

opinion/editorial

Grass-roots democracy conquers Big Business

Democracy is a funny thing. Nothing downright hilarious mind you, but always a fascinating study.

Take last week's city elections. The Northeast Radial again was voted down, and as precinct statistics were tallied and chronicled, the old local power structure became vividly obvious. The Northeast Radial, as the name so cleverly suggests, would have eased traffic in Northeast Lincoln and provided a short cut to Cornhusker Highway and Interstate 80.

Did the people of Northeast Lincoln want the Radial? No. How about the university district, the Malone and West Clinton neighborhoods, where the actual asphalt would be laid? Nope. Woods Park? Havelock? Meadow Lane? Downtown? Air Park? Uh, huh. In fact, out of 177 precincts, only 28 favored the radial by a majority.

So who did want the Northeast Radial? Southeast Lincoln of course, the area farthest removed from the road's perceived benefits. One of only three pro-radial blocs actually north of O Street was Capital Beach. What does that neighborhood have in common with southeast Lincoln way across town? Very simply: money.

The radial was really a pro-business issue underneath that claims of saving everybody gasoline and time. What's good for business is good for a

city's economic elite, who often face frustration at election time when they find their votes are no more powerful than anyone else's.

The people of north Lincoln, long the economic underdogs in the city, can be understandably wary when listening to a south Lincoln businessman extolling the virtues of the roadway. Especially when the radial is going to serve his south Lincoln interests during such critical times as the mad rush to get to a Havelock steakhouse after football games.

The upper levels of a community most often wield the greatest share of power, but in elections such as last week, the voters can command a tremendous voice. The pro-radial faction now may be grumbling quietly about how backward a town is that would refuse such an obvious convenience. They may be right. It is very likely the radial would aid traffic flow and get many citizens where they want to go faster.

But perhaps, just perhaps, many people in Lincoln voted down the radial because they did not like to see neighborhoods unsettled and pavement take the place of yards. Perhaps it's a bit of Midwestern ruralism showing through: "Heck, we can get along just fine as we are. And if the folks over there in south Lincoln are so all-fired con-

cerned about us, why in blazes don't they come and chew the fat with us more often?" Whatever it was, it was refreshing.

But as stated earlier, Democracy's a funny thing. In the simultaneous City Council elections, the top three vote-getters were pro-radial candidates. This is not as incongruous as it appears. When it comes to certain local issues, voters are not always Republican, Democrat, liberal, conservative, business or labor, but instead pro-citizen/self.

Maybe we're just a naive little Midwestern town. Look at Washington for contrast. There, a man named James Watt, in an unelected position, has been making environmental decisions that make the Northeast Radial look like a memo. And no citizen is allowed to vote on the consequences. The democratic system begins to falter here, as we see a man catering to a grossly self-serving minority on matters that dwarf our concerns here in one city. We aren't allowed to vote on whether we want our national parks turned over to private enterprise, or whether we want to see off-shore oil drilling on scenic coastline.

We can't vote on individual national policies, so what's a citizen to do? Well, I guess that's up to us.

Casey McCabe

Impetuous reporter finds injustice the hard way

Washington—Every year at this time, ambitious and well-educated college seniors drop by our office searching for jobs in journalism. Most of them seek nothing less than an opportunity to find the vice president at a downtown strip joint, or a presidential assassin.

Few of the journalism grads we've met this year are interested in what Detroit News Editor Bill Giles described as the starting, \$190-a-week newspaper job.

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"The editor will put the selected newcomer to work writing weather stories, weddings and obituaries until somebody decides the newcomer can be trusted to handle bigger things. Like a good fire," writes Giles.

The historically poor treatment of spirited young reporters often drives them to other professions such as public relations, advertising or to graduate school.

Yet, after learning of the long hours, stressful working conditions and financial shortcomings, a few young reporters still try to make it big without chasing ambulances.

Jon Lee Anderson, 23, is one young journalist who got tackled trying to make an end run on the profession.

Bored by the monotony of undergraduate life, the tall, curly-haired Anderson dropped out of the University of Florida during his sophomore year in 1978. The son of a retired Foreign Service officer, he'd always had an appetite for travel, having been raised in a half-dozen countries.

Soon the romantic Anderson made his way to Honduras and then Peru. There, in the capital city of Lima, he noticed the injustices in Peruvian society and asked the Associated Press and the English-speaking *Lima Times* if he could write about them.

Like most inquisitive and experienced reporters, however, Anderson let his impetuosity get the best of him.

Last spring, he accompanied the Peruvian Investigative Police (PIP) on a

narcotics raid in the countryside. The police were seeking coca growers whose crops are processed into cocaine for export to the United States.

Anderson's story on the raid for the *Lima Times* insinuated that some of the Peruvian police department were "on the take."

While strolling with his Peruvian fiancée just weeks before his scheduled June wedding, Anderson was stopped by immigration police. Lacking his travel documents, the young reporter was held in a downstairs lobby while the immigration authorities ransacked his apartment. They returned from his room carrying a gun and a half-kilogram of cocaine.

Anderson, who claimed the items weren't his, was dragged off with his girlfriend to the high-security Penitencia Rosa jail. According to a family member, who later visited him, Anderson was beaten, hung from a pulley by his wrists and given electric shocks to his genitals and nipples. Guards had been under orders to obtain a confession by any means.

"Jon signed the confession after six days of torture," said one family member. "His girlfriend, Juana, was also being held. He thought they were going to kill her unless he signed."

After "confessing," Anderson was transferred to the Lorigancho prison, a medium-security structure outside of Lima. Doctors who examined him there found injuries to his back, legs, arms and head.

Today Anderson shares a cell with 16 other prisoners. He complains of shivering in salty water and of sharing three toilets with 500 other men in his prison cell.

Sometime later this month, about a year after his arrest, Jon Lee Anderson will be brought to trial. If convicted, he could receive anywhere from 2 to 15 years in prison.

Anderson's relatives contend he was framed by the Peruvian police for his unflattering articles. And sources within our own Drug Enforcement Administration even say "it looks like a setup."

"Look at this case seriously," said one DEA source. "The Peruvian immigration officers never arrest anyone on the street. I know because I helped train some of them.

They probably got this guy Anderson as a favor to the civil police."

Fortunately, Peru is one of six countries that exchanges prisoners with the United States. Anderson may be luckier than most of the thousands of Americans now jailed elsewhere in the world.

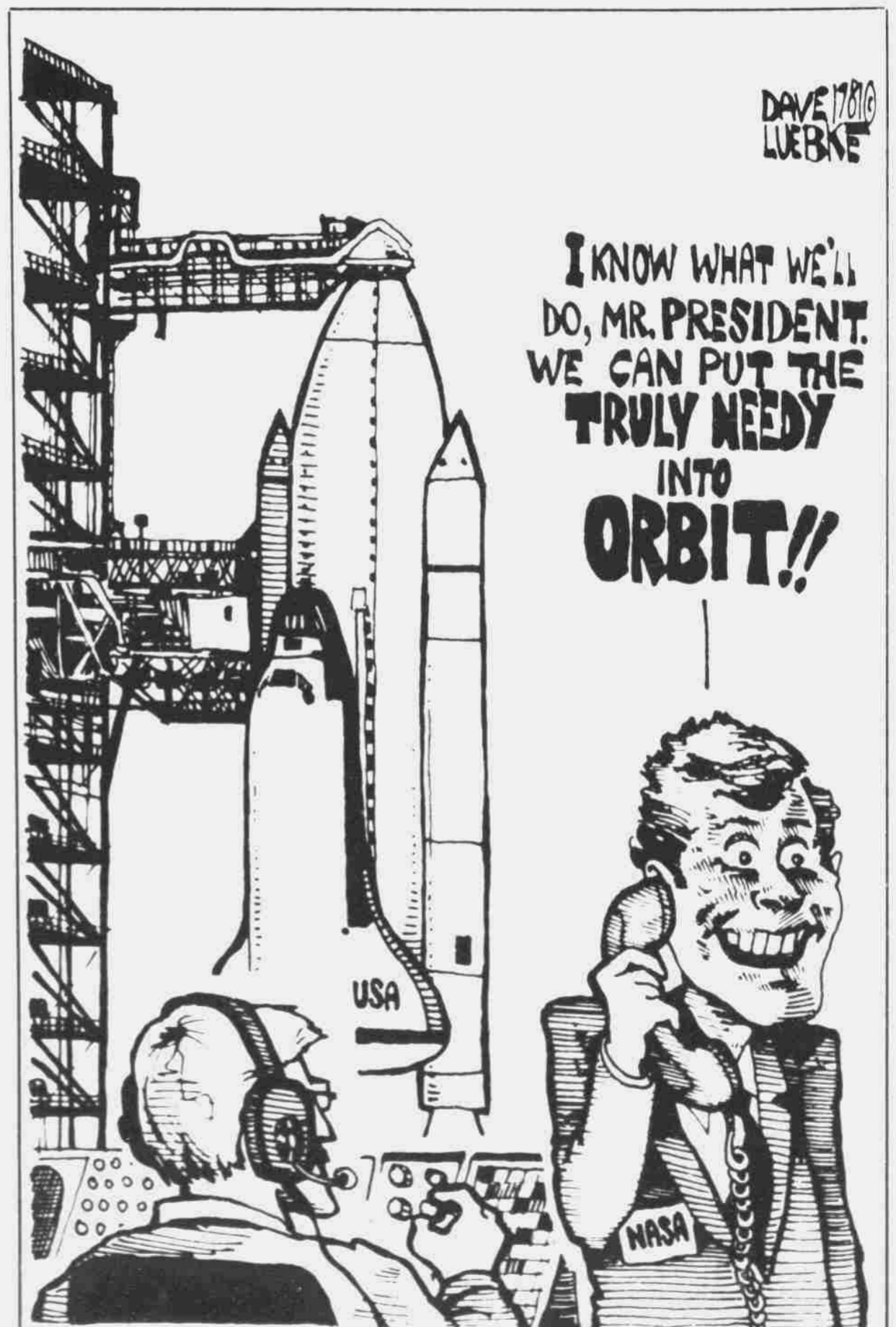
Yet the State Department has done little to pressure the Peruvians for a quick trial. Embassy officials in Lima who've seen Anderson recently wouldn't even talk to us about his condition.

Nevertheless, Jon Lee Anderson is still

writing articles from prison, having learned the hard way why young reporters are kept under wraps.

Ernest Hemmingway may have stated Anderson's case best in *A Farewell to Arms*: "If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them . . . It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure that it will kill you too, but there will be no special hurry."

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