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Free trade sends jobs south, pollution north

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

Expanding NAFTA would harm labor and the environment while boosting corporate profits

If the North American Free Trade Agreement is expanded to Chile and other South American nations as Clinton wishes, it will drastically change the nature of the agreement.

For one thing, we won't be able to call it NAFTA any more. That's really too bad because AFTA has a silly ring to it.

On reflection, that's probably the only major change in the way the agreement works that will occur with expansion. Otherwise, free trade between American nations, as set up under NAFTA, will continue to be unfair to workers in all countries and to damage the environment throughout the region.

We don't have any particular affinity for Ross Perot or his four-color charts, but we agree with his statement that NAFTA will cost jobs in the United States. Not only have real wages declined in the years since NAFTA was signed, but many companies have also moved their operations south of the border.

Perot was not alone in worrying when NAFTA was first composed. Many labor leaders worried about the agreement as well, not because of the flight of capital to Mexico, but because of the damage done to workers.

Despite Clinton's promise to modify NAFTA to provide protections for workers and the environment, the agreement continues to be detrimental to both. It sets up a situation in which U.S. labor is part of the same market as Mexican workers, who are paid substantially less.

Without provisions to protect workers in all areas covered by the agreements, U.S. and Canadian labor laws are rendered useless by the less stringent policies in other countries. Major corporations will go where the labor is cheapest and the laws weakest, taking jobs and money with them.

Along with hurting workers, this movement by big corporations also harms smaller companies, which are unable to relocate and are rendered less competitive because they have to pay a living wage.

Proponents of free trade and the relocation of major companies argue that U.S. industry brings an increase of employment and wages to the countries where it settles. While it is true that wages do increase when international capital comes to town, those working for the wages often find their money

buying less. International corporations tend to bring mass-produced products and a rise in consumerism, meaning workers have to pay more to buy lower quality goods.

Because goods produced within the country are no longer purchased, even fewer Third-world workers are able to support themselves, leading to a glut of workers that lowers real wages even further. The big companies come out ahead, while the small nations find that their culture and ability to make a living have been destroyed.

None of this affects the governments of nations like Mexico and Chile, however, which is why they are willing to sign trade agreements and bring multi-national corporations into their borders. As long as the companies pay taxes to the government, the national leaders feel they are getting a great deal.

The companies don't just destroy the labor market in both the United States and other nations. They also damage the environment in those countries.

Corporations tend to flee more stringent environmental laws in favor of places with weaker legislation, just as they find countries with weaker labor laws. This has several unfortunate effects.

Most significantly, many nations, especially those involved in trade agreements like NAFTA, tend to keep

their environmental legislation weak to attract foreign capital. This leads to the degradation of their environment, which causes even more harm to workers in those countries.

In addition, because the pollution often includes greenhouse gasses and other atmospheric pollutants, the entire planet suffers from weak regulations in even a few countries. Loosening trade barriers prevents nations from stopping environmentally harmful products from crossing their borders. This encourages the continued destruction of the environment worldwide.

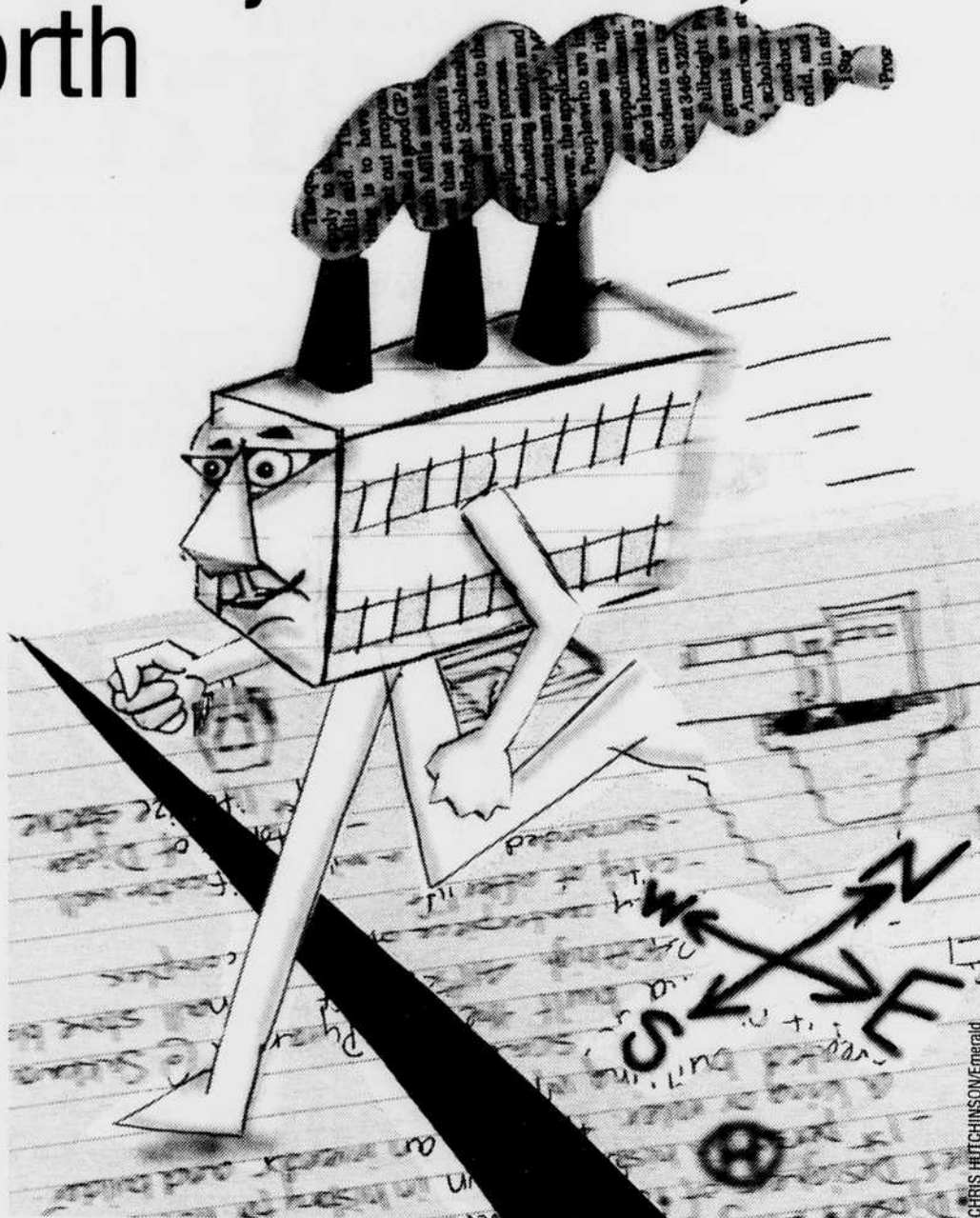
So long as nations with strong labor and environmental laws are forced to compete directly against those with weaker regulations, the only group to come out ahead will be major corporations. They can get away with paying workers too little while destroying the

planet. At the same time, new markets open up in which they can sell their community-destroying goods.

Clinton is pushing to expand NAFTA southward and to maintain "fast-track" approval for trade pacts, which allows him to negotiate pacts and force Congress to vote quickly on them. Neither of these requests are a good idea.

Free trade between equal partners can work. Free trade between nations with a very diverse set of laws only works for one group: the big companies. Those same companies then buy the support of politicians by sponsoring their campaigns, creating political backing for the unsound implementation of free trade.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu



Thumbs



TO UNIVERSITY DINING HALLS:

For several years, the halls have given leftover food to FOOD for Lane County, which then divides the meals into family-sized portions and distributes them to the needy. This program continues to be an admirable act of charity and efficiency. Rather than wasting the resources needed to produce and prepare the food, the University provides a healthy meal for those who might not otherwise receive one.

TO THE CIA:

While we don't endorse the agency or its operations, we were amused to read that it finally revealed its budget. After years of refusing to comply with a constitutional requirement to disclose its spending, the organization admitted in a one-sentence fax that it spends \$26.6 billion annually, according to The New York Times. That's \$26.6 billion more than we should spend meddling in the affairs of our own citizens and other nations, but at least now we know how bad the situation is.

TO THE URINAL SCREENS:

The plastic devices, which sit on the bottom of toilets in men's rooms in the EMU and elsewhere, remind urinal users: "You hold the power to stop rape in your hand." While such a reminder might not deter many actual rapists, it does raise awareness of an important issue and remind all men that rape is a crime in which the perpetrators, not the victims, are to blame. A woman who goes out late at night by herself or who wears a short skirt is not "asking for it." She is living freely, as we should all be able to do.

Examine hiring factors

It would be hard to disagree with your editorial position that the UO should hire more minority faculty, if possible (ODE, Oct. 21). I hope we do. But the Emerald's editorial and its news coverage have ignored a couple of factors:

1. The University's overall minority faculty ratio is about the same as the proportion of minorities in the state of Oregon. That's an achievement.
2. The question of WHY more racial minorities are not hired needs to be examined. One of the controlling factors is the availability of minority faculty. If, say, only 5 percent of the faculty pool in the country is black, that factor alone will limit hiring. Same with Hispanic, Native-American and other minorities.

The Emerald hasn't looked into the latter factor, which is probably the most significant in the en-

tire hiring issue. Of course, that's a tougher reporting assignment, but if you're going to do an honest and objective job, it has to be examined.

Arnold Ismach
 Journalism Professor

Employ best faculty

I wanted to address some of the pernicious notions given voice in the recent editorial concerning minority faculty at the University (ODE, Oct. 21). First, the editorialist seems to believe that the first duty of this University is to promote or create a diverse culture, both on campus and in the community at large. I would submit that the first duty of the University is to educate its students to the best of its ability. This means that we must promote faculty hiring, not of people of color (be that color black, brown or white) but of people of the highest intellectual and teaching ability. Skin col-

or has nothing to do with teaching ability. To suggest such a thing is to insult the intellectual integrity of the faculty of this University without warrant and to insult our own capacity as students, of whatever ethnicity, for intellectual achievement.

If there is racism in University hiring practices, it must be addressed, in federal court if necessary. To seek out minority hires in order to establish a "comfortable" environment for students of color strikes me as condescending at least and racist Balkanization at worst. What students of all ethnic backgrounds need and should demand is not a professor who looks like they do, but one who challenges them to think beyond comfortable platitudes, into which trap all of us fall at times, including the Emerald, it seems.

Joseph Renaud
 German