

New civil penalty snags shoplifters

By DOUG BUTLER
Of the Emerald

Shoplifting, a crime that boosts the cost of merchandise for stores and buyers alike, has become more costly to the shoplifter in Oregon.

In addition to a stiffer criminal penalty, the shoplifter now faces a civil penalty.

Before 1979, a student caught shoplifting for the first time could escape court by forfeiting roughly \$175 in bail, says Chuck Spinner, lawyer for the University's legal services office. Now a student caught shoplifting will pay at least \$400.

Spinner says he currently is helping a student who stole an item worth three dollars. She wound up paying about \$100 in response to a civil shoplifting demand letter and another \$300 in bail forfeiture, he says.

And she may have lost more than money. "That one mistake may make it very hard for her to continue in school," Spinner says.

The new civil shoplifting legislation, passed by the Legislature in 1979, allows stores to collect between \$100 and \$250, plus the value of the item taken, from the shoplifter. Usually a store will send several demand letters before deciding whether to pursue the claim in court.

But "an unusual part in the civil legislation" prevents stores from turning over their claims to collection agencies before the courts make a judgment, Spinner says. If a shoplifter ignores demand letters, the store must go to small claims court and sue the shoplifter. Because of economic disincentives, many stores don't pursue their claims beyond the demand-letter stage, he adds.

"If a student caught shoplifting receives a demand letter from a store, he should see an attorney prior to paying it," advises Spinner, who estimates that he sees three to five students each week on shoplifting-related matters.

Some shoplifters believe paying the civil penalty will have a positive effect on their criminal cases, Spinner says, but the criminal courts pay no attention to civil cases.

To date, Lane County's small claims court has ruled on only seven or eight civil shoplifting

cases. Although none of these cases involved the University Bookstore, the majority of student shoplifting cases come out of the bookstore, says Skip Stokes of the Eugene police department's Community Officer Patrol team.

Each week three to five shoplifters are arrested in the bookstore, according to bookstore general manager Jim Williams. The store lost more than \$37,000 to shoplifting in the book department alone last year, Williams says.

The bookstore's policy is to follow the new civil procedures, he says, although "because the law is relatively new, we have yet to go to court."

"We are hoping that the penalties are so severe that they (potential shoplifters) would elect not to steal."

The civil penalty doesn't offset the cost of shoplifting because the store catches only a small percentage of shoplifters, Williams says.

But the new penalties seem to be stopping shoplifters, says Gloria Timmons, crime prevention specialist for the Eugene police department. The civil penalties also encourage stores to catch shoplifters, she adds, because the fines help merchants meet the costs of filing shoplifting charges.

Filing shoplifting charges is costly to businesses because employees must leave the store to sign complaints, and stolen merchandise is held as evidence for a month or longer. Consequently, the increase in shoplifting arrests in Eugene last year — to approximately 1,300 — is a sign that more shoplifters are being caught, not that the crime is being committed more often, Timmons says.

Oregon's civil law for shoplifting, sponsored by the Oregon Retail Council, is patterned after a similar law in Washington, Timmons says. Ninety-six percent of Washington shoplifters paid the civil penalties after receiving two demand letters.

Oregon's law has met with similar success, she says.

Ninety percent of the shoplifters paid the penalty on the first demand letter.



Photo by Steve Dykes

Before 1979, a \$3 item would only cost a caught shoplifter \$175 in forfeited bail money. Now, as one student discovered, the shoplifting price-tag is \$400 — \$300 in bail forfeiture and \$100 to the store itself.

Profs say future of Polish movement hazy

By MIKE RUST
Of the Emerald

Poland today is "a society in revolt," but where the current turbulence will lead is unclear, a panel of professors said Wednesday.

About 50 people listened as three University professors and a guest panelist discussed Polish problems ranging from economic conditions to the respective roles played by church and army within the country.

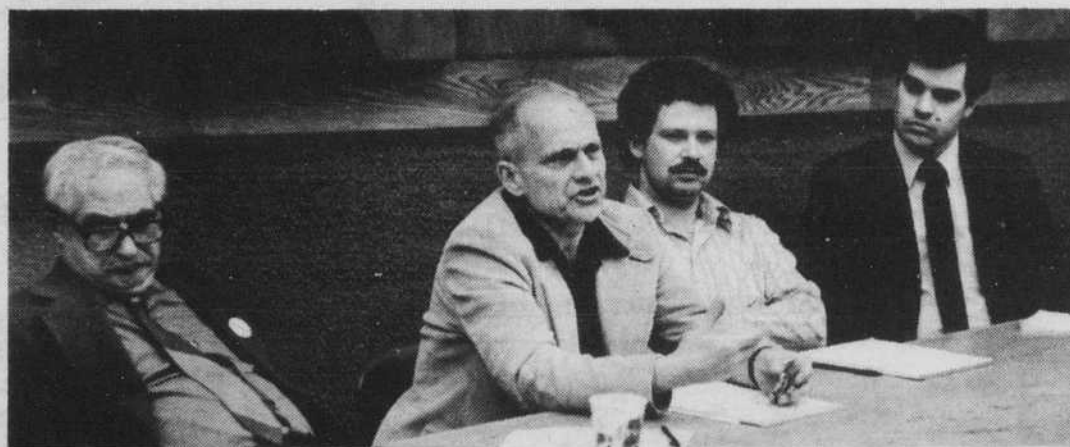
The panel included University professors Joe Stone, Ron Wixman and Joe Fiszman, and Portland State University political scientist Ladis Kristof.

Stone, a University economist, began by saying that the Polish economy was "better than average" among the planned economies of Eastern Europe. The Polish Gross National Product has grown about 7 percent per year compared to an average of 5.5 percent for other eastern-bloc countries, he said.

"We can't really point to overwhelming economic problems as reason for recent events," he said.

Instead, he says, the struggle in Poland is more political than economic.

The Polish union Solidarity is unlike the "relatively decentralized" American trade unions, he said. Solidarity is a "countervailing monolith" created to



Joe Fiszman, Ladis Kristof, Ron Wixman and Joe Stone.

Photo by Erich Boekelheide

oppose "unilateral decisions made by the Polish government."

The union primarily represents skilled city workers. Their gains may come at the expense of unskilled rural workers, he suggested.

Political scientist Joe Fiszman disputed the idea that Poland was better off economically than the rest of Eastern Europe, maintaining that the economy of Poland lags behind those of East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. The Polish economy has been propped up by \$22 billion in borrowed funds — money paid from exports.

The workers' movement in Poland is "the tip of the iceberg," brought on

because "a system was imposed on Poland against its will." Fiszman, sporting a Solidarity button obtained in Warsaw, compared the Polish situation to the civil war in El Salvador.

"People in Latin America and Eastern Europe were never asked whether they wanted to be in these spheres of influence."

However, the panel agreed that because of the "spheres of influence," the United States will not intervene militarily, no matter what the Soviets do in Poland.

In response to a question from the audience, Ron Wixman of the University geography department said the U.S.

government would do "absolutely nothing" if the Soviets were to invade Poland.

"The Poles know it," he said. "We didn't do anything in Hungary when we could have done something."

Wixman said that while military confrontations between the two superpowers may take place in "Vietnam, Tierra del Fuego and Mozambique," they will avoid fighting in each others' "backyards."

However, Wixman said that the Soviets will attempt to avoid military intervention until "the party is no longer in control."

Russian reluctance to invade is based on many factors, including the likely resistance of the Polish army, the fact that the Red Army already is "bogged down" in Afghanistan, the grassroots nature of Polish opposition and the fact that the Soviet economy is deteriorating.

And most importantly, the Soviets want to prevent the rearming of Western Europe, Wixman said. An invasion of Poland, he claimed, would lead to a "shift to the right" in that area.

Kristof said that within Poland the Roman Catholic Church has identified itself with Polish nationalism and culture, and for this reason it opposes the Polish governments.

"The church provides values and the

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