



President Ford's Ideas on Amnesty

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PRESIDENT FORD obviously intended his announcement concerning draft-dodgers and deserters, before the VFW convention, to look like a death-defying leap into the arms of liberalism, and the press obligingly played it that way. But the facts are otherwise — so otherwise that I am tempted to suspect the President of funnin' us.

Begin with the fact that, as a congressman, Mr. Ford was notorious for his opposition to "amnesty." We are urged to suppose that, in his speech to the VFW, he dramatically reversed himself. But not so; as he correctly pointed out, what he has steadfastly opposed (and what many liberals have been urging) is an "unconditional blanket amnesty" for draft-dodgers and deserters.

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AND ON THAT his attitude hasn't changed a bit. All his speech to the VFW proclaimed was his intention to begin the long process of evaluating the individual culpability of each offender accessible to the law, and determining in a spirit of charity the appropriate penalty or (at a minimum) the required alternative service. Nothing could resemble "amnesty" less.

Second, regardless of whether or not President Ford actually reversed his own

stand, we are told that his statement represented a sharp break with the policy of President Nixon, who is depicted as vengefully opposed to leniency for anybody at all, save possibly himself. But once again the precise opposite is true. As Mr. Nixon told Dan Rather in a televised interview on January 2, 1972, he (like Ford) was opposed to a blanket amnesty.

But he went on to say that, once the fighting was over and the draft-dodgers and deserters had submitted themselves to American justice, he personally would be "very liberal" in the matter of penalties. All President Ford has done — 2½ years later, after our withdrawal from Vietnam and the return of our prisoners — is indicate his readiness to start processing the cases.

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THE SUPREME IRONY — and you may be sure President Ford knows this, and has coolly taken it into account — is that a great many of the draft-dodgers and deserters, including all the worst ones, haven't the slightest intention of coming home on any terms that involve any penalty whatever, including alternative service. They think they deserve a ticker-tape parade, not a penalty, and they will continue to hold out for it. All the way, I predict, through President Ford's administration.