

'Insurgent' in need of liberal support

This University has a reputation, Eugene has a reputation... even Oregon has a reputation. And it's the same reputation in every case.

Liberal. Progressive. Leftist.

This particular political bent goes by many names, but whatever you call it, this campus is widely regarded to be its headquarters. Although there are always a few pockets of conservatism to be found, the general consensus is that this is a liberal campus in a liberal city in a liberal state.

Why, then, does the self-proclaimed "liberal, leftist voice" on this campus have so little to say?

The Student Insurgent, a campus publication with a decidedly leftward bent, has been taking a lot of heat lately. Although many of the criticisms are deserved, there is another side to the story.

"It takes an incredible amount of time to put together a newspaper, especially in the format the *Insurgent* uses," Jung said in a Feb. 12 editorial responding to criticisms that have been leveled against the *Insurgent*. "Needless to say, the energies of three staff members were not enough."

Below these words was a cartoon crying, "Submit! Please, the *Insurgent* needs your submissions!"

On a campus renowned for being liberal, people should be lining up to contribute to the "liberal, leftist" voice on campus. Three staff members? Where is everyone? The *Oregon Commentator*, the *Insurgent's* conservative nemesis, boasts a staff ten times as large. How could this happen? Where are the liberals?

They're certainly not writing for the *Insurgent*.

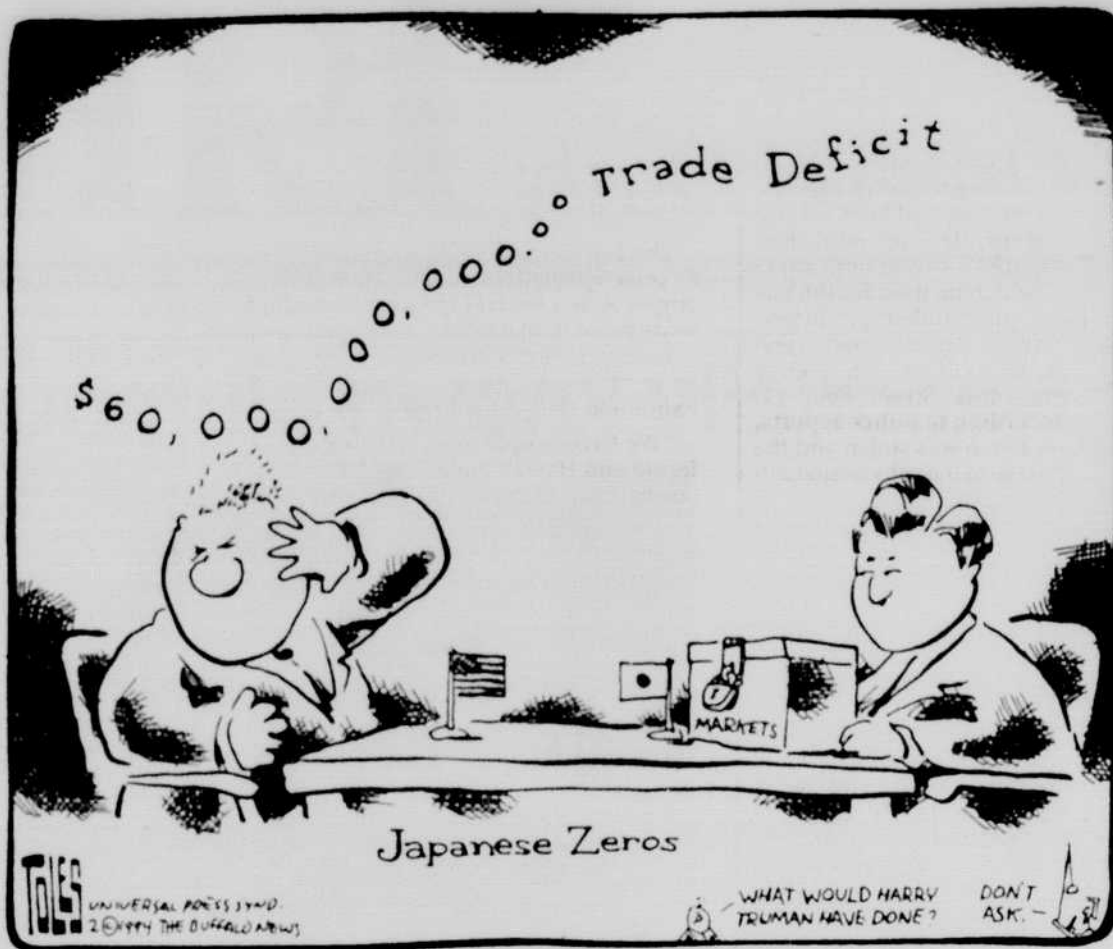
A quick glance at the bank of free publications in the EMU reveals plenty of somewhat liberal newsletters and newspapers, all apparently prospering. The *Emerald* editorial pages are frequently filled with letters to the editor and other commentaries that are liberal in slant. Clearly, liberal thinkers are still around on this campus, and a number of them are more than willing to put pen to paper. So why won't they do it for the *Insurgent*?

Maybe liberals are unwilling to join "the establishment" of a big-time (on campus, anyway) newspaper. But the *Insurgent* is a far cry from the establishment. They can't even seem to establish a uniform typeface for their pages.

More likely, those individuals who would normally tend to support the *Insurgent* have simply given up on it. Its erratic publication schedule, appalling visual design and poorly written copy all combine to make reading the *Insurgent* a frustrating experience, even for those who would embrace the paper's politics.

And that is a shame. In order for a worthwhile and balanced exchange of ideas to take place on this campus, the University needs an *Insurgent* — not just for the liberals, but for everyone.

If highlighting the *Insurgent's* faults can accomplish anything, it ought to influence a few more liberals to get out and do something. Liberals are supposed to be activists. Perhaps they should take action to improve the *Insurgent*.



COMMENTARY

The 'Emerald' board backs Berg

By Tim Gleason

The *Oregon Daily Emerald* is an independent student newspaper. The Board of Directors has not and will not do anything to threaten the editorial autonomy of the editor or the staff. Jake Berg is the editor. He decides the editorial content of the paper and the board stands behind his decisions, regardless of the public reaction.

If Owen Brennan Rounds (*ODE*, Feb. 16) or anyone else believes otherwise, then they haven't been paying attention in the recent meetings of the board and they don't understand the challenges facing all newspapers in the 1990s.

Brennan Rounds would have us believe that the *Emerald* board became interested in questions of newsroom diversity, coverage of the campus community and editorial decision making as a result of the Nov. 2, 1993 publication of mug shots of three black University of Washington students and the protests that followed. That is simply wrong.

These issues were on the board's agenda when I became the faculty representative on the board in 1991 and have remained on the agenda. Every candidate for *Emerald* editor has been questioned at some length about his or her plans for increasing the diversity of the *Emerald's* news staff and about plans for covering the campus community. During each editor's tenure, the board has asked for reports of the success or failure of those plans at the monthly board meeting.

Following the selection of the new editor last spring, the board entered into a long discussion about the need to provide more structure and support for the editor and other *Emerald* management personnel as they work to meet the *Emerald's* stated commitment to diversity. The discussions addressed issues of recruiting and retaining a more diverse student staff and training for all students.

These discussions resulted in the board's adoption of a new Diversity Policy at its Nov. 16, 1993 meeting. It is modeled on the policies in place at *The Seattle Times* and other major daily newspapers in the United States. It is in the spirit of the American Society of Newspaper Editors "Project 2000" report in which the ANSE pledged that the proportion of ethnic minorities at daily newspapers would match the percentage in the general population by the year 2000. The board and the staff are now actively engaged in implementing the *Emerald's* policy.

The recent special meeting of the board with representatives of student unions was part of the board's ongoing efforts to understand the issues the *Emerald* faces and to develop new strategies to implement the Diversity Policy. Contrary to Brennan Rounds' characterization, the meeting was a very useful discussion. Yes, the "mug shots" were a catalyst for the meeting, but the participants moved far beyond that issue.

Brennan Rounds would also have us believe that the board does not support Jake Berg, the *Emerald* editor. Wrong again. Publishing a daily newspaper is a tough job. Jake has performed well.

When the board first addressed the issue of the mug shots at its Nov. 16 meeting — six days before the BSU news conference — we had only one question: What decision-making process led to the publication? The board is not in the business of telling the editor what to publish; however, it does have a

responsibility to monitor the professional practices in the newsroom and provide the editor with constructive feedback.

Were we to gather the editors of 30 leading newspapers together and ask if Berg made the "right" decision in running the mug shots, we might very well end up with 15 saying "yes" and 15 saying "no." The simple answer to the question is that there is no simple answer. The definition of "news" is not static. News organizations are always in negotiation with their publics over the question of what is or is not relevant and appropriate. Given the increasingly diverse makeup of the publics, the editor's task of making "right" decisions on tight deadlines becomes more and more difficult.

From my view on the board, developing policies and practices that will support the editor as he or she confronts the challenge of leading a newsroom in the 1990s is the best way for the board to protect and strengthen the editorial autonomy of student journalists.

Brennan Rounds may disagree (and I'll support his right to do so in the *Emerald*, *The Oregon Commentator* or anywhere else), but he'll have to do more to convince me he's right than run around like Chicken Little yelling that the *Emerald* board is "a tool for faculty use when the masses get a bit uppity."

Tim Gleason, an associate professor at the School of Journalism and Communication, is the faculty representative on the *Emerald* Board of Directors.

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The *Emerald* reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style.