

# Workers shouldn't be giving up rights

To sue or not to sue. That's not even a question anymore for several laid-off Trojan nuclear plant workers.

Portland General Electric, which owns the defunct Trojan, is requiring workers to sign away their rights to sue the company in exchange for receiving their severance pay.

PGE says it's acting to "protect the utility" from greedy employees. The company says it has gone to great lengths to provide support and retraining for workers who will be laid off because of the plant's closure, and it doesn't want them coming back for more.

Workers are asked to sign a contract waiving their rights to sue under 16 state and federal laws, including the Civil Rights Act of 1991, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act and the Older Workers Benefit Protection Act, to name a few.

In return for signing, workers will receive pay for four weeks, plus another four weeks for every year at PGE.

The issue begs the question — if PGE has done nothing wrong, what is it afraid of? Certainly, the utility has an interest in protecting itself from groundless lawsuits, especially in today's litigation-happy society.

But is it necessary to require workers to give up their rights without cause? Probably not. Should workers discover, some years down the road, that they had been made ill by radiation exposure, or were the victims of unfair labor practices, they would have no recourse — regardless of the justification of their claim.

Whether the release is legally binding is unclear. More than likely, it is intended to dupe workers into believing they have no right to sue, thereby lessening the number of potential lawsuits.

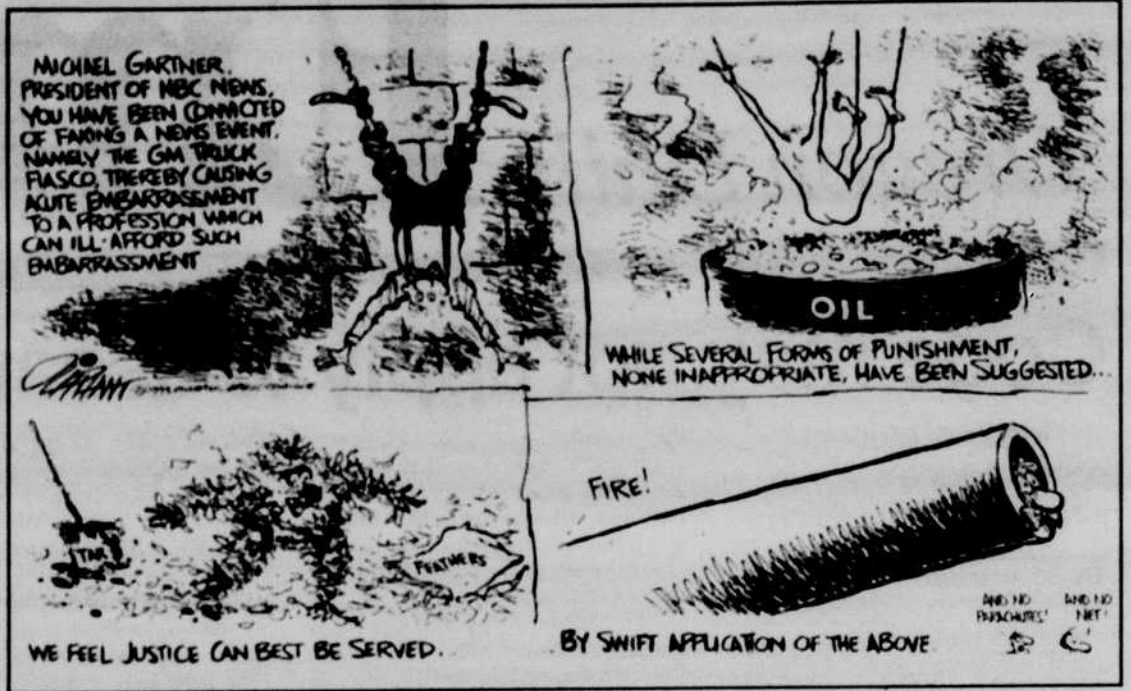
The contract urges workers to seek the advice of a lawyer before signing, gives them 45 days to consider the offer and allows them to change their mind within seven days of signing.

It is difficult to suggest a worker forego receiving severance pay to protect some right that may or may not ever be invoked, particularly when that worker is now unemployed and may be supporting a family. That lump sum of cash is going to look awfully appealing when compared with some abstract legal mumbo jumbo.

But that abstract legal mumbo jumbo is there for a reason. History has demonstrated the importance of protecting workers' rights, and those protections were hard-fought for and long in coming.

Are they worth severance pay to give up? That's a question each individual will have to answer himself or herself. Should PGE be asking its workers to make that choice? If it were truly devoted to the rights and well-being of its employees, the answer would be "no."

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## LETTERS

### Mistreatment

The Oregon Citizens Alliance develops clever arguments to justify its agenda against homosexual citizens. Voters may again be forced to put aside other pressing matters to evaluate arguments that keep our state's people divided and its resources drained.

One OCA rationalization is that homosexuals should never gain protected class status because the choice of sexual behavior is not legitimate grounds for minority classification. Fortunately, it's not that simple.

People who consider themselves Christian engage in Christian behavior. People are sometimes discriminated against and forced to hide — or are even killed for Christian behavior. Such persecution is wrong.

Our country has laws to protect personal religious affiliation choices and prohibits persecution of anyone based on religious preferences. People are not born Christian. It appears Christians may not meet the OCA definition of a "legitimate minority."

Homosexuals may or may not have homosexual relationships, but crime statistics show they are persecuted and sometimes killed for being homosexual. Whether you think sexual orientation is a choice or not is irrelevant. It is fair and right to address, in law, such blatant persecution against a category of people.

Women can hardly be considered a minority in terms of population numbers. Yet so far the OCA hasn't said that women should not be protected from unfair treatment because they may not be a "legitimate minority."

We should all be able to agree that persecution is wrong and must be prohibited — however a group of law-abiding citizens subjected to mistreatment is defined.

**Ron Schlittler  
Journalism**

### Pedestrian nuts

Warning to fellow bike riders: You probably already know this, but if you don't, I heed you warning — pedestrians who saunter in and about 13th Avenue between Kincaid and

University streets are nuts. They apparently enjoy the sound of skidding bikes bearing down on them and bikers narrowly missing or directly smacking them (resulting usually in obscenities, embarrassment, broken bones or bikes, etc.).

Sometimes the foolish pedestrians think it is the sole responsibility of the bikers to avoid collisions. Granted, it is kind of fun to weave in and out of pedestrians who flinch after you've passed them, but nobody likes accidents.

I think the University should provide walking students with well-worked crosswalks and enforce their use. Please, they've got sidewalks, and now the fruitcakes want the streets. Keep the campus friendly and avoid the bloodshed.

**Reagan White  
Asian Studies**

### No stickers

The EMU needs your help. This past week, the building has been covered with stickers that stridently support the rights of gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals.

Individually and professionally, I aspire to have the entire EMU accepted as a safe zone for celebrating diversity. As a facility serving the entire University community — supporting many different organizations and employing hundreds of individuals — it may be unrealistic to expect that my aspiration will be universally accepted.

The process of changing individual attitudes of intolerance must not stop. It will always be a struggle of finding the correct methods of addressing acts of hatred with opportunities to change both behavior and the attitudes that allow the behavior to occur.

The covering of windows, doors, walls and floor of the EMU with adhesive stickers is not the best way to change attitudes. As I walked through the EMU removing the stickers, I heard more comments focusing on the methodology of placing the stickers than on the stickers' message. Clearly the stickers did not change the attitudes.

My request is a simple one. To all individuals who feel that diversity and inclusiveness must be actively supported, who feel acts of intolerance must be

challenged, please understand that the method of advancing those beliefs should not include defacing public property.

It is my hope that your energy be directed at creating an environment of positive change and that you perceive the EMU as supporting those positive efforts.

**Dusty Miller  
EMU Director**

### No expulsion

I was extremely angered by the article regarding Steven Laliberty's alleged assault by the accused Todd Pendexter (ODE, Feb. 11).

I was especially piqued by Sarah Ross' demand that Pendexter be expelled from the University because of his alleged assault, saying that his actions will not be tolerated "by the University, nor by the larger community."

A student should not be expelled for an alleged assault to a non-University student. If the issue angers Ross and others, why not suggest an awareness-raising workshop that Pendexter could attend and learn from?

Because I know of no student who's been expelled for reasons other than poor academic status, does this mean that rape and other more violent and serious crimes (i.e. breaking the windows at the Federal Building) are tolerated by the University and the Eugene community?

However, it doesn't seem that it's the University's position or decision of whether to expel a student. Expulsion sends the message to Pendexter (and others) that there is no hope for education to prevent such assaults from occurring again.

Sections 19A and 19B of the student conduct code specifically say the harassment be "on University property or at University-sponsored or supervised activities." The "assault" occurred at 13th Avenue and Mill Street, considerably off campus. The University cannot sanction off-campus harassment.

Yes, I think what happened was wrong. But expulsion isn't the answer. Two wrongs never make a right.

**Jennifer Horton  
Journalism**

# Oregon Daily Emerald

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