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Fight crime through community

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

You might not realize it, but Eugene is a festering cesspool of crime.

Well, we don't think so either, but a lot of people in this community are concerned about the crime rate. According to statistics compiled by the FBI, they are worried with some justification.

According to an editorial in The Register-Guard, Eugene ranked 164th out of 206 large- and medium-sized cities, where a lower number indicates fewer crimes per 1,000 people. Interestingly, other Oregon cities also performed poorly; Portland came in at No. 177 and Salem barely beat Eugene, placing 147th.

Worse, crime in Eugene increased 24 percent between 1990 and 1996. The rate also rose in Salem and barely dropped in Portland despite sharp decreases nationwide.

Obviously, this should be of concern. The problem comes when people use statistics such as these to justify expensive and ineffective "solutions."

Clearly, crime is a problem throughout the Willamette Valley. Nevertheless, the Guard's editorial assumed that the reasons crime was high in Eugene were unique to Eugene instead of looking for statewide trends.

Additionally, the editorial took at face value the reasoning of Becky

Hanson, acting captain of the Eugene Police Department detective division. While police do have unique insight into crime rates, they also have considerable biases about crime and a very narrow view about what appropriate anti-crime action entails.

In the editorial, much of the blame for crime is pinned on a shortage of jail space and a lack of police officers. While both prisons and police are necessary for fighting crime, the reasons both are in short supply in Eugene and throughout the state have more to do with the way they are allocated than the amount of funding available.

State prisons are overcrowded because of things such as Ballot Measure 11, which imposed lengthy mandatory sentences on a vast range of criminals, eliminating judicial discretion. Worse, strict anti-drug laws mean state and federal cells are often filled with growers and dealers instead of rapists and murderers.

The United States already imprisons a larger percentage of its citizens than almost all other developed nations. Wasting more taxpayer money to manufacture even more jails is clearly not going to solve crime.

Similar problems plague the police. Officers in Eugene spend a large amount of time enforcing skateboard bans and park closures; proposals such as the daytime curfew would further waste their time. Additionally, police throughout the state squander too much time on potentially profitable vice operations — in Portland, for example, police confiscate the cars of men caught soliciting prostitutes.

While they're busy chasing down drug dealers, johns and hippies, Eugene police are unable to focus on more significant crimes and criminals — people they would undoubtedly rather go after. Eugene has already decided to fund police almost exclusively, at the cost of other local programs during

Rising crime rates in Eugene and Oregon are due to poor priorities, not a lack of police and prisons

this era of tight budgets; increasing the police budget even more would be counterproductive.

The Register-Guard and Oregonians as a whole should consider the fact that increasing crime rates occurred as social spending was being slashed because of Measures 5 and 47. As long as we fail to adequately fund our schools and provide community support, we shouldn't be surprised that our crime rates are rising while those throughout the nation are falling.

Of course, The Register-Guard doesn't consider this possibility, mentioning instead another police explanation: Eugene's "tolerant attitude toward people who commit crime." While the Guard doesn't endorse this explanation, merely giving it credence while ignoring social and economic factors is insulting.

Admittedly, if we imposed 50-year sentences on every criminal, built massive prison complexes throughout eastern Oregon and placed 10 police officers on the street for every remaining citizen, we would solve crime. But at what cost?

Solving crime requires realizing that crime is but one symptom of a flawed society. Fixing that society requires more than beating it into submission. Even in those places where crime rates are dropping, there are signs that the cost has been significant; places such as New York are suffering under a stifling lack of civil liberties, and the bill for all the prisons we've built and drug users we've thrown in jail is growing rapidly.

Here in Oregon, we still have a choice. We can adopt a police-state mentality and squander what few resources we have left to militarize our communities, or we can work to fund and rebuild those communities by improving education, providing jobs and focusing our policing resources where they are truly needed.

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

READER OPINION

Boycott Gardenburger and NORPAC Foods

Editor's note: The following opinion piece was written by representatives of MEChA. The statement has the support of MEChA, the Survival Center, the Jewish Student Union, the Coalition Against Environmental Racism, the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation executive board and former ASUO President Bill Miner, according to representatives from those groups.

The Gardenburger boycott supported on this campus is just. The boycott is an effort to raise the living standards of the most functional workers in our society — farmworkers who pick the fruits and vegetables for our daily sustenance — by forming an economic picket line.

Farmworkers primarily earn their wages through piece rates. Their wages are based on the number of pounds, sacks or buckets of crops they pick in a day's work. Sounds reasonable? We must understand that 1) piece rates are unreasonable; 2) farmworkers work with substances that destroy life; and 3) farmworkers are excluded from employee rights guaranteed under the National Labor Relations Act of 1934.

- Strawberries have been picked at a rate between 12 and 15 cents per pound for the last 15 years while the relative supermarket price of strawberries has gone up exponentially during the same period.

- Farmworkers are the largest workforce in the United States who work, live and are sometimes sprayed with substances meant to kill life. Pesticides, herbicides and fungicides have been shown to cause cancer, tumors, physical deformities in newborns and death. Annually, there are 300,000 related pesticide injuries to farmworkers.

- The NLRA and added worker provisions guarantee employees collective bargaining rights, the right to breaks and a safe work environment, among other things. Farmworkers, contrary to worker protections, are completely excluded from these provisions.

- Child labor is allowed in the agricultural industry.

Gardenburger plays a very important role in the boycott of NORPAC Foods Inc. and its product line, Flav-R-Pac, by continuing to have its products sold through the distribution network of NORPAC Food Sales and its principal contractor, Robert Arneson Sales Agent Inc. In essence, Gardenburger is breaking the boycott of NORPAC Foods by not severing its business relationship with NORPAC Food Sales. NORPAC Food Sales was a major reason Gardenburger earned \$54 million in sales last year. This is why Gardenburger refuses to honor the request of PCUN, Oregon's treeplanter and farmworker union, to support the NORPAC boycott by finding another distributor for its products. This is

also why Gardenburger was added to the boycott called by PCUN.

NORPAC Foods is the largest growers' cooperative west of the Mississippi with a distribution network that reaches Japan. Their reported earnings for 1997 were up 34 percent above 1996. This was due in part to NORPAC divesting its interest in food companies with lagging sales. Despite a \$5.37 million net profit for the company in 1997, the president of NORPAC has declared the boycott a problem for NORPAC and the entire agricultural industry in Oregon. Gardenburger is implicated in the agricultural industry's concern with the boycott, as will be demonstrated below.

Gardenburger Inc. claims it has an outstanding record on issues of social responsibility. While Lyle Hubbard, president and CEO of Gardenburger, would like you to believe that because a business magazine lists Gardenburger as one of the most socially responsible companies in the country, he ignores the fact that the raw ingredients used in Gardenburger products are picked by farmworkers at other Oregon farms! And that the ingredients — legumes, vegetables and fruits — are grown with fungicides, pesticides and herbicides! Furthermore, Gardenburger recently moved its production facility to Utah, a state with laws hostile to unions, to ensure lower labor costs. How can a company that makes tax-deductible donations to community groups totaling a whopping 0.4 percent of their earnings (based on 1995 reported earnings and in-kind donations) claim social responsibility when it engages in deception while supporting labor exploitation? Clearly, this is a choice of profits over people.

Farmworkers voted in the fields to improve their situation. The explanation of consumer and market demands given by the University administration and housing administration allegedly provides the justification for Gardenburger's presence in campus dining halls. What is actually does, contrary to what we may think supply and demand is about, is undermine democracy and, more important, human dignity.

We ask that you not only support the boycott of Gardenburger but continue the boycott of Gardenburger's distributor, NORPAC, and its food product line, Flav-R-Pac. The University can embrace a position that other universities — Duke being the latest — across the country have taken by refusing to purchase products made by sweatshop labor. The sweatshops in the fields of the Willamette Valley demand that we do the same.

This opinion piece represents the views of its authors and those who have endorsed it. It is not necessarily representative of the opinion of the Emerald.

