

CONTACTING US

NEWSROOM: (541) 346-5511
E-MAIL: ode@oregon.uoregon.edu
ADDRESS: Oregon Daily Emerald
 P.O. BOX 3159
 Eugene, Oregon 97403
ONLINE EDITION: www.uoregon.edu/~ode

PERSPECTIVES

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
 Sarah Kickler
EDITORIAL EDITOR
 Mike Schmierbach
NIGHT EDITORS
 Sarah Kickler
 Carl Yeh

Lapin speech displays intolerance and ignorance

Rabbi Daniel Lapin brought a message to campus on Monday. He told us in speech and in writing that poverty and prejudice are no longer problems in America, but any residual social problems can be solved by inflicting shame upon children.

The rabbi, who hails from Mercer Island by way of South Africa, has a long history of promoting ill-advised social policy based on his own limited scope of what it means to be religious. He runs Toward Tradition, a group devoted to building alliances between conservative Jews and right-wing evangelical Christians.



This particular speech covered the subjects of morality and free market economics. He stayed away from his nastier views (which exist throughout his writings), instead choosing to make broad, unwarranted claims about free-market capitalism.

And Lapin is not shy. He flat-out reviled separation of church and state in a Wall Street Journal article, saying the "ideologies the Bible frowns upon inevitably turn out to be poor public policy." Besides the obvious problem with this — that theocratic regimes inevitably oppress people, particularly minorities — there is a worse problem, not rooted in Lapin's religious convictions: He denies other people, even people who share his religious beliefs, the right to hold different political opinions. He has asked that liberal Jews "speak as liberals, not as Jews" while never holding him-

The right-wing rabbi provides parables but little evidence or comprehensive analysis to assist understanding of current social issues

self to the same standards. Lapin doesn't think of himself as a man who has political opinions, but as a man who knows the one correct interpretation of all scripture. His writings have shown it by promoting hateful social practices; his speech showed it by defending outmoded economic ideas. First, the speech. Lapin's unabashed defense of deregulated capitalism doesn't consider modern economic realities, or indeed, even the scriptural teachings which he purports to believe. His obfuscations are designed to convince the disenfranchised that they deserve the screw job they get.

This was evident throughout his speech, which he delivered with an eerie smile reminiscent of the clown Pennywise and the slick style of a practiced snake-oil salesman. He offered a world view advocating free-market capitalism, unfettered from regulation, as the best fulfillment of "human desire," which he said was "unlimited." No sources were offered for any of his theories; Lapin has a frustrating habit of speaking in broad examples rather than offering hard evidence for his claims.

He offered the example of a "barter club" run by one person to illustrate the troubles with centrally-planned economics: If all the power (to print money, to formulate trade policy) rests in the hands of one person, corruption inevitably follows. He also discouraged class awareness, presenting the rather

indefensible idea that "Bill Gates [for example] is not rich because other people are poor."

I agree that undemocratic economic planning is bad. Unfortunately, the real "central planners" in modern economics are corporations. Forty percent of U.S. "free trade" is intrafirm, centrally managed by a few large companies. For example, over 50 percent of U.S. exports to Mexico are simply transfers from one branch of a U.S. firm to another, designed to keep the wealth in the hands of a few select individuals, never to reach places where people actually live. These central planners are also the ones who downsize — the world's top 500 firms have shed over 400,000 workers every year for 10 years, despite consistently increasing profits. In that sense, Bill Gates (and Phil Knight, etc.) are rich because other people are poor; more specifically, because they make other people poor. When I asked him about central corporate planning, he claimed to be a "simple guy" who didn't want to talk about economic policies, just anecdotal examples that "make sense to him."

According to the Jerusalem Post, Lapin "is irked by Jewish liberals who cite the biblical passage, 'Love thy neighbor as thyself,' as a rallying cry for social justice." He is also fond of citing Proverbs 12:24 to validate his opinions: "The hands of the diligent shall produce wealth, but the lazy shall be subject to taxation." I would ask him to read a bit farther to Proverbs 22:16, which declares "he that oppreseth the

poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich shall surely come to want." I would also point out that there are over 600 verses in the Bible devoted to compassion for the poor and contempt for the rich. Does "camel through the eye of a needle" ring a bell?

Besides the speech itself, Lapin's writings (which have appeared in the National Review, the Wall Street Journal and others) defend offensive social practices, such as "ostracism" and "shaming" of children born out of wedlock. Disgrace and ostracism, writes Lapin, are the "armory by which civil society needs to be maintained," and the "ostracism of a bastard" is actually a gesture of "profound respect for the mother-child tie." No wonder the guy isn't into loving his neighbor as he loves himself. He probably knows a single mother who just got laid off living next door. Lapin said the only reason any of us in the audience feel underpaid is jealousy "that a corporate head makes more than you." Personally, I'd bet Lapin's neighbor feels underpaid if she can't buy milk.

One of his concluding remarks was an entreaty to the audience: "If you think you have a right to something, identify the parallel obligation that someone else has to provide you that right." Here goes. The public has a right to straight answers about why so many of them don't get a living wage. If Lapin can't provide them, he at least has an obligation to be silent.

Jeff Shaw is a columnist for the Emerald. His columns appear on alternate Wednesdays. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

DRAWING BOARD



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Riot jurisdiction

Regarding the riots this term at the 17th Avenue and Alder Street area: It is astounding to me that the University administration just shrugs its shoulders at this blatant disruption, not only to the city and its citizens at large, but to its students who live in the affected area. Earlier this term in the Emerald, we read about a guy who was being punished by the University for making a few harassing phone calls at 3 a.m. to somebody. But a full-blown riot by its students happens, calling our 40 cops, and the University wonders whether they have any jurisdiction?

University Vice President Dan Williams says, "We can't govern people's behavior off campus in any significant way." This is pure bullshit. One thing you can do is kick the offenders' little asses back home to mommy and daddy and let them explain how they got thrown out of college. The University feels comfortable enough about controlling the behavior of its students in their bedrooms, but riots in the streets are presumably a private matter. If I try to kiss someone without asking first, I can incur sanctions from the University. If I uproot street signs, throw bottles at cars and assault the police, the University says that it can't do anything. This kind of attitude makes a laughingstock of the University and its administration. If the University does not yet have a policy on drunken rioting, perhaps it ought to. Ineffective hand-wringing about matters like this does little good, Mr. Williams.

Joseph Renaud
 Germanic languages and literature

Free trade is good

Among the glut of low-quality Emerald editorials this year, Thursday's condemnation of free trade is by far the worst I've seen. Free trade is the only issue that virtually all economists agree upon — from Laissez-faire disciples to Marxists. I'll try to explain why in as few words as possible.

Example: Nike contracts a Mexican factory to make shoes for \$100 million. What can the contractor do with \$100 million? After all, the workers get their paychecks in pesos. The contractor can do one of three things with the dollars: 1) buy American goods; 2) invest in American businesses; or 3) exchange the dollars for another currency, whereupon the other trader has options (1) and (2) above. Jobs cannot go south, north, east or west. All of the money must come back in one way or another — either by purchase of U.S. goods or investment in American companies, both of which create jobs. As much as we spend abroad is as much as comes back. Our trade deficit? That's the result of foreign countries investing in the United States, like those Honda and Nissan factories in Ohio.

The job loss that your article cries about is more accurately called job displacement, which is exactly proportional to the degree of protectionist trade policies of generations past. Sure, if we suddenly free up trade in an industry protected by tariffs for years and years, workers will be displaced. This is a tragedy, but protectionist policies are the culprit, not free trade. I certainly

empathize with families of Pennsylvania steelworkers who depended on a subsidized industry for their livelihoods. But further protectionism merely postpones their fate until the industry becomes too expensive to subsidize; then the result is even greater worker displacement. It is a waste of money and U.S. labor to create goods which could be produced more cheaply in other countries. In a free economy, we would save money by purchasing Mexican steel and use the savings to buy other goods (creating new jobs in new industries).

Meanwhile, all of the dollars spent in Mexico would come back to buy desired American goods, or provide capital to fledgling U.S. industries through foreign investment. You see, all of the money spent abroad finds its way back home — so long as every nation has its own currency. This is called comparative advantage, a cornerstone of economic theory, and a concept that all of you on the board should learn before writing about economic issues ever again. Had you limited your criticism to certain aspects of the NAFTA agreement (i.e., environmental regs, labor regs, etc.) you'd have been fine, but to come out against the ideal of free trade is preposterous. It is painfully obvious that whoever wrote that piece has never taken a single economics class, but nevertheless had the arrogance to take that unwise position.

Jonathan Collegio
 Chairman, College Republican
 Federation of Oregon

CORRECTION

In the story "Community groups launch riot task force," (ODE, Nov. 4) the source of the information on the number of kegs of beer confiscated and landlords, including the quote "Let's go after landlords, and then have the legal system say, 'No, you can't do this,'" should have been attributed to Eugene Police Capt. Roy Brown. The Emerald regrets the error.