opinion

greg wasson

a quorum of one

Folk wisdom advises one to speak sweetly, so the words will taste better when they have to be eaten.

Put another way, be careful about acidly condemning something, for next week it may be your salvation.

I remember in 1977 interviewing a representative about the Land Conservation and Development Commission and being told that the Legislature shouldn't mess with land use planning because the people had approved it in the 1976 election.

About a month later, the same lawmaker spoke favorably about public financing for political campaigns, even though the people had rejected that idea in the same election.

This session, the House Business and Consumer Affairs Committee passed out a bill expanding the hours grocery stores can sell wine and beer. Despite the popular idea that government ought to get off our backs (so we can get on everybody else's) one member was disturbed that the Legislature even had to spend the time and money dealing with this problem.

"After all," opined the legislator, "the Oregon Liquor Control Commission could have dealt with the situation by rule."

Now, log-truckers find themselves in a similar predicament. Forest workers are among those who argue most fervently against government control. Yet, for many truckers, the government is the only answer.

See, most gypos get paid on a piece basis rather than hauling on salary. It used to be that the independent truckers got together to decide what price they would charge for their services. About five years ago, however, the attorney general ruled that such practices violate Oregon's anti-trust regulations.

The result is that many haulers find themselves in trouble when there is a surplus of trucks. Certain logging companies take advantage of the situation and refuse to pay a decent wage, knowing that someone will take the work for the low price.

In response, Sen. Charles Hanlon, D-Cornelious, has introduced SB 6, legislation that would put log hauling rates under the Public Utility Commission and allow the state body to ensure that the rates paid fall within a zone of reasonableness.

"You have to realize that the log trucker has abolutely no economic punch. These people don't have any mechanisms to legally bring the rates up and are out there negotiating with not much to bid on. They're low man on the totem pole and once in a while they get dumped on."

But, doesn't the regulation scheme violate the principle of less government interference?

"Yes," admits Hanlon. "But I would say, as a general rule, if principle advances your cause, you argue principle. If it doesn't, you ignore it."

Of course, while paradoxes are often unavoidable, the same is seldom true of contradictions, also in big supply at the statehouse.

When members of the House jumped on me in February for swearing in my column, my main detractor announced that he planned to deny me, therefore most the students at the University, access to his office.

Scarcely a month later, he was on his feet again, this time lauding Freedom of Information Day and pointing to the press as the public's eyes and ears.

It's enough to make one's hypocrisy meter jump into the red.

yours

'We' vs. 'them'

Yet another letter has appeared in the Emerald, praising the American way and panning socialism. This time we are best because of our system of competition — but look at Russia: in school, children compete for grades and the "winners" are trained for the higher paying, higher status jobs. On the job, Russians compete for monetary and other bonuses (such as the privilege of a better apartment). Also back in school the competition for membership in the party begins and the "winners" are groomed for the party leadership. Within the party, competition goes on for the high ranking positons — Stalin killed Trotsky during this "test of worthiness."

Equality no more exists in Russia than it does here — ask the Russian woman sweeping the streets if she has the same pay and power as the party boss who put her there. On the larger scale, the Russian state socialists compete against the American free-enterprisers for markets, and for Vietnam, Cambodia, Cuba and the Middle East. "We" compete with "Them" for military supremacy — "we" are supposed to be proud because we have the nuclear might to kill all life on earth twelve times over, and "they" can only kill us all nine times over.

There is nothing to be proud of about dog-eat-dog competition and inequality — neither Russia nor America is "better" on this count. Both systems are cruel, inhumane and dangerous to the continuation of the human race — a "third way" must be found — one that enhances the human ability to work toward mutual benefit, not mutual disaster.

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'White Paper'

It was back in 1964 when President Johnson used the Gulf of Tonkin "incident" as a pretext to justify bombing North Vietnam "back to the Stone Age."

In 1981, the Reagan Administration is using a similar pretext for escalating US military intervention in Central America and to back up its charges that El Salvador has become a "textbook case of indirect armed aggression by Communist powers," it released to the press on Feb. 23 an inch-thick "White Paper" entitled, "Communist Interference in El Salvador."

Seeing as this document is the key justification for sending military aid and advisors to El Salvador, I thought it deserved some scrutiny. In the summary of the "Paper" that I obtained from the State Dept., there were two pictures of a trailer truck allegedly used to smuggle arms into El Salvador and seized by Honduran authorities in January 1981. Pictures were taken from two sides; one from the side and the other from above. The side view of the trailer has horizontal lines and about eleven (the picture is blurred) vertical frames reaching almost to the trailer's roof. The photo taken from above which reveals the weapons show part of the side of the trailer. However, this trailer has different siding than the trailer photographed from the side — the vertical frames are missing. One can say with almost 100 percent certainty that the two pictures are not of the same trailer.

It's not suprising that the U.S. government might be willing to put out documents of questionable validity to back up an interventionist foreign policy. But it's an indictment of U.S. journalists and media outlets who prostituted themselves by unquestioningly going along with the government publicity campaign.

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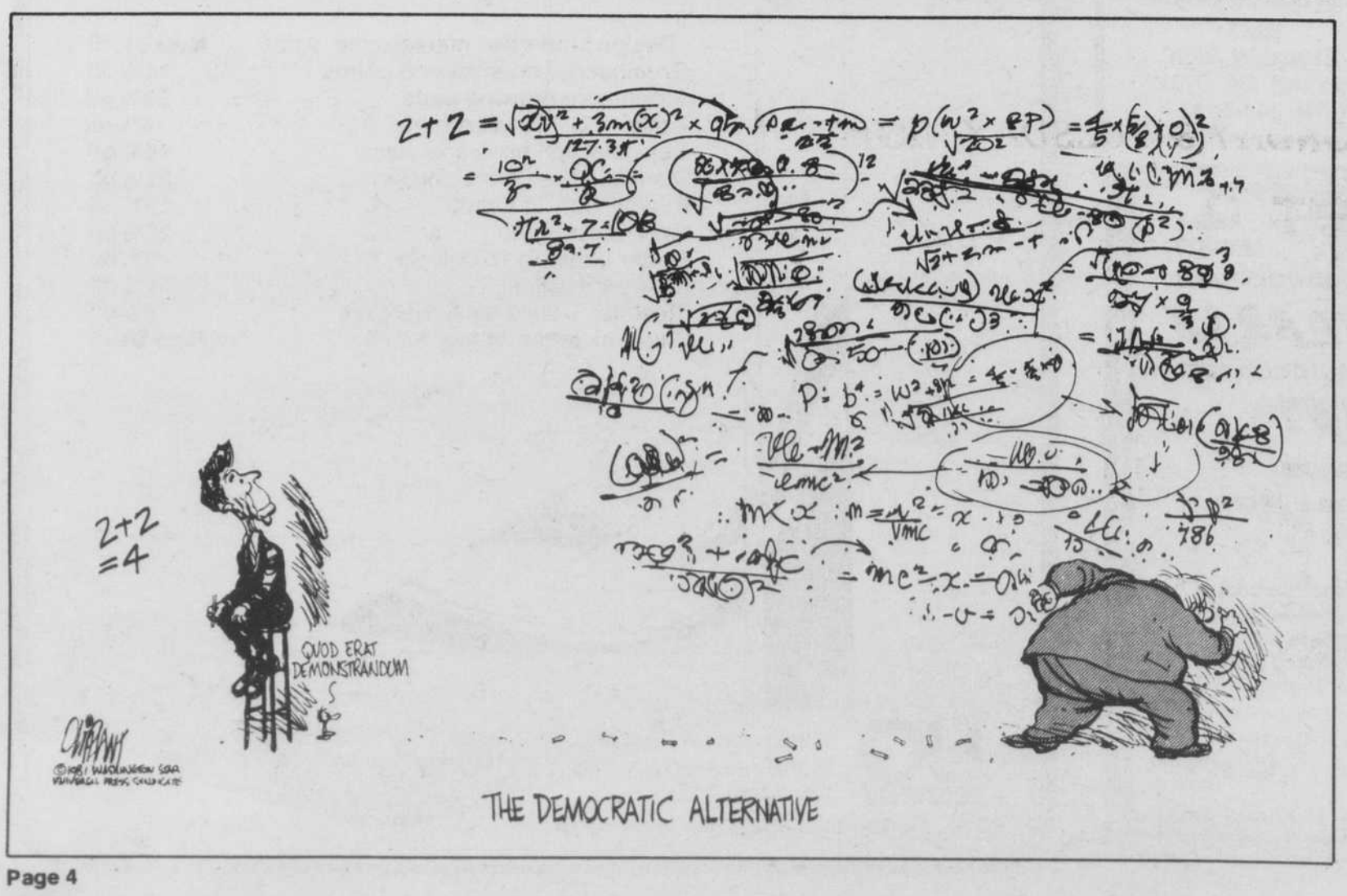
Sophomoric column

For a writer — if that is indeed what Greg Wasson considers himself to be — to rage about self-serving liberalism and illogic while blatantly exemplifying both of them is not only annoying but embarrassing ("A Quorum of One," May 4). I don't know what rattled his cage so hard, but I sympathize; there must have been more to it than he was willing to write about. For that very reason, though, he came away looking very foolish; much of his column made little or no sense (e.g., what is this nonsense about John Birchers as James Kilpatrick's storm troopers?). Wasson's anger at Kilpatrick is understandable — from a strictly emotional point of view — but was expressed mostly through invective, which has never changed anyone's point of view. Wasson can hardly be believed when he says he wants disinterested commentary — he can't manage it himself, he just wants the bias his way. And his contempt for Phyllis Schlafly is perfectly appropriate, but his comparison-in-illogic is not even in the same league as her exercise in asininity: crime against another human being is wrong, and the fact that a gun makes some kinds of crime easier has no bearing on who holds the final responsibility for those crimes. And personal responsibility is what it's all about, right, Mr. Wasson?

"A Quorum of One" is usually well-meant, but the fact that the Emerald is a college newspaper is no excuse for sophomoric commentary. If Wasson is going to make a fool of himself in print, I would just as soon be spared the proof of it.

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