

Roots for Japan's success run deep

The news last week about the General Motors Saturn small-car assembly plant wasn't that GM picked a small town in Tennessee to build the plant, but how the plant, once it is built, will be operated.

The plant, in response to the increasing share of the American automobile market being claimed by the Japanese, will incorporate Japanese production methods.

Scrutiny of Japan's success found the relationship between Japanese employees and their companies to be the most significant difference between American and Japanese production. Japanese companies hire employees for their entire working career, and employees more often are involved in company decisions. The "us vs. them" attitude of workers and management that predominates in American companies is absent.

So, GM, frustrated by market losses to Japanese car manufacturers, decided to try its hand at Japanese-style auto making for its small cars. By hiring workers on a permanent basis, paying them salaries, and implicating them in managerial decisions, GM hopes to instill in its American workers the loyalty Japanese workers have for their companies, and thus, increase production and profits.

The plant will mark the first time Japanese-style car production will be attempted on a large scale in America. It is also a move in which America will shed its egocentricity and try the methods of an Eastern country.

However, GM may find that it will take more than imitating Japan's outward corporate structure to enjoy the kind of success that Japan has under the system. The Japanese production system is far more complex than just higher employee involvement and job security.

The Japanese system, rather than being designed specifically to maximize production, is a reflection of Japanese society as a whole. The system exists as it does because much of society operates on similar principles.

If any one term could describe the Japanese, "group-identity" would be the most accurate. Working as part of a team, and sacrificing self-serving goals for the good of the whole aren't traits that are practiced by the Japanese; they are social requirements.

For example, unlike Western names, Japanese names are pronounced family name first, personal name last, which emphasizes that it is more important which family you come from than who you are personally.

And this extends to the workplace. For example, the word for "workplace" in Japanese derives from the term *ie*, which incorporates the traditional concept of household. Many Japanese see their workplace as an extended family, often living in company housing in close proximity with other employees, and constructing their entire social lives from co-workers.

Westerners — particularly Americans — on the other hand, emphasize rugged individualism and self-reliance. The strong American emphasis on the individual may conflict with the values of group-identity GM will try to instill in Saturn plant employees.

Although the company may be successful in incorporating some aspects of Japanese production, several key elements will be unavoidably absent. For the system to generate the success of the Japanese system, American values and attitudes would have to be dramatically reshaped.

But the few elements that Americans are able to incorporate may boost production and help American workers feel less like useless cogs in a huge, uncontrollable machine. And if this happens, the new production technique may not only promise changes for automobile production, but for all forms of management in America.



CIVILIANS WILL REVUE THE STANDARDS OF MILITARY MEDICAL CARE.

letters

Read carefully

Jack Straton's recent attempt (ODE, July 30) to discredit my letter (ODE, July 18) contains more fallacies than I could possibly deal with in 250 words. I will try to deal with some of them, though.

Straton begins his attack by asserting that I "argued for prayer in public schools...." Wrong. A careful (stress "careful") reading of my letter would reveal that I was simply challenging the Supreme Court's (and the Emerald's) recent "interpretations" of the First Amendment as being historically illegitimate.

For evidence, I directed students to two essays on the subject, one by Judge Rehnquist and another by constitutional scholar, John Whitehead.

In a shoddy attempt to discredit these essays, Straton attacks my supposed presuppositions. ("Visoky's presuppositions that longer essays contain deeper truth, and that one person can 'prove' what another intended or thought, are absurd.") Wrong again. I do not presuppose "that longer essays contain deeper truth." I do presuppose, however, that longer essays give a writer space to pile up evidence to prove or disprove a particular point.

As for Straton's contention that it is "absurd" to believe "that one person can 'prove' what another intended or thought," I would only ask him what he thinks the study of

history is all about? Does he think, for example, that I could not "prove" what Hitler thought about or intended for the Jews?

History, Mr. Straton: look in to it: Perhaps you could begin by reading the essays I recommended. But do read them carefully.

Tom Visoky
Journalism

Obie's Agenda

Eugene's small size, interest in and support of small business, and close community spirit attracted me to Eugene. Eugene is the most special place I have lived. I hear this often from other Eugene residents; they feel it too. The Agenda/Riverfront Park project will ruin Eugene's specialness. Eugene will become another ugly, big city. I don't want this. I want Eugene to remain small, special, nurturing, vital and environmentally aware.

The Eugene — Mayor Brian Obie's — Agenda, Riverfront Research Park project, is being "shared" with the people of Eugene after its governmental body already has decided its plan of action. This is not involving the people's participation. This shows a tremendous social irresponsibility on the part of our elected officials and public employees.

I am convinced that the jobs/careers involved in this proposed project will be given to people outside Oregon. Jobs here should go to the local people — here.

Not long ago, many people entered the computer/high tech field; the promise was careers for everyone. Now that field is

in a slump. California's Silicon Valley is an example. The people who devise and implement such money-making schemes are not willing to look at the long-term effects of such a plan, at the destruction it will cause.

I propose an alternative — small, light industry encouraging local employment. Use the millions of dollars to be used for Obie's Agenda to encourage small local entrepreneurs to create new business in already-existing structures, and to expand existing business.

Nan Cohen
Eugene

Encouragement

As a former Peace Corps volunteer (Liberia, West Africa, 1975-77), I appreciate Diana Elliott's remarks, contained in her July 16 piece on Live Aid, in support of the Corps. However, I disagree with her criticisms of anyone who, in order to help the people of the Third World, does less than join the Corps.

Fasting for a day, contributing a quarter to a fundraiser on a street corner, buying a ticket, and attending a benefit concert... these are all steps in the right direction. As opposed to those who have done nothing, these fasters, donors and concert-goers have at least done something. They deserve encouragement, not censure. With encouragement, they will perhaps do more. Under censure, they may rejoin the multitude of the uncaring and uninformed. If so, the world will be, on the whole, a great deal less compassionate and, in the end, a lot hungrier.

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oregon daily emerald

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published on Tuesdays and Thursday during the summer session except during exam week and vacations by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, 97403.

The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices on the third floor of the Erb Memorial Union and is a member of the Associated Press.

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Letters to the editor must be limited to 250 words, typed, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is turned in. The Emerald reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style. Letters to the editor should be turned into the Emerald office, Suite 300, EMU.