

opinion/editorial

Unemployed controllers must blame themselves

When members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization endorsed Ronald Reagan for president last year, they must have thought they were getting a friend in the White House.

They must have thought Reagan was committed to easing the plight of controllers who complain about their work conditions. And they must have thought that when they stamped their collective feet loud enough, Reagan would respond to their liking.

But, when PATCO began talking strike this summer, Reagan and Transportation Secretary Drew Lewis said a strike by federal employees against the government was illegal and members would be fired.

PATCO members went ahead with strike on Aug. 3, and in effect, fired themselves. Reagan gave the federal mutineers 48 hours to return to work — an extension he did not have to grant — but they refused to return. Of all the decisions Reagan has made during his presidency, the decision not to submit to the demands of the

controllers must have been among the easiest.

As employees of the federal government, air traffic controllers signed an oath saying they would not strike. When PATCO issued its demands for higher salaries and less work, Reagan had to uphold the U.S. Code saying that civil servants cannot hold their jobs if they participate in a strike against the government.

To allow some federal employees the right to strike is to allow all federal employees the right to strike. And to allow that would be a serious breach of the president's duties.

No one forced these people to work for the government. They knew when they were hired the obligations of their public service. PATCO simply chose to ignore them.

So now, three weeks later, air traffic has not yet returned to normal frequency and intermittent strikes by controllers overseas give PATCO members a morale boost and pilots and passengers headaches.

Too much is being made of Reagan's adamant stand against PATCO. He is merely upholding the job he was elected to. He certainly recognizes the right of collective bargaining but not when the right to strike has been waived by employees.

The government did offer PATCO a \$40 million increase in salary and benefits this summer. Not only did members reject it, but they demanded 17 times their original request or they would strike.

Air safety has probably been diminished. Anytime that many regulars are replaced by the second team, the quality of service has to decline somewhat.

But still, the nation's air traffic continues. Maybe not as fast, maybe not on schedule, but it continues.

The next time federal employees band together and strike illegally, they may think twice before telling the government to "take this job and shove it."



Three shootings keep world safe till December

They say bad turns come in threes. If that holds true, then the world can rest easy until December 1981. We've had our three shootings for the year.

First came the Dec. 8 slaying of John Lennon. Less than four months later, in March of this year, our president was struck by an assassin's bullet. And then, in just more than a month, the headlines read "Again" — the Pope had been shot.

patti gallagher

Lennon's death brought thousands to the gates of New York's Dakota apartment building; the thousands brought tears and vigils for the ex-Beatle and his surviving wife and son.

Following his death came an outpouring of media attention and public alarm about the availability of handguns. Mark David Chapman, the 25-year-old assassin from Hawaii, had killed a legendary man with a .38-caliber handgun and a cry of disgust for guns rose from the country. One man, though, stood firm in his opposition to gun control. Ironically, he was the next victim.

Ronald Reagan, 70 years old and 70 days the president, was struck in the chest as he exited the Washington Hilton Hotel on March 30. Accounts of the shooting circulated quickly — complete with details of the bullet's

path and the president's operation room humor — as the United States and the world sighed. We sighed relief that "Yes, he would live." We sighed despair that "No, no one is immune."

And again we heard about gun control. Television news shows, newspapers and magazines played up the fact that one of the strongest advocates of the "right to bear arms" lay victim to his own beliefs. Then the din died and it was calm and once again no positive solution was found to stop people from shooting people.

So John Hinckley, Jr., the bizarre loner who reportedly shot Reagan out of love for a movie star, went to prison and the government did a study on the responsiveness of the Secret Service.

The study, released by United Press International last week, listed 11 recommendations for tighter presidential security. Among them is allowing the Secret Service to pages long and costing heaven knows how much, also commended the special agents and hospital involved in the shooting and stated "the assassination attempt was made by a single person with a small caliber weapon in daylight." Revealing stuff.

Brimming prisons demand attention

WASHINGTON — You're going to be hearing a lot about non-prison sentences, victim-restitution contracts, mandatory community services and other alternatives to incarceration during the coming years: Not because soft-hearted liberals are taking over the criminal justice system, but for the simple reason that we're running out of prison space.

william raspberry

According to the Bureau of Prisons, the number of U.S. and state inmates is up 61 percent since 1969 — from 98 per 100,000 population to 140. Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia are under court orders to reduce overcrowding. Local jails, intended to hold suspects awaiting trial, are crammed with sentenced convicts because the states have run out of space for them.

True, there was a 8 percent decrease in the number of federal prisoners between 1979 and 1980. But according to Benjamin H. Renshaw, acting director of the Bureau of Prisons, most of that decrease resulted from the fact that the federal authorities have begun concentrating their resources on white-collar and organized crime, leaving it to state and local law enforcers to deal with bank robberies, auto thefts and most drug offenses.

The safest prediction is that the trend will continue up, perhaps even accelerate if the Reagan cuts in social

programs are not accompanied by offsetting gains in employment.

The knee-jerk response to the increase in criminal convictions and overcrowded prisons will be to build more prisons. But building and staffing prisons is an expensive proposition, whose main effect is to postpone, rather than solve, the problem. Sooner or later, nearly every convict will be more of a threat to society than when he went in.

The more logical approach is to make increased use of non-prison alternatives, at least for nonviolent offenders.

The third in the "bad turns" was the mid-May shooting of Pope John Paul II. As the pontiff toured St. Peter's Square in Vatican City, a papal crowd of thousands watching, a 23-year-old Turk, apparently an international terrorist named Mehmet Ali Agca, shot at him.

The world's sentiment seemed to echo that of a newsman in Detroit as quoted by *Newsweek* magazine: "We shoot presidents periodically, but nobody shoots popes."

But the fact is we do shoot popes. And we shoot presidents and we shoot Beatles too. One wishes the solutions were obvious. We can document the lives of assassins and would-be assassins.

We can speculate their motives. We can step up security forces to protect our heroes and leaders. We can do studies that tell us what we already know. We can talk about controlling weapons and we can even make progress toward that end.

But the truth remains that there are few, if any, solutions to prevent kooks from taking shots at our popes, presidents, and performers. We can only hope — for this year — we've met our quota of three.

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