

Drive for Amnesty



Mary McGrory

AMNESTY, that orphaned cause, has acquired a powerful sponsor. Senator Edward W. Brooke, (Rep-Mass.), is joining Senator Philip A. Hart, (Dem-Mich.), in support of a measure that would give unconditional amnesty to Vietnam era draft-dodgers and deserters.

Brooke's advocacy, forlorn friends of amnesty think could make a difference.

For one thing, he is known as a cautious politician. If he thinks amnesty is now a respectable issue, his colleagues who, since he urged Richard Nixon to resign two years ago, suspect Brooke knows something they don't know—may regard it as safe.

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WHAT BROOKE will do at a minimum is to cut off the retreat of those war critics, particularly among the Democrats, who are evading amnesty and silently agreeing with the veterans groups who insist the country would be enraged.

Democratic presidential candidates are about as enthusiastic about amnesty as a campaign question as they are about busing, which was forced on them recently by Senator George McGovern, (Dem-S.D.).

Only Governor Milton Shapp, the democratic governor of Pennsylvania, brings it up. He opens his attacks on Gerald Ford with a cry that he pardoned the wrong man, and should

have brought home conscientious exiles instead of letting Richard Nixon go free.

The others discuss it only when asked and "through clenched teeth." The liberals are for unconditional amnesty: Jimmy Carter favors pardons, which are not the same. Henry Jackson is opposed, and so is the current undeclared front runner in the polls, Hubert Humphrey, who sees unconditional amnesty as "a disservice to the memory of those who fought and died in Vietnam."

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BROOKE, who is himself a World War II veteran, feels that politicians have "miscalculated the emotions" of bereaved families, which are cited by opponents as one of the strongest reasons for delaying amnesty indefinitely.

"There are precedents for amnesty in our history," he said, "but there is no precedent for the Vietnam war, which was resisted while it was being fought. It was a tragedy for anybody in my generation who couldn't go in World War II, but the people who were in this one didn't even want to talk about it."

"It disturbs me," says Brooke, "to deny anyone the right to come home. We are more prone to forgive our enemies, the Germans, the Japanese, than to forgive our own sons, who wouldn't fight those who were defined as our enemies for a very specific moral reason."