

BIKE PRIDE: A Manifesto

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Riding a borrowed three-speed bicycle around Eugene, Oregon I felt like an outlaw. My guide, the wife of a local surgeon led me through dismal warehouse-lined back streets and down alleyways, we traversed one-way streets in the wrong direction, and frequently rode on the sidewalk.

Surprisingly we were not alone in doing this. There seemed thousands of our fellow outlaws who followed the same devious paths. The ten-speeders seemed a little bolder about using the main streets. Still Eugene is a comparatively good bike town compared to San Francisco or New York City. Apart from an occasional difficult-to-reach oasis such as Central Park or Golden Gate Park, these cities treat a cyclist as a non-person; his presence is ignored by police and motorists.

His one objective is survival and if this means going through a red light or up a one-way street against traffic, that is okay. No one will mind because the laws are really made for automobiles and pedestrians. Cyclists who survive under these conditions are heroes. Whether they should be the models for the bike movement is another matter.

Coming from Davis, California, a mecca for cyclists, this anarchic situation appalls me. I know there is a better alternative. Heroes can survive and perhaps thrive on journeys fraught with danger, excitement, and thrills. But I personally want to see bike transportation available for ordinary mortals too—children on their way to school, housewives going to the supermarket, and workers on their way to jobs. The root questions are political. They involve the rights of the cyclist *vis-a-vis* other competitors for circulation space. Railroads require tracks, automobiles require roads and traffic signals, and pedestrians require sidewalks. The city and state are willing to exercise eminent domain to obtain and maintain these.

None of this was accomplished easily, except perhaps the railroad right-of-ways in the American West where the protests of the displaced native Americans were ignored. Any roadway plan of the last 50 years has aroused some community objections. There will always be people whose short-run vital interests will be adversely affected by a proposed change. If I have a gas station on road A, I don't want to see a freeway built at B. If I have a home at D, I don't want to see a sanitary landfill located nearby. We have an adversary system where the needs of the various interested parties are resolved in a political arena.

The bikeway system in Davis, California did not appear by magic or by the overwhelming good will of government officials. Rather there were city councilmen and merchants who opposed bikeway development at the outset. The bike was considered old-fashioned, bad for business, and, most of all, inimical to the interests of automobile drivers. Citizens concerned about the rights of cyclists collected petitions declaring that Davis should have a transportation policy which included the bicycle as a regular means of transportation. A sizeable number of registered voters signed this petition. A city council election was held in which the pro-bicycle candidates defeated the anti-bicycle candidates.

The police authorities were also skeptical about bikes at the onset. Special ordinances and enforcement problems were involved. These have been largely resolved and the police department is enthusiastically behind bicycles. One local policeman spends most of his time on bicycle matters and visits to schools to conduct rider education classes. There are also two full-time bicycle aides in the police department whose salaries are paid out of bicycle registration fees. Like any political effort, this was not accomplished easily; it required effort and commitment, and it occasionally aroused controversy.

As a contrast let me mention my visit to Christchurch, New Zealand which used to be known as the Copenhagen of the Pacific because of the prevalence of bicycles. This was 10 years ago but it is hardly the situation now. In 1970 when I spoke to the Christchurch traffic control people, I was surprised to find that the bicycle was regarded as a nuisance and was likely to be zoned out of the business district in the near future.

I tried to explain what was happening in major American cities and I think I saw some lights flashing on. Perhaps Christchurch can avoid some of the errors of other cities which came under the hegemony of the automobile. The lessons of Christchurch are very clear. *Like any other form of transportation*, the bicycle has its own requirements. When these are ignored, the bicycle will be squeezed out by the automobile in the com-

petition for available space.

I feel strongly that cyclists must organize and act politically to see that their rights are respected. I pay taxes, in fact I pay more state taxes than the governor of my state who vetoed the bikeway bill that was passed by both houses of the legislature, and I would like to see my rights respected. Although I understand how their feelings developed, I am appalled of the attitudes of many older bike people. These are the heroes I mentioned earlier. They have learned to adapt themselves to roadways designed for automobiles and trucks. They are willing to squeeze themselves between parked cars and moving cars, to find little-used back streets and alleyways.

Personally I don't want a bike route that avoids all the places that I want to visit. I do want the city to provide bike lanes for me just as it provides traffic lanes for automobiles. I can prove that my vehicle is non-polluting, quiet, requires minimum space for parking, is good exercise, and so on. Yet it is not enough to demonstrate the positive values of bicycle transportation. We must also develop a *political constituency* in favor of bicycles. Rapid transit may be desirable and necessary in Los Angeles, but until the citizens there want it and organize for it, they are not going to get it. In every city there is a history of parking spaces being taken for additional automobile lanes, tow away zones, and express lanes, to create bus stops and taxi stands, and two-way streets converted to one-way streets over the protests of local merchants and homeowners. Despite the protests these steps were taken in the interests of the total community. Essentially the cyclist's struggle is political. His or her main opponents in the competition for available space is the automobile. It is not easy to take a traffic lane away from automobiles and give it to cyclists as a "bikes only" lane, but we have done it in Davis. It is not easy to take away a parking lane from local homeowners, but we have done it in Davis. It is not easy to close a street to through automobile traffic, but we have done it in Davis.

In each case there were protests from the people affected, but we managed to do it because we had sufficient support from cyclists. While I don't like to compel someone to walk across the street to reach his parked car, I don't like dodging between parked and moving automobiles on my bicycle and I want my children to have a safe bicycle route to school. The homeowner has his preferences and I have mine, and I want the city authorities to respect us both. I am not satisfied with the leavings at the table.

Bike pride means that the cyclist looks upon himself and his vehicle as legitimate and worthy components of society. He says out loud what he has

always said within the family, "Bikes are beautiful." He campaigns, petitions, and lobbies to get legislation that will support bike riding. The hegemony of the automobile was not a matter of divine right. Rather it was a matter of political struggle against the entrenched interests of draymen, teamsters, and pedestrians. The same political power that created the roadway system can be used to change it. When traffic congestion into San Francisco became excessive, subsidies were given to ferries from Sausalito and other bay cities. A lane on the Bay Bridge was set aside for buses. Yes, it was taken from cars and given to buses! Most cyclists will draw back from the suggestion that a bikeway could be created in a present parking lane. Automobile drivers would never tolerate the loss of those parking spaces! They wouldn't like it, it is true, but in most cities there are streets where parking is prohibited during the day and the local merchants and residents didn't like it either, but they accepted it.

If we are going to create a viable network of bikeways, we are going to have to wrest some asphalt away from the automobile. Detroit won't like it, automobile clubs won't like it, and many local residents won't like it. We should not have any illusions about this. On the other hand, we cannot simply accept the leavings of the automobile if a satisfactory system of bikeways is to develop. It may be easier in the short run for cyclists to lobby for brand new bicycle trails rather than to try to wrest a parking lane from the automobiles, but this is unsatisfactory from an ecological standpoint. There seems too much asphalt already without adding new pressures for more of it. I agree that the automobile lobby is more powerful than the wilderness lobby, and therefore from a short-range tactical standpoint it may be easier to advocate new paved bike trails in parks and along riverbanks than to take away a lane from automobiles, but in the long run the bicycle movement will lose its soul if it does this. Young people who are conscious of the ecological aspects of bike riding are not likely to look with favor upon this kind of expediency.

I feel that all these are very practical matters. I am not a sentimentalist talking about the good old days. I am voter, a taxpayer, a father of three children who ride bikes to school, and a person who rides his bike to his office every day. I want to see my rights and those of my fellow cyclists respected in transportation planning. I do not intend to remain humble and silent, waiting until that golden day when Detroit becomes interested in my plight. I have allies at Huffy and Schwinn, and in the Sierra Club, and in Sacramento and in Washington. Cyclists of America, organize!