PERSPECTIVES

Wednesday

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Still inspired by a fallen King

Giovanni Salimena Emerald

The question is not, 'If I stop to help this man in need, what will happen to me?' The question is, 'If I do *not* stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?' That's the question."

The above quote is from Martin Luther King Jr.'s final speech on April 3, 1968. The next day, 33 years ago today, King was shot on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tenn. He was pronounced dead at 7:11 p.m. Four years earlier, he had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The most renowned civil rights leader in America, King forged a path that would change race relations in this country forever.

King's assassination that night is somewhat ironic, however, in that he wasn't in Memphis to march for civil rights. In 1967, King had begun broadening efforts to help his people by focusing on poverty and worker rights. He was in Memphis in support of 1,300 striking sanitation workers. King was asking his supporters to stand up for the rights of workers who were being treated unfairly.

One year ago today, University students began protesting on the lawn of Johnson Hall, demanding that University President Dave Frohnmayer sign on with the Worker Rights Consortium. The goal, they claimed, was to end the use of the University's logo on apparel made in foreign factories where workers are subjected to inhumane treatment, wages and living conditions.

The Emerald editorial board certainly recognizes the inadequacy of the comparison. The Johnson Hall protests last year are obviously not the same as King's struggle and sacrifices. But the issues are comparable, and students should take this opportunity to remember King's work and to find out more.

There are many complicated issues surrounding the WRC and University apparel licensing. There are many complicated issues involved in poverty, race relations and worker rights in America and worldwide. But there are many ways to be involved, there are many ways to make a difference, and not all of them require sit-ins or speeches.

"We don't need any bricks and bottles; we don't need any Molotov cocktails. We just need to go around to these stores and to these massive industries in our country, and say, 'God sent us by here to say to you that you're not treating His children right. And we've come by here to ask you to make the first item on your agenda fair treatment where God's children are concerned. Now if you are not prepared to do that, we do have an agenda that we must follow. And our agenda calls for withdrawing economic support from you.'"

We're not advocating any specific action. King, in his words above, called upon his supporters to change the dynamics of the problem economically, by using public pressure with money. That may be a good solution for some people. Sit-ins may be a good solution for others. There are also business concerns that need consideration when examining worker rights. But maybe the students protesting last April weren't just rabble-rousers looking for an excuse. Perhaps the WRC is bad and the Fair Labor Association is good; maybe it's the other way around. You won't know if you don't get involved and get the facts.

The issues of worker rights, poverty, race and gender relations are important and interconnected. King worked on these issues, and whether their methods were right or wrong, students last year worked on them. What follows is a list of Web sites that you may find useful in getting more information. There are also groups on campus that are involved in these issues; take the time to stop in the ASUO office in Suite 4 of the EMU and ask about them.

In closing, here are the haunting last words of King's final speech on April 3, 1968:

"... I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as people, will get to the Promised Land. And so I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything; I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

- www.stanford.edu/group/King/ is the Web site of the Martin Luther King Jr. Papers Project at Stanford University, filled with full-text speeches, biography, chronology and more.
- seattletimes.nwsource.com/mlk/ is the Seattle Times Web site dedicated to King's life, with stories and photos.
- www.infoplease.com/spot/mlk1.html is a Web site explaining the official version of events of King's assassination.
- www.parascope.com/mx/luther1.htm is a Web site explaining the various alternate theories of King's assassination.
- www.workersrights.org is the WRC Web site, which explains the independent, student-organized monitoring group's mission and structure.
- www.nlcnet.org is the Web site of the National Labor Committee, an organization dedicated to worker rights that works with non-governmental organizations to promote change in corporate labor practices.
- www.fairlabor.org/ is the Fair Labor Association Web site, which explains the joint industry- and government-organized monitoring group's mission and structure.
- www.laborrights.org/ is the Web site of the International Labor Rights Fund, an non-governmental organization working for labor rights worldwide.

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

Letter to the editor

Stand up for conservative views

Kudos to J. Thomas Gombos ("Keep Your Opinions To Yourself," ODE, April 2). Most public and many private college faculty are well to the left of center politically. Further, they typically are not bashful in promoting their leftist views in the name of "tolerance and diversity."

Last year, I attended a class session with my daughter. The professor went out of his way to blast Christianity. At one point this professor stated that "Jerry Falwell was worse than Hitler." That was quite a statement, given that the professor also referred to his Orthodox Jewish heritage. This professor was essentially saying, "Don't confuse me with the facts, because I've made up my mind!" Sadly, this is an all-too-common occurrence in the academic world, with no dissenting argument from equally qualified people.

Gombos is quite right. Students and parents are paying a lot of money for instruction, not to listen to an instructor's unsubstantiated opinion. The student is the consumer; the instructor is hired to teach the subject to the best of their ability. If opinions are discussed, then both sides should be presented.

By the way, when was the last time that a conservative perspective was presented in a university-wide forum and given respect? Tolerance and diversity run both ways. All views must be given equal value and respect, including conservative values.

I would encourage Gombos and other like-minded students to stand their ground and speak up. After all, it is your money.

Jim Hallwyler
Class of '72
Eugene

CORRECTION

A story about the Giustina Resources Dexter Sort Yard ("OSPIRG, NEDC forge environmental lawsuit," ODE, April 2) incorrectly stated that the two organizations are also suing the Department of Environmental Quality. The DEQ is not named in the suit against Giustina.

The Emerald regrets the error.

CLARIFICATION

In the story "Students travel to OUS hearing" (ODE, April 3) the Oregon Student Association was misidentified as strictly a lobby group. The OSA also offers training and other educational services to student governments at state universities.

In the same story, it was reported that ASUO President Jay Breslow testified about the incidental fee during a March 29 legislative work session. Breslow was in attendance at the session and answered questions, but was not officially testifying before the committee.

The Emerald regrets the errors.