

Mr. Davis Defends His Turf

New York Times (1923-Current file); Apr 24, 1978; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times
pg. A22

Mr. Davis Defends His Turf

Nothing touches more tender political nerves than a Parks Commissioner defending his turf. Commissioner Gordon Davis has come out for the public as well as the parks' interest by barring the "Taste of the Big Apple" celebration—a promotional restaurant bash that produces food and garbage in equal parts—from Central Park this year. He has also impounded a \$2,500 bond posted by the March of Dimes for a recent Central Park to Battery Park walkathon that left both parks inundated with trash. Neither event ever had any reason to be in the parks at all.

The same goes for a great many other events as well. Mayors and commissioners have tended to look at the annual onslaught of trampling feet as a kind of equation—two feet, one vote—and to crumble under pressure from any group except the conservationists, who are looked on as the Scrooges and spoilsports of the parks. According to Commissioner Davis, the cost of repairs caused by the overuse of park facilities for extraneous activities has become astronomical; to resod the Sheep Meadow and the Great Lawn in Central Park, for example, will require almost \$500,000. At present, these repairs cannot be done at all. But even if the money could be found, he concludes that "the whole effort might be undone by just one year of the present concentrated usage."

New York's parks are loved, and used, as they have

not been since the 19th century when they became the green "lungs" of the growing city. The green is appearing hesitantly this spring; fruit trees are dusted with pink and alabaster above eroded lawns where grass struggles to grow in impacted earth. There is abuse, as well as use, and even parks can die.

With that in mind, Commissioner Davis has made it clear that each request will be judged on its merits. He will soon face the hard decision on the proposal to let the Big Apple Circus take over Bryant Park for the summer. What is left of the classical landscape is off limits to most of the midtown community because of the sordid overflow from Times Square. What tempts the city is a crowd-drawing activity and the promise of a restoration bond, or private funds, to rehabilitate the park after the circus is over. But details of the bond and of the circus's finances and installation are unsettled. There are still doubts also about the desirability of foreclosing neighborhood use of the park over a summer. Nor would this temporary use of the park settle its future appeal, which is tied to the resolution of the social and physical problems of the 42d Street area.

A Parks Commissioner's job is clearly not an easy one, but Mr. Davis has made an excellent beginning. He may not end up as the most popular Parks Commissioner in the city's history, but he might just save the parks.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.