.”

Whatever legal justification is found for the actions of Utah County, what does this situation say about the state of our nation? In this video you can see the full attire of the officers on the scene. This paints the picture as more of a battlefield than a peaceful gathering. Police can be heard commanding attendees to leave and in the background police dogs can be heard barking. The woman being seen tackled in the interview claims she was attacked for asking why they had to leave.

The full truth about the situation at this time cannot be determined. However, a simple analysis of the situation leads to many questions that need to be answered. Utah County arrested one man for possession of a firearm. This man happened to be the son of the land owner. That being said, what was the justification for the firepower that was on display during the course of this raid? Should intimidation be the primary means of law enforcement in this day and age? It is doubtful that the officers were concerned with their personal safety. These events always have tight security, and rarely is a weapon even present. From the looks of these officers, they were expecting a war.

JH

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