

Mysterious campaign lacks nuclear issue

About a year ago, I bought a T-shirt with a cartoon profile of a female Yuppie looking up at the sky in distress. She was crying out: "Nuclear War!!! Oh, No. There Goes My Career!!!"



Ellen Goodman

There was something in that line that got to me — the black humor, the irony of it. But now when I see the T-shirt hanging in my locker, I wonder if it is the ultimate tag line on this peculiar election year.

This is a campaign of mysteries. The voters applaud Ronald Reagan's "leadership," even when they do not follow his lead on impor-

tant questions. They agree with Walter Mondale's stand on many policy matters, but do not want him standing in the Oval Office.

The most glaring example of this paradox has to do with war. With monotonous regularity, the public rates nuclear war as its number one concern. A full one-half of Americans surveyed believe that nuclear war will happen in their lifetime. At the same time, most of the polls of this season have shown that the public is worried about Reagan's hand on the nuclear trigger.

By any normal mathematical equation — one plus one equals two — this would add up to a landslide for Mondale. But it is not working that way. In the new math of this election, the number

one negative — fear of war — is less important than the number one positive — an improved economy.

Is this just proof of a national myopia captured by the author of my T-shirt? After all, 50 percent of Americans under 30, Reagan's largest group of supporters, believe that an all-out nuclear war is likely within 10 years. Have they simply decided to drive a better car to the holocaust?

I do not think we are suffering from madness or that we have entirely lost the instinct for self-preservation. My sense is that voters simply cannot grab onto the great, amorphous, Number One Worry we call "nuclear war." There is no concrete solution up for a vote. What we have at the moment is a concern in search of an issue.

For a while, it looked as if the nuclear freeze would be the way to translate fear into political action. It was and is a simple way of demanding, "No more." But supporting the freeze has become, as one advocate admits, "just another way of expressing anxiety." When a majority of delegates to the Republican National Convention simultaneously back a freeze

and the president who opposes it, the idea has lost some political meaning.

When the Public Agenda Foundation looked into this gap between our private worries and our public politics, it found some consensus and some confusion. Americans are absolutely clear on the dangers of nuclear war, and totally reject the notion that it could be "limited" or "winnable." We even reject the notion that there are winners in the arms race. In short, we agree on the worries.

But we are thoroughly conflicted about the nature of the Soviet threat, how to negotiate with the USSR or how to defend ourselves in the nuclear age. In short, we do not know what to do. And "doing" is the business of politics.

As the foundation's president, Dan Yankelovich, said, "It's an enormous opportunity for what political leaders always look for, those concerns that haven't yet become an issue. It gives them a chance to take leadership." Yet, as he agrees, they have not taken that leadership.

So far, the discussion about

nuclear policy has gone on at two levels: the level of anxieties expressed by "The Day After" or "Red Dawn," and the level of technological jargon spoken by the cruise and MX missile experts. In politics, it goes on from two sides. Reagan talks tough (in the nicest possible way) and Mondale talks freeze. Reagan plays on fear of the Soviets, and Mondale on fear of Reagan. Many voters, anxious and uncertain, turn the dial to find some easy listening.

As Yankelovich said, "You can't explain the fact that the arms race isn't the number one issue without some reference to the peculiar kind of national mood. It's like the public is taking a holiday from negativity, from complexity, from the big mind-breaking questions."

If we can't get a grip on the questions, if we do not see clear choices and options, we concentrate on something reassuring — the temporary good news of the economy. But if there is anyone who really thinks we can take a holiday from the arms race, I have a T-shirt tailored just for you.

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Letters

Religious approach to abortion avoids issue

I disagree with Kema Soderberg ("Pre-defined religious morals unneeded," Sept. 26 Daily Nebraskan). Sure, people should not force their beliefs on others, but how do we determine if a moral is religious or not?

At Bob Jones University people were forced not to date interracially, and blacks were kept out of some school organizations. If a religion breaks a law, it is not different from any individual breaking a law. Some churches do disagree with the government on issues like abortion, nuclear proliferation, etc., but these churches work within the law. Anyone who doesn't work with the law — for example, someone who bombs an

abortion clinic — should be punished according to the law whether he is a priest, ditch-digger, lawyer or whatever.

Abortion is as much a religious moral issue as murder or social security. A religious person judges government laws according to his faith, or that person would be denying his faith. Religion is an inseparable part of that person. This idea is the same with abortion or Social Security. It doesn't erase the issue.

The argument that abortion is a religious, moral issue is a cardboard protest. It changes nothing and is, in fact, skirting the true issue.

The real issue with abortion is

whether or not we are allowing murder. Since science cannot determine when human cells actually become a person, shouldn't we give the unborn the benefit of a doubt and let them live? Otherwise we may be committing murder without realizing it.

As to the argument of the right to choice, everyone should also have the right to live, whether they depend on someone else, as with a fetus, or whether they are just ordinary people walking down the street.

Kyle W. Hoffman
freshman
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Student says neutrality naive

Dear Editor:
Kema Soderberg does a wonderful job of clouding the true issue concerning government-

func d abortions in her Sept. 26 editorial, "Pre-defined religious morals unneeded."

One would never guess from her article that people who abhor abortion are forced to help pay for thousands of abortions yearly through their federal tax dollars.

Platitudes like, "It is not the government's right to rule on this issue or morality because the correct morals are undefinable," only throw an etherizing haze over the entire issue.

The government is, in fact, taking a moral stand in forcing certain people to help certain other people abort their fetuses. It just so happens that the moral position of the U.S. government coin-

cides with Soderberg's at the moment, but this does not mean the government is taking no moral position whatsoever.

It is a little shameful, or at best naive, for an educated person to claim moral neutrality in a political issue. The claim to neutrality is little more than an attempt to boost one's morality over the opposition's.

Mike Lawrence
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