

Editorial

President should set private example for public

Last week as President Reagan prepared to board a helicopter headed for Camp David, Md., a bevy of reporters surrounded him. Someone threw the president a question about one of many groups hurt by his budget cuts and the crippled economy.

Reagan's response was an easy, short answer for a serious question. Then, with a wave of his hand and a flash of that disarming Hollywood smile, he climbed into the roaring helicopter.

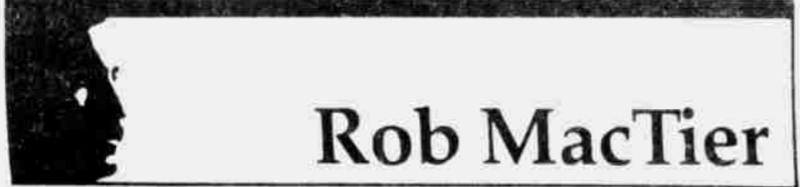
This short episode on the nightly news presented a deep irony. Here was the president commenting on a group's struggle to survive and at the same time departing for a weekend at a private retreat. Obviously, Reagan's life is far removed from the everyday hardships of lower-income and middle-income Americans.

But no one is begrudging the president his time away from the enormous pressures of his job. After all, who would want to see the President of the United States become a victim of burnout? Rather, it is the symbolism and political effect on Reagan's actions that come into

Missed the plane but hit the books

It was an elk that got me this time. One would think that I would have learned by now to keep my eye on the main chance, but I still get distracted much too easily. Some things seem destined to remain the same.

Last week, I was making a reckless dash along a snow-covered Interstate 70 in Colorado in an effort to catch a



Rob MacTier

4:30 flight out of the Avon airport. This being the second semester of my senior year, it was my last chance to return to school on time, for once in my life. I skidded into Avon at 4:20 and stopped a policeman to ask for directions to the airport. He spied an elk on a nearby hillside and, foolishly, I took a few minutes to gaze at it before gunning my car to the airport.

I could see the plane engines warming up as I turned the final corner, but I checked my watch and still seemed to have plenty of time. It did not dawn on me that the watch had stopped and was giving the same time that it had five minutes earlier.

Feeling confident, I was sauntering into the terminal when, to my dismay, I saw the propellers of Rocky Mountain Airways Flight No. 417 burst into full power. The plane took off. With it went my last chance of ever returning to college by the set deadline. If only I had dived through the terminal doors and thrown myself in front of the plane, I'm sure I could have gotten on board. Instead, I had slacked up in the last, vital minutes. I had blown my race to the plane in the sprint.

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UPSP 144-080

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The Daily Nebraskan is published by the UNL Publications Board Monday through Friday during the fall and spring semesters, except during vacation. Address: Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, Neb., 68588. Telephone: 472-2588.

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question.

Because he is a ceremonial as well as a political and governmental leader, the president must be surrounded by some of the finer things in life. The office just wouldn't carry the same weight if the president lived in a run down tenement on the wrong side of the Capitol or even in a split-level home in suburban Washington.

But it must be hard for a laid-off autoworker in Detroit to hear the president ask for belt-tightening and then see him live in the style he has known since he became a movie star.

Whether paid for by the government or by rich friends, Nancy Reagan's china and decoration of the White House must seem frivolous matters to a welfare mother. But Nancy's projects are only two concrete examples of a whole attitude in the Reagan White House and administration.

In their free time, the Reagans seem to lead the lives of jet-setters.

How can Reagan begin to counter charges that he favors the rich over the poor when he doesn't make any

cutbacks in his own lifestyle? His budget squeezes those of modest income while hardly touching those of means. His policies have helped to worsen an already sick economy and have put thousands more out of work.

Granted, the symbolic gestures that Jimmy Carter used while in office didn't always work. The fireside chats and the cardigan sweaters drew ridicule rather than strong support. But Carter did exchange his limousine for a more modest car, and he turned down the thermostat in the White House.

Now, according to a *Newsweek* magazine cover story, Nancy turns the heat up to well over 80 degrees while viewing movies.

Reagan made a symbolic gesture for the Polish people by setting a lighted candle in a White House window. It would seem that Americans are just as deserving of such a gesture.

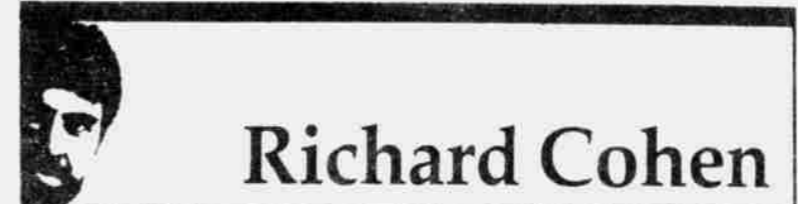
It might make it easier for them to accept Reagan's economic philosophy and actions.



Response noteworthy as protest

In the Polish town where my ancestors lived for hundreds of years, the records at city hall are only partially in Polish. The older ones are in the Cyrillic script of the Russian language — a reminder that for a longer time than parts of Poland have been "Polish," they were Russian.

This is the vivid reality of the situation — then and today. Poland is the Russian sphere of influence. From 1772 until 1918, the eastern third of the country was admini-



Richard Cohen

stered by Russia. In this century alone, Poland has only been truly independent from the end of the First World War to the beginning of the Second. Then Russia and Germany carved it up — again.

Now it sits, as it has always done, between Germany and Russia. For the historical moment, Germany is not the threat. Russia is. The world recognizes that the Soviet Union can do pretty much what it wants with Poland. There are wonderful diplomatic terms for this — sphere of influence is one — but the plain fact is that Soviet tanks could roll into Poland and neither Germany nor all of Europe nor the United States of America could — or would — do a damn thing about it.

It is for this reason, that the Germans and the other European powers love the status quo and do not appreciate American moralizing on the subject of Poland. Things, after all, could be a lot worse. Whatever you might think about the Russian role in Poland, it is not Russian tanks in the streets of Warsaw. And it is not Russian soldiers on patrol and it is not, as far as we know, Russian policemen who are making arrests in Poland and throwing dissidents into jail. The Poles have managed to do this all by themselves.

So there is justification for the view that what is happening in Poland is an internal matter. And there is justification for arguing that the American response to events in Poland, the boycotts and the strong words, are examples of too little and too late. No boycott of computer parts is going to force the Soviets or the Poles to reverse what they have done. Lifting the American

landing rights of the Polish airlines, LOT, is not going to bring the martial law government to its knees.

In fact, there is an air of futility to the whole exercise. These sanctions, these punishments, should have been announced beforehand. The American government should have made it clear to the Soviets what price they would have to pay if the clock was turned back in Poland. The American government, in fact, could simply have recognized the Soviet sphere of influence and then, logically, held the Soviet Union accountable for whatever happened in Poland.

So it is understandable that the Europeans see us as hopeless amateurs. We have bungled the matter. We did plan well and we did not execute well and we do not understand cardinal rules of real politics. We do not understand what it is like to live on a small continent, crowded with many countries, all of them somewhat edgy, all of them punchy after years and years of war — and all of them fighting those wars over and over again in their memories. The big Atlantic Ocean enables us to be hopeless romantics.

But even if Europe has conceded its history and its wisdom and even if all the arguments about spheres of influence are acknowledged, there still has to be a place in this world for moral outrage. No one is saying that Poland is worth triggering World War III or scuttling detente or even breaking off the dialogue about arms reduction. But it is certainly worth a protest, a scream, a yell.

Acknowledging Russian hegemony is not the same as acknowledging Russia's moral righteousness. Resigning yourself to the events in Poland is not the same as accepting them. Refusing to bring the world to the brink of war over Poland is not the same as turning your back on the Polish people and pretending that what has most certainly happened, has not happened.

Ronald Reagan may not have been artful in the way he has handled this crisis. And his knowledge of diplomatic history, of the commas and the dots in the agreements from Versailles to Yalta, may be superficial. But at least he does not have the weary cynicism of the Germans and some other Europeans. Maybe he could have done things better.

But at least he did something.

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