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# PERSPECTIVES

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## Anti-trust in the media

**AN EMERALD EDITORIAL**

*The media have abdicated their role as a corporate watch dog, choosing to praise massive monopolies instead*

The local FOX affiliate, KLSR, doesn't carry a locally produced news show. Instead, it relies upon a service called Northwest Cable News, which assembles stories from contributing television news shows throughout the region.

Recently, the show featured a quick story on the Fred Meyer merger. The department store chain is merging with Quality Food Centers and Ralph's Grocery Co., making the chain the fourth largest U.S. food retailer with \$14.9 billion in annual sales.

At the end of the piece, one anchor turned to the camera and flatly proclaimed the merger meant Fred Meyer would now have to pay lower wholesale prices, leading to lower prices for the consumer. No attribution, no explanation, no critical thought at all.

Have the media really fallen that far?

There was a time when muckraking reporters earnestly chased after monopolies, exposing their horrendous profit margins and their mistreatment of workers. In part because of media-sparked consumer pressure, Congress responded, strengthening labor and passing strong anti-trust laws.

That time has obviously passed. Not only do unions receive unfair coverage and heaps of abusive rhetoric from the press, but even monopolies, once the greatest scourge of consumer groups and pro-capitalist theorists alike, are now receiving friendly coverage from the press.

There is no valid argument in favor of monopolies. Capitalist economists claim monopolies operate below efficient level, hurting both company profits and consumers. Consumer activists note that monopolies allow a

company to set prices as their money-making desires see fit. Leftist political groups conclude that monopolies allow already powerful companies to bring forth even more political power because of their near-total control over one aspect of the economy.

The only group that campaigns in favor of monopolies are the companies who are working hard to run their competition out of business. These same companies are the ones whose lobbying of Congress has helped reduce pressure on widespread corporate ownership and whose advertising dollars have helped push for the business pages in which much of the media's pro-monopoly coverage now appears.

Fred Meyer's merger certainly doesn't represent a monopoly as such. It is a move toward a smaller number of corporations controlling an ever-larger share of an industry, however, and that incurs many of the same ills that accompany a monopoly. Instead of singing the praises of a

massive company and the purchasing advantages such a company has, the media should be wondering what such corporations do to small communities and the little stores they compete with.

Fred Meyer may be at a competitive advantage when it comes to purchasing goods or advertising, but that advantage only cripples small business. This does far more to harm consumers in the long run, as they lose a sense of community and the influence they used to have over smaller stores.

Proponents of current business practices and the media coverage of them point to the Justice Department's investigation of Microsoft as proof that anti-trust laws are still being enforced. The fact is, Attorney General Janet Reno waited until Microsoft's massive control began to affect the interests of other big companies before the department stepped in to investigate.

As long as companies maintain their profit margin, anti-trust legisla-

tion is being ignored. For example, another Seattle-area company, Boeing, is merging with another massive aerospace group in a move the federal government will probably approve, despite the fact it will make Boeing responsible for the majority of military and civil aerospace contracts in the United States.

Instead of staring blankly at the camera and smiling as they tell us about the continued buyout of our communities and our interests, the media should return to their muckraking days. Monopolies damage the economy and the community; they don't lead to lower prices and better service.

Next time, we hope the anchor will smile as he tells us the latest anti-trust decision will save consumers money by maintaining competition and local control of industry.

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



### Thumbs



#### TO "GOODNIGHT MOON":

The children's classic just turned 50, and the date has brought back pleasant childhood memories. Yes, we do have pleasant childhood memories. So, goodnight stress, goodnight exams, goodnight personal woes and hello childhood comfort.

#### TO THE FOOTBALL TEAM:

Somewhere between highly improbable and absolutely impossible, a victory Saturday in Seattle was precisely what no sports commentator in the country was banking on. Nevertheless, the team came back from a poor second half to retake the lead and claim victory, giving Oregonians one more thing to hold over our espresso-drinking, glass-blowing, angst-ridden brethren up north.

#### TO THE BIJOU:

In addition to de-lighting sold-out crowds for weeks, the little theater that used to be a church has been playing revivals of popular films. Like "Goodnight Moon," movies like "The Princess Bride" fill us with that warm fuzzy feeling most people in town seem to extract from vodka at the weekly Friday night riot. Some days it's the simple things.

### CORRECTIONS

In the story "Sustainable growth is forum focus" (ODE, Nov. 10), Andrew Yorra should have been identified as representing the group Land Air Water. The Emerald regrets the error. In the story "Senate denies most of Model UN special request" (ODE, Nov. 6), the sentence in the last paragraph should have read, "The Student Senate felt the University Senate's motion would limit students' ability to sculpt their own educations, Senator Michael Olson said."

## DRAWING BOARD

