

Opinion

Belief in 'meritocracy' leads columnist to cast Reagan vote

By Kevin Warneke
Daily Nebraskan Senior Editor

Americans point to many concepts when explaining the success of our nation. Democracy perhaps being the most important concept of all.

However, one concept that is almost always forgotten is meritocracy — which means basically, that you get what you deserve. In other words, those who work hard and achieve are rewarded.

Meritocracy, while at times flawed and still in need of improvement, has given people the incentive to strive to be the best they can be.

The main difference between this year's presidential candidates is that one candidate, President Reagan, understands this concept, the other Walter Mondale, does not.

Mondale's solution to our economic problems is simple. Tax those people who have worked the hardest even more. To those one in ten households, which have gross incomes of \$50,000 or more and who pay 3 1/2 times more taxes than their numbers, Mondale says, "You simply haven't paid enough."

And how did those eight million households get the chance to pay 3 1/2 times their share of taxes?

Very few inherited their success. Most got where they are by investing and saving what they have earned and by working 60 to 70 hours a week.

Instead of taking pride in these people, Mondale has scorned them for being "rich."

Few would argue, including President Reagan, against the safety net of social responsibility. We simply can't allow our citizens to live in poverty. Yet, to quote Newsweek guest columnist John Adams, "There comes a point when progressive taxation becomes confiscation and social responsibility becomes plain old socialism."

Apparently, the United States reached that point in the early 1980s. President Reagan asked the Congress to pass the famous tax cuts — part of which stated that government simply couldn't take more than half of what a person earns.

He understands the realities of our time.

He understands the lessons to be learned from the invasions of Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Afghanistan.

He understands the lessons to be learned from SALT I — unilateral disarmament simply doesn't work.

He understands that the Soviet people are like you and I, but he also understands that their government is not of the people, but of something different.

Many have criticized the president for the dramatic increase in the defense budget.

While the budget has increased dramatically, a few facts need to be pointed



out.

First, manpower is by far the greatest expense of the department of defense. In 1983, manpower took about 42 percent of the budget. We all know what type of people enrolled in the Army during the 1970s. In 1974, about 40 percent were high school dropouts. However, in 1984, the situation was improved. Only about 10 percent had not received their high school degree. During this time, re-enlistments increased as well.

Another important fact which needs to be pointed out is that while the defense budget is extremely high in numbers as a percentage of the gross national product,

it is a smaller budget than that of the 1950s and '60s.

While the danger of nuclear arms is obvious, it also should be pointed out that reducing them in favor of more conventional arms would involve an increase, not a decrease, in the defense budget.

Also, the defense department spends a great deal of money on research — research which often benefits everyone.

I'll admit that the department still has problems. In the area of procurement, we often hear of the \$1,000 screws or the \$500 hammer. We also need to push harder toward developing verifiable arms reductions.

Reagan victory to mark start of U.S. political realignment

By Jim Rogers
Daily Nebraskan Columnist

Every four years the politicians and political pundits seem to agree that the upcoming presidential election sets before the American people a choice so fundamental that its impact will be felt years down the road. Usually what occurs, though, is that scarcely few weeks pass after inauguration day and all seems to be in its proper place as the government goes bumbling along — with no noticeable turn of events.

Yet, with fear of entering the commentator's no-man's land of utter triteness, this election does seem to hold forth some promise of being one of those historical turning points on a par with F.D.R.'s election victory in 1932. At least such an event seems more possible this year than in the years since Roosevelt won the presidency.

Before considering the notion that a Reagan victory could possibly indicate one of those rare, historic points of realignment — a realignment for the better in my view — it is necessary to note in passing why a Mondale election could very well spell economic darkness to the world for the next 40 to 50 years.

In Mondale's attempt to avoid a wholesale abandonment by union members similar to that which occurred in 1980, he has adopted a strong protectionistic "Buy American" stance. The press has typically reported this phenomenon as simply evidence of Mondale's incessant pandering to special interest groups. However, what the press has typically ignored is the haunting specter of the potential international political and economic consequences of Mondale's policy, which dwarf the domestic issues surrounding the policy.

The world's economic recovery is not as advanced nor as deep as it is in the United States. In fact, the continual sluggishness of the international economy is evidenced by the horrendously large debts — growing still larger — owed by Lesser Developed Countries. Indeed, currently those who would be hurt the most by even a slight increase in protectionistic practices are precisely those nations.

To be fair one need point out that Mondale's specific proposals are aimed primarily at the Japanese. But what Mondale does not apparently understand is that domestic protectionism invites retaliation, which in turn invites yet further response, with the distinct possibility that the responses snowball until there is a full-scale trade war. The impact of such an event, even on a modest scale, would spell ruin to the fragile economies of many L.D.C.'s. Thus darkening the already bleak outlook for these nations.

In a more positive vein there are some very good reasons to vote in favor of Reagan rather than simply cast a vote against Mondale in a sort of "lesser of the two evils" calculation. Located within these reasons exists the intimation that a realigning election could be in the offing.

First, a Reagan victory next week would indicate a ratification of sorts of the agenda change which took place in 1980. The effects of this agenda change have been felt in this campaign already. After all, who would have guessed just five years ago that the Democrats would boast of an ability to cut the deficit more than a Republican administration; or that "traditional" family values would be celebrated in the keynote address of the Democratic convention.

Of course nobody really believes that the Democrats mean what they say on these issues, but simply the fact that they are even attempting to "out-Reagan" President Reagan is an indication of an amazing shift in the issues.

Reagan has managed to once again bring the serious belief that there are limits to the size of a just government into the public's purview. Reagan has been able to communicate the belief that economic equality is not truly an ethical concern of just government — which it is not — and consequently has at least slowed down America's mad rush to a statist and violent serfdom under the perverse guise of helping the underprivileged.

Even Marxist economist James O'Connor pointed out that the poor are on balance harmed by the system of income transfer which Mondale so emotionally defends. Writing of social security he

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Election forces decision between opposing values

By Chris Burbach
Daily Nebraskan Columnist

Regardless of who we elect president Tuesday, we can expect certain things to happen in the next four years. The recovery will end, or at least level off, and taxes will be raised.

According to UNL professor of economics Wallace Peterson, no peacetime economic boom since World War II has lasted more than three years. The current boom, built by looser money policies, the deficit and defense spending, is on its last leg. Exactly when it will end is impossible to predict, but history places that date in the near future.

Better off or not, Americans will be paying higher taxes. Although President Reagan vows he can and will prevent tax increases, the facts make that promise about as believable as his 1980 vow to bolster defense spending and balance the budget. The American public and its legislators are becoming increasingly agitated in opposition to the spiraling federal deficit. Tax cuts have reduced revenue, while spending cuts in some areas (such as domestic programs) have been offset by increases in other areas, most notably defense.

The next Congress will have to pass some sort of tax increases and the next president will have to sign them to quiet the anti-deficit crusaders and possibly just to keep the government operating.

Mondale's tax program would be as close to a progressive program as we're likely to see. A family of four earning between \$25,000 and \$35,000 would pay no more than an additional \$95 in taxes in the plan's final year, 1989. A family earning between \$35,000 and \$45,000 would pay about \$200 more, and the balance of the \$85 billion tax increase would come from wealthy individuals and corporations.

Through all this economic machinery runs the current which Republicans call "a return to traditional American values." These are select values chosen from a pool of values broader than the right wing want to admit

exists — the values we are returning to include greed, macho ethnocentrism, intolerance and militarism, yet the pool of values also includes fairness, tolerance, and a desire for international understanding and peace. Mondale refuses to admit that the latter set, which is as traditional as the former set, has evaporated from the pool of American public thought. His candidacy is testing that theory.

Reagan, on the other hand, would interpret an election victory, especially a landslide, the same way he interpreted his victory in 1980 — as a mandate from the American people to pursue policies based on the values of materialism and militarism. Those policies would mean several things for America. First, the arms race would continue to spiral, taking defense spending up with it. That policy would make even more dramatic what Peterson called the "greatest transfer of wealth in history" from the average taxpayer for interest on the deficit. It would continue to prevent meaningful arms talks, and intensify the itch to use military force already present in the current administration.

That itch would draw the United States deeper into Central American conflicts, where we are already active militarily. The rise in "American spirit" after we clubbed Grenada (the equivalent of Mr. T clubbing Woody Allen) could inspire larger enterprises, like even more direct intervention in El Salvador or an invasion of Nicaragua.

Mondale proposes demilitarization of Central American trouble spots and constructive collaboration with Contadora nations and other countries to gain a peaceful solution to the region's problems. Mondale is also committed to serious talks with the Soviets on a mutual and verifiable nuclear freeze and subsequent arms reductions.

We may choose between the values of short-term self service, elitism and belligerence and the values of social justice and a rational pursuit of peace. If we reject the fairer set of traditional values, that's when the gloom and doom shows up.