

Allen Ginsberg

By DAVID McCAUGHNA
Excalibur Staff

Allen Ginsberg, who has been described as "mystic, original, beatnik, political protester, and paterfamilias for every yearning youth" descended upon York last Thursday.

The poet and social commentator was besieged throughout his day at York by Fine Arts groupies, open-mouth heroworshippers, and downtown "weirdos". One professor's date attending the dinner party given Ginsberg, told the Star, "One just has to be able to say one was here, doesn't one?"

But Ginsberg's visit wasn't all silliness. During the afternoon he held a press conference where he spoke on a number of issues. Ginsberg had the usual hassles with Canadian customs officials that beset many important and unorthodox U.S. visitors (remember Jerry Rubin's ordeal last year?) He began by commenting on these difficulties:

GINSBERG: Last week coming to the American customs I ran into trouble. They opened my valise and they found I had been given as a present the complete file of Logos newspaper from Montreal and the U.S. people impounded it as possibly obscene and put my whole suitcase in bond and I had to go to the customs in New York who examined it again.

So far the sum total of all this customs bureaucracy activity that I've noticed in the last week is that they're real hung up on newspapers and private writings and also inquiries about my psychological state and inquiries about whether or not I take any narcotics.

So most of their inquiries are reprehensible to the normal John Bull type distinguished citizen mentality with Canadian gentleness or even American democratic procedure, that is the examination of newspapers and the examination of private writings and notebooks. Its pretty low even for so degenerated a situation as we find ourselves in, where grown-up men, manning the border are bothering with newspapers people are carrying around and their poetry notebooks. Its silly and a waste of taxpayers' money and a waste of my time and a waste of their time.

They should be up in the north country cultivating the land instead of hanging around like parasites eating up more paper and cutting down more trees to write their duplicate forms on. They should be planting trees. I've got a piece of paper saying I can only stay in Canada for four days.

QUESTION: Is that because it's you, or the way you look?

GINSBERG: I don't know, either way it's pretty silly. I mean if it's the way I look well what can I do. Actually when I came through he said how long will you be here, and I said I'm lecturing at York University and showed him the address of York University and as soon as I did that I was taken out of line and taken into a private office and examined specially.

The cover story of lecturing at York University is absolutely no good. I don't know if York should take that to heart. Is this considered an especially freaky university? Let's get off this narcissistic border complex.

QUESTION: Do you think there's any chance that Canada will have better dope laws in the future?

GINSBERG: I don't know. Last week the headlines in the Montreal papers were all about repealing the dope laws. They're looking into it in New York state.

QUESTION: Is it going to be a question of changing the penalty?

GINSBERG: What they'll do is make it an instrument for selective repression, in other words you get a year and a \$5,000 fine for the first offence, or a suspended sentence at the discretion of the judge. And if he doesn't like the way you look or your politics and he does like a nice clean face and your Brooks Brothers father standing before him weeping, then, you know.

QUESTION: Do you see licenced depots in Canada where someone can go and buy marijuana like they can buy liquor?

GINSBERG: Ultimately if the earth survives, sure. But the planet will have to survive another 10 years. I noticed the other day its a quarter century since the pot laws began filtering to the public in tiny detail, so its taken this long and how many tens-of-thousands of people are in

jail on this continent. For any kind of public consciousness to be moved at all it might be another quarter-century. So by the year 2010. I don't know. 1995.

QUESTION: What moves the consciousness?

GINSBERG: Direct experience of the realization that the law rules the nation rather than the state of consciousness. Life for instance, says that 12-million Americans get turned on, which means that 12-million people know that there's a law that makes absolutely no sense and which is absolutely sinister in its intentions and in its application.

QUESTION: Don't you think there's a shift in emphasis now away from drugs. Drugs are being de-emphasized by political activists.

GINSBERG: Oh, they never were interested in drugs. They were never interested in personal liberty to begin with, many of the political activists are interested in enforcing their own authoritarianism.

QUESTION: What about the Yuppies?

GINSBERG: The Yuppies mixed it up and some of the SDS people mixed it up and some of the old-fashioned political activists are still giving great pompous speeches about reality.

QUESTION: But they've faded and the Yippie had come to the fore. Is that good?

GINSBERG: Well ya, I think Abbie Hoffman has more of a genius than most political activists.

QUESTION: Tom Hayden?

GINSBERG: Well, Hayden is still relatively square; still relatively un-sublime. I mean I worked with Hayden and with Hoffman at Chicago and we were able to work together. Hayden had a certain hipness at that point. He was willing to recognize the mantra as an effective political technique.

QUESTION: But there's not much to feel sublime about in the United States?

GINSBERG: Yes there is, it's not the United States, it's the planet, remember? We're on the planet, its not really on the continent. In the universe we're two-thirds out in the centre of a large galaxy which is roughly lense shaped and we're two-thirds out towards the periphery and if the solar system were just the size of an electron, the smallest particle we know of, then we would be in a lense shaped object, three-feet long and about half-a-foot wide and the nearest familiar object would be another galaxy about 16 feet away and the farthest known limit would be about 16 miles away and light would move through it at the rate of one-millimetre every hundred years. Keep that in mind.

QUESTION: Let's say that people don't feel sublime in the States now because there are certain things not to feel very sublime about.

GINSBERG: Well, the basic fact of life and death and human existence is more overwhelming.

QUESTION: What do you think about the moratorium scheduled for next week. It is subliminal?

GINSBERG: If it isn't its not going to work. as long as people feel that they're not sublimating its going to be ineffective. They'll still be victimised by the situation they're in.

QUESTION: Do you think that if a solution is reached to all these things in the United States, it won't have to be re-reached in other countries as they industrialize, and so forth?

GINSBERG: I guess if the United States come to some resolution as to how to deal with machinery as well as private greed.

QUESTION: As an example, if the United States can accommodate pot in their system ...

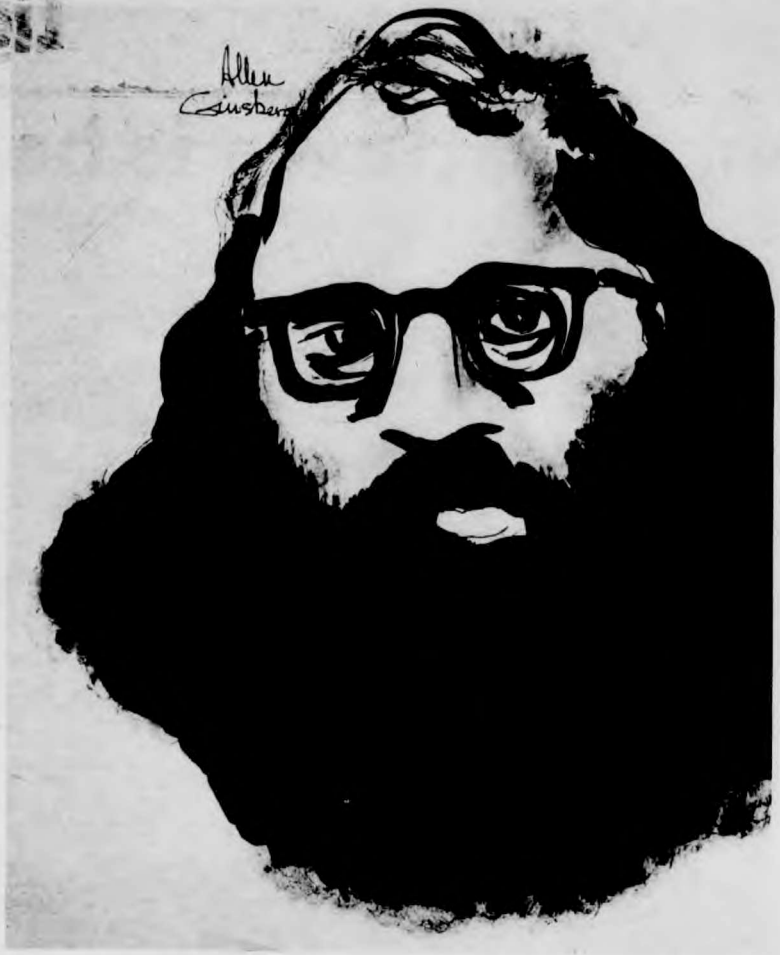
GINSBERG: There's no guarantee that things would get any better as far as the destruction of trees or human beings.

QUESTION: What about the fantastic polarization on the right and left. You almost have to be on one side, you're almost irrelevant if you're not. Where does this leave you?

GINSBERG: It's nonsense. The very terminology of saying somebody's irrelevant is he's not with this gang or that gang makes me want to vomit on the whole scene and say "Well, then let the world go up, if you have to tow the line to be relevant." Screw that.

QUESTION: That's what's happening. Thousands of people are getting involved in that kind of thinking. What are we going to be about that?

GINSBERG: I don't know. Burroughs



thinks the planet is finished.

QUESTION: That's about the third time you've spoken fatalistically about the planet in the last five minutes, now would you be a little more specific.

GINSBERG: Well, a lot of ecological specialists are worried that we have already gone into irreversible poisoning of the body of the planet in a number of ways. DDT is one heavy threat perhaps beyond control, and the accumulation of carbon wastes in the upper atmosphere which creates a shield which prevents some kinds of light from the sun, infra red, from bouncing back out and so they tend to heat the place up like a greenhouse.

There are some statistical predictions that the year 2000 will be the beginning of the irreversible greenhouse effect. Melting the polar caps. And there will be increasing starvation outside the United States from now on. I've been involved in smallscale organic farming and now that I'm getting into the 19th century technology I'm reading up on it and I'm beginning to realize that the large-scale, technological farming we've been indulging in is depleting the soil, its like putting methedrine in the soil. They use nitrogen fertilizers in the soil around where I live and kill all the worms. The Sahara was once green but was destroyed by goats grazing in it. The technology we've introduced is eating up the forests and nobody knows at what point there isn't going to be enough green beings to breathe the oxygen back out.

QUESTION: You discount the possibility that the technology that you seem to think is destroying us will also find a way out.

GINSBERG: Well, I was having a conversation with Herman Kahn the other day on precisely that and I asked him why all the technology and all the systems he was involved in were all destructive and war-like and why he wasn't concerned with ecological reconstruction and he said that he has applied for money from the interior department to do ecological reconstruction and surveying and they couldn't get money that way, the only place they would get money from was the Pentagon.

The heavy interial drag of the \$90-billion Pentagon budget in the United States is towards more and more accumulation of mechanisms of power and its very hard to reverse that. It gets slightly versed as people become more and more conscious that they're on a planet and that the planet is a breathing mama and that mama is choking of poison.

Big cities are uninhabitable. New York City certainly is. The noise pollution is too great and smog pollution prevents you from seeing the planet, air, stars.

QUESTION: Everybody knows about it. What action can be taken?

GINSBERG: Get out of the cities. Get out of the cities and learn farming and 19th century technology. Indian means, neolithic means. Getting along worshipfully with the body of the land is vital. You should have seen those customs people today. The United States customs wanted to seize a complete backing of Logos newspaper. The main preoccupation of Logos is ecological reconstruction. The official government uniformed people were trying to seize this information on reconstruction of the ecology.

QUESTION: Wouldn't you say that's ignorance?

GINSBERG: They're paid to be ignorant. I mean if they weren't ignorant they'd have to quit their job. Where would they get a job. Why don't they go north and settle the land or something? In southern California three out of our people are employed in the aerospace industry. They're paid to be interested in the aerospace industry. That's why Reagan gets to be governor.

\$90-billion is the single largest block of industry, all controlled out of the Pentagon. The second biggest block of finance is the Mafia: \$40-billion gross every year. And there's probably a corpoarte merger between the Pentagon and the Mafia at this point possibly through General Dynamics or some other defence contractors. You know it's beyond capitalism, it's some sort of state socialism.

QUESTION: You mentioned Burroughs. Do you think the death of Jack Kerouac will have any effect, I mean his life obviously effected many, what do you think his death will do?

GINSBERG: I got the impression of a movie when he died. When I saw his corpse in its coffin I suddenly felt some resentment that he had written a movie and then cut out of it.

QUESTION: How do you feel about the fact that you're a poet and yet this whole discussion has been about social issues. It seems to me that people don't read your poetry but talk about Allen Ginsberg.

GINSBERG: I did a lot of original research on politics and the legislation involving marijuana.

As a poet I got involved in shooting my mouth off in public at times when it was considered impossible to speak publicly about marijuana. People were to paranoid. So in my function as poet I began making imagery about pot at a time when pot was not considered at all. There is a very poetic nature of politics these days, its the politics of apocalypse. I think if we're going to survive, any political program will be based on the platform of biology; on the basis of biological awareness. Politics gets so apocalyptic when people are reaching the moon, I mean the politicians have gone to the moon. Everybody's mixed up, not just me.