

Urban League Head Asks U.S. to Grant Total Amnesty to Veterans of Vietnam

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ATLANTA, July 27—Vernon E. Jordan Jr., executive director of the National Urban League and a member of the Presidential clemency board, broke with the Ford Administration today and urged total amnesty for Vietnam veterans.

Mr. Jordan's position was disclosed in remarks he had prepared for delivery tonight in his keynote speech at the 65th annual convention of the league.

The nine-member board was established by President Ford last September to review the cases of those already convicted or punished for military desertion or draft evasion.

Mr. Jordan said that he had been troubled by the amnesty position of the Administration and, as a result, had not participated in recent deliberations of the board.

"President Ford, who was compassionate enough to pardon Richard Nixon, should also be compassionate enough to pardon those who were right about an evil war and those whose service for their country has resulted in the unfair, lifelong punishment of a bad discharge," he said.

"That is why I call for complete, immediate, universal and unconditional amnesty."

In an interview, Mr. Jordan said he did not know how the White House would react to his new position. He said he had informed Donald Rumsfeld, White House chief of staff, and Charles M. Goodell, the New York Republican who is chairman of the clemency board, of his decision to change his stand.

Mr. Jordan said that his new position was "the result of my experience on the Presidential clemency board, an experience that brought home to me the full unfairness of the treatment accorded to the different categories of people caught in the snares of our system of military justice."

He said these categories included persons unfairly denied conscientious objector status, some who were drafted or enlisted and fought at the front but then deserted for compelling personal reasons and others who were "saddled with bad conduct discharges because of capricious or arbitrary rulings by superior officers."

"Most of these young men are white, but a disproportionate number are black, especially among the over 200,000 Vietnam veterans with less than honorable discharges," he remarked.

In his speech, Mr. Jordan also unveiled the Urban League's proposal for a new national welfare program. He called for a credit income tax, which is a version of the negative income tax. He described the tax as "a pro-work, pro-family, pro-dignity proposal for a humane, responsible society."

Under the proposal, all persons would receive a basic annual grant, or tax credit. Persons above a certain income would lose the grant through taxation, and those below a designated income would

keep all or part of the grant.

"Families who are above the poverty level but below the level at which the grant is taxed away would benefit because a portion of their grant he explained. This means that working people of modest incomes would get the income assistance they need, but for which they do not qualify under the present system.

"No means tests, no work requirements, no coercive local regulations or other stigmatizing elements would be part of the system. Payments are automatic, through the tax system, and would be a matter of right." The present system, he said, "takes more from the pockets of moderate income working people than it does from the rich."