

Editorial

Right-wing rhetoric returns



HOOKED

As the conflict in El Salvador grows bloodier and the United States ties itself closer to that country and its ruling junta, Americans debate the pros and cons of U.S. involvement. Those against that involvement compare the situation to that of Vietnam during the 1960s. Conservatives counter these arguments with firm denials that the United States is entering another Vietnam.

For example, speaking to the Conservative Political Action Conference Saturday, Secretary of State Alexander Haig said, "Salvador is not Vietnam."

But, according to an Associated Press report, in the same breath Haig said, "The American people are not unwilling to support a sound effort to do whatever is right, provided they believe we mean business and we are going to succeed."

What could sound more like the old right-wing rhetoric used during the Vietnam War? How many times were Americans told we could win the war in Vietnam if only we would fight it in an all-out effort, no holds barred. Bomb civilians and drop napalm until the communist foe drops to its knees and cries for mercy.

Haig was not the only one making such statements this weekend. Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., told the same conference that the Reagan administration is not taking strong enough action in Central America. He also

criticized the administration for aligning itself with El Salvadoran President Jose Napoleon Duarte.

Furthermore, calling Duarte a "left-wing socialist" when most Americans are complaining that Duarte is too far to the right, too tied to the monied and landed interests in El Salvador, showed how out of touch Helms is.

Are we going to let men like Haig and Helms tell us to disregard similarities between the situation in El Salvador and what were the first steps to American involvement in Vietnam? Obviously, Haig and Helms don't understand how many Americans feel, what many Americans foresee and fear.

These men must not have learned from the mistakes made in Southeast Asia, and if they did, they are disregarding those lessons as they deal with and comment on U.S. involvement in another delicate situation. Can't these men leave well enough alone and remember what happens when a nation interjects itself into what is basically the nationalist civil war of another country?

Whether conservatives want to admit it, we've been down this road before and our final arrival point was not one many Americans would want to return to.

Government's draft program failure no surprise

In case you haven't noticed it, February has come and gone, and with it the end of the government's lenient policy toward draft resisters.

February had been a month of extension for those 18-year-olds who hadn't yet registered for the draft. "Give



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'em a month to collect their thoughts and they'll come to their senses," was the government's reasoning.

But now it's no more Mr. Nice Guy for all you 18-year-old lawless heathens. March is here, and with it a newer, tougher policy toward draft resisters. The government is going to start cracking down on all the young men who haven't fulfilled their obligation to sign up for the peacetime draft.

Somehow I doubt it. If the government's prosecution process goes anything like its normal, day-to-day activities, then any 18-year-olds out there who haven't yet registered don't have much to worry about.

The peacetime draft has been filled with delay, indecision and wastefulness. It has been a prime example of government's tripping over itself. It has been, to a large extent, a failure.

The government hasn't gotten as many young men to register as it had hoped, and that's before their forthcoming "crackdown." It has been slow with its entire process. One delay after another has been the program's pockmark. The government's program was ill-fated from the start; it started off on bad footing and has gotten progressively more inept.

It comes as no surprise that the government hasn't gotten as many people to register as it had hoped for. There has been a media campaign, yes, but somehow Jerry Reed doesn't seem like my idea of a positive impetus for

registering. I get the feeling that, of those who haven't registered, there are just as many kids who don't care and haven't bothered to bother as there are those who are consciously objecting the ideals of a draft.

There are many reasons for absolving the peacetime draft. Conveniently tossing aside the philosophical ones, such as opposition to war and killing, the peacetime draft should be abolished for no other reason than that it has shown itself to be such a boondoggle.

To be fair, we in Nebraska have more than adequately represented ourselves in the draft. We are far and above the national sign-up averages. Why that is, I don't know; I'm sure it's either because we're dumber or smarter than the nation as a whole. I just haven't figured out which, yet.

At any rate, considering the government's prodigiousness at blundering the peacetime draft, you draft resisters have nothing to worry about. If the government ever gets around to prosecuting you for not registering, by then we'll probably have entered World War III anyway.

Reagans or not, 'A deficit is a deficit is a deficit'

The Democrats have been having a lot of fun with the Reagan administration over the projected size of the 1983 federal deficit (\$91.5 billion), and one must admit there is a rough justice in this. Every conservative in America, including the present writer, has taken large hunks out of the hides of previous presidents, Democrat and Republican alike, for countenancing deficits less than half or two-thirds that size. At last our beau ideal enters the White House, and right away we are confronted with the largest projected deficit in U.S. history!

Fun aside though, what can be said about that deficit? (Never mind the still bigger ones predicted by wishful



William Rusher

Democrats for the years ahead — nobody really knows what those years will bring, since that depends on intervening developments.)

The first thing that needs to be said, with the usual nod to Gertrude Stein, is that a deficit is a deficit is a deficit, and that it doesn't cease to be a deficit, or have the deleterious effects of a deficit, merely because it is run up in the administration of Ronald Reagan. This deficit is very bad news indeed.

Having said that, let's get on to the next question, perhaps humanly the most interesting: Who's to blame? The Reagan administration blames the "unexpected" recession; the Democrats adhere to the debatable but ancient tradition that an incumbent administration must accept responsibility for all major economic developments occurring during its tenure.

There is a little sleight of hand going on here, on both sides. Far from not expecting a recession, the administration not only expected it but (while quite sincerely deploring its painful effects) privately welcomed it, as a neces-

sary step in slowing down a dangerously overinflated economy.

On the other hand, the Democrats are being deliberately incorrect when they misquote candidate Reagan as having promised, in 1980, that he would simultaneously cut taxes, increase defense expenditures and balance the budget in fiscal 1983. He may have been optimistic, but he wasn't all that optimistic. Reagan's pledge to balance the budget was always linked to later years, though he did hold out the hope that tax revenues would actually rise, even in 1983, under the stimulus of his proposed cuts in tax rates.

On to the next, and more important, question: Granted that this deficit is bad, just how bad is it? Here the Democrats aren't going out of their way — why should they? — to ease the Republicans' embarrassment, but the rest of us ought to be capable of remembering without the Democrats' help that the sheer scale of all figures involving the federal government is forever increasing, for at least three different reasons: by virtue of inflation, by virtue of the increasing expenditures (e.g. for Medicaid) built into the budget under existing law, and by virtue of the continuing expansion of the whole economy. The 1983 deficit of \$91.5 billion, adjusted for three factors, simply isn't comparable (for example) to the \$66 billion run up by Gerald Ford in the second of his two years in office six years ago.

And finally, the most important question of all: What can be done about this deficit? Basically, there are only three ways of covering a federal deficit: by taxes, by printing extra money and by borrowing. (I have not, of course, forgotten that it can also be reduced by cutting the budget, but I am talking now about covering the deficit, not reducing it.)

Mr. Reagan still hopes that his sharp tax cuts will stimulate the economy and thus pave the way for fatter revenues even at the lower rates; but he is adamantly against raising the tax rates and thereby diminishing the stimulus, and he is right. Merely printing extra money

("monetizing the debt") is — as the Democrats discovered — the royal road to double-digit inflation and national suicide.

That leaves borrowing, wherein the government competes with the private sector for available money, thereby keeping interest rates high and to that extent discouraging the economy. It is the course the administration will take when the time comes, and — unsatisfactory as it is — probably offers us the best hope of breaking through to better days.

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