

The Fearless Spectator

Charles McCabe

Mr. Reagan Weeps

I FOUND Governor Reagan's Tuesday night television statement on the death of UC Santa Barbara student Kevin Moran so distasteful that I thought maybe something was wrong with me, so I saw it a second time, and read several newspaper accounts of the incident.

Well, it was distasteful. Stronger language than that has suggested itself.

To use the senseless death of a student who was completely uninvolved in last weekend's Isla Vista rioting as a propaganda podium for his extreme and inflammatory personal views on campus militants was quite bad enough of the Governor of California.

It was even worse to have prejudged the cause of the young man's death when the Governor, unless he was holding out on the rest of us, couldn't possibly have known what he was talking about.

To have placed young Moran's death at the door of the militants, when it is much more likely (at this writing) that the death was the result of gung-ho police activity, is the greatest bit of pre-judgment since the first brave soul said the only good Indian was a dead one. Or when that Texas gunman pointed at the notches on his hardware and said "excepting for Mexicans."

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THE GOVERNOR appeared to be in a high, emotional state as he made his divisive and dangerous little speech. Whether you read The Chronicle ("almost tearfully") or the Los Angeles Times ("With tears in his eyes . . ."), the Governor clearly intended to convey anguish.

Without knowing whether a cop or a militant fired the shot that killed the young man, Mr. Reagan asked uncommitted students and teachers to believe " . . . this is the end—no more attending rallies, no more even supporting with expression of sympathy, those who have resorted to this kind of violence." Who "those" were the Governor had no doubt. Nor has he ever had.

He said, with what seemed to me incredible callousness, "It isn't very important where the bullet came from."



Not very important, eh? I just wonder how close to tears Mr. Reagan would have been had it been established beyond any doubt, as it well may be established, that the bullet which killed Kevin Moran came from a Santa Barbara cop's gun?

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ONE OF THE FEW THINGS we knew for sure when the Governor spoke was that one Santa Barbara cop had admitted his hunting rifle had accidentally fired a .30 caliber bullet.

The hunting rifle was furnished with a telescopic lens. This is an assassin's weapon. One may wonder whether it is called for to quell student demonstrations at Santa Barbara. Or anywhere else, up to now?

The Governor, in a superb example of double-think and double-talk, tried to turn his unfortunate April 7 remarks about "bloodbaths" away from himself and onto the student militants.

"Is there anyone who would suggest that we haven't been subjected to a bloodbath for these last three or four years . . . I think we have."

The Governor's unhappy remarks, and their highly-charged context, will merely make things rougher than better on the campuses of California. Everything the Governor says about these disturbances seems to have just that effect. Pacific, he is not.

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IF IT SHOULD BE determined by the Attorney General's office that the death bullet did indeed come from a cop's rifle, the campus bloodbath alluded to by the Governor will be just that much closer, such is the campus climate to which his words have contributed too much.

And it's not going to be what you would call an easy matter to persuade disaffected students that the rifle went off accidentally. Students who don't like the way things are going on campus have no trouble believing the worst of both Governor Reagan and the cops. This is the real and essential tragedy of the matter.

One wonders, sometimes, whether Governor Reagan wants peace on our campuses, or wants some kind of war. The first will not do much to re-elect him. The second will. That, in itself, is a rotten situation.