

THOSE DIRTY BIRDS

How can the city of Eugene waste its time debating a downtown exclusion zone for people while turkeys are running amok? Yes, at the corner of Broadway and Willamette, less than three blocks from City Hall, turkeys took over the sidewalks, forcing pedestrians to go out of their way to avoid them.

The problem was not just the presence of turkeys. No, it's much worse! It's what they were doing. Though I blush as I write this, you must know. They were defecating on the streets! And worse yet, the males were displaying in public, an act of overt sexual behavior! Even the turkey hens retreated in dismay at the unwanted provocations.

But you must know, that, nature being nature, one day a hen will not shy away. Is City Council really prepared for turkeys fornicating in front of banks, title companies and law offices?

Can you imagine what will happen to Eugene's image if word gets out that turkeys have taken over downtown? People like Stephen Colbert will mock our slogan, "Eugene, a Great City for Arts and Outdoors," replacing it with "Eugene, a Great Place for Nutria and Turkeys." How embarrassing!

I am also deeply concerned — worried sick, in fact — that the streets of downtown Eugene are no longer safe. Turkeys have a reputation for being aggressive, especially during mating season. What will it take to secure the streets and protect the citizenry — a severe peck on the thighs of a city councilor?

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



Now, please tell me again, why is it that City Council is trying to exclude people from downtown?

John Hofer
Eugene

VAL'S VENDETTA?

Rep. Val Hoyle (D) won her first election with the endorsement of current city councilor and previous state representative Pat Farr (R). Farr is running against stalwart Democrat Rob Handy in the upcoming County Commission election, and it seems that Hoyle's known

dislike for Handy and Sorenson (perhaps because they are strong, uncompromising, and outspoken progressives who fight for what we believe is right) may be a factor in her scathing comments and attacks against the "process."

Pete and Rob don't just fight for what I believe is right; they honor and support the values of the Democratic Party of Lane County, which is why we endorsed the two candidates almost unanimously. It's election time, and we strong progressives will stand by the near-unanimous endorsements of Sorenson, Handy and

a slew of local Democrats running in Springfield and Eugene. We will stand by the values of our party, and cannot be fooled by the personal vendetta of a disgruntled state representative.

Ben Torres
Eugene

INSPIRE VS. INTIMIDATE

After attending the most recent Eugene Symphony Orchestra concert, I realized how much I was still seething from music critic Tom Madoff's condescending comparison between the former conductor, Giancarlo Guerrero, and the current conductor, Danail Rachev, which appeared in the R-G. Frankly, I was worried that no one else would hire Guerrero away. I was overjoyed to be proven wrong and wish him success.

I have attended symphony concerts since the symphony's founding. I claim only one collegiate music appreciation course and admit to ears that may be unable to discriminate the "color" with which Madoff says the symphony occasionally played under Guerrero but has not, so far, under Rachev.

Manoff also criticizes Rachev for using a score, whereas Guerrero did not. That's equivalent to my complaining that one conductor negotiates the path between the violins to the podium like an ox, while the other does so with dignity. Arguably, neither entrance style has that much to do with the music. There is an important distinction between memorizing a score and understanding the music. Rachev understands and leads the symphony with inspiration, not intimidation.

THE CLASS WAR FROM ABOVE BY GORDON LAFER

Time for Faculty Union

The future of higher education depends on it

Across the UO campus, teachers and researchers are organizing to create a faculty union.

Of course everyone wants better wages and benefits. UO salaries are well below national averages, and health insurance has gotten progressively worse. With a union, health and pension benefits could never again be cut without negotiations with faculty representatives.

But money is not the biggest issue. Anyone who's smart enough to earn a Ph.D. is also smart enough to have gone to business or law school and be making more. Academics by definition are people who explicitly chose the lower-paying path because they're driven by some deeper commitment to intellectual life.

But higher education is being reshaped in ways that threaten to destroy the very values that drew us to academia. It is this, even more than wages and benefits, that lends the union its urgency.

Universities are being remade in the image of corporations. Students are viewed as customers, which means charging as much tuition as possible while spending as little as possible on teaching. It also means abandoning the mission of educating smart working-class kids from local communities, in favor of attracting higher paying students from out of state or abroad.

So too, academic departments are increasingly viewed as revenue centers — encouraged to promote big lecture classes and to avoid hard-to-grade writing assignments or other expensive forms of personal attention. The decision of which departments grow or shrink is made not on any intellectual or pedagogic basis, but as a financial decision. What generates tuition dollars or outside grants grows; everything else — including traditional liberal arts staples like philosophy and religion — get cut.

For faculty, corporatization means the wholesale replacement of tenure-track faculty with part-time, adjunct and temporary instructors. Nationally, 70 percent of all teaching hours are now performed by "contingent" teachers; an undergraduate signing up for an English class has a less than one-in-four chance of being taught by a tenure-track

professor. Non-tenure-track faculty — people with degrees and skills, but no job security — are much cheaper than regular faculty, and can be treated as just-in-time production inputs, hired or fired at the last minute in response to fluctuating enrollments. This is what led NYU Dean Ann Marcus to famously celebrate adjuncts as faculty she could "abuse, exploit and then turn loose."

Traditionally, a university is supposed to be a place that is specifically outside the rat race, a place for curiosity and critical thinking. The idea of academia is to raise up a crop of bold thinkers freed to pursue their own idea of the truth without fear of losing their jobs for it. This is why campuses are homes for a broader range of ideas than can be found anywhere else.

But by locking the majority of faculty to positions of institutionalized insecurity, the corporate university does just the opposite: Instead of building thinkers up, it tears them down, creating a scared and silent teaching staff.

In the sciences, the days when Ph.D.s. were encouraged to their own ideas in their own lab have been replaced by a corporate structure where a single professor oversees an army of postdoctoral "fellows" who constitute the country's most highly trained low-wage labor force, and whose hopes of ever running his or her own lab shrink by the day.

These are national problems, not created by UO administrators. But administrators — under pressure to squeeze all possible revenue out of each function of the university — are not well positioned to resist them. A faculty union is the only organization that can serve as an effective counterweight to these pressures, in a fight to restore the more humane vision of education.

Personally, I'd like to see a contract that not only improves wages and benefits, but that guarantees UO students access to smaller classes where they can formulate their own arguments and learn how to write; increases the share of teaching done by tenure-track faculty and creates a pathway from non-tenure to tenure-track positions; and encourages mentoring of grad students by providing course release for supervising large numbers of dissertations.

Whether we can win these things depends on how many faculty join the cause and how strong a union we create.

But without a union, the future is clear, and it's bleak.

It's time for faculty to put down our books and pick up the phone to the union (uauoregon.org). For ourselves, for our students, and for anyone who hopes to follow us into this life.

Gordon Lafer is a professor at the UO Labor Education and Research Center, a research associate with the Economic Policy Institute and is the author of Free and Fair? How Labor Law Fails U.S. Democratic Election Standards (2005).

