



Peace Corps Peace Talk Gets White House Gag

WASHINGTON — The White House has been trying to muzzle antiwar talk, of all places, in the Peace Corps. President Nixon's efficient aides apparently see nothing illogical about shutting up Peace Corps volunteers who speak out for peace. The suppression began after Vice President Spiro Agnew came back from his recent Asian tour with reports that young Peace Corps workers were joining the dissent against the Vietnam War. In Afghanistan, for example, 10 Peace Corps people signed an antiwar petition.

After Agnew tattled to the President, Peace Corps director Joe Blatchford was summoned to the White House and asked to muzzle the dissenters. He agreed that Peace Corpsmen, as representatives of the U.S., shouldn't make public statements abroad critical of U.S. policies. But at home, he felt they had the right to oppose the war.

He investigated the Afghanistan incident and found that the 10 volunteers had submitted their petition to the American ambassador. This seemed to Blatchford to be proper.

Budget Threats

When he resisted the attempt to stifle the antiwar sentiment in the Peace Corps, the White House began dropping ominous hints about budget slashes. At one staff meeting, Deputy Director Tom Houser complained that "we are getting intense pressure from the executive branch" to shut off dissent.

Blatchford, a clean-cut, 35-year-old executive raised on Wheaties, has been less valiant about resisting what insiders call the Nixonization of the Peace Corps. One associate describes him as "a Pat Boone figure with newly lowered sideburns."

In a private memo to the Republican members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Blatchford wrote: "We inherited a very difficult situation resulting from volunteers just out of college with strong, liberal views. We have also had to weed out many members of a hostile staff hired during the past eight years of Democratic administration and unwilling to accept the new administration. . . ."

"In a little more than a year from now, all volunteers overseas will have been selected during this administration. They will

have better screening, training and guidance."

Blatchford later reconsidered what he had written, decided it had been indiscreet and sent aides up to Capitol Hill to retrieve the memo. But he has gone ahead with efforts to recruit more volunteers from President Nixon's "silent majority" — farmers, technicians, and skilled laborers.

Insisted a Peace Corps spokesman: "Youth is still the backbone of the Peace Corps and always will be." He explained that several countries had requested volunteers with skills that young people don't possess. "These older volunteers," he said, "are every bit as idealistic as the kids."

Meanwhile, Peace Corps applications are down 30 per cent for the first eight months of the program year ending August 31. Last year, applications dropped 22 per cent.

As part of the Nixonization process, Blatchford has put emphasis on getting business executives to fill staff positions. His staff now includes William Inglis, 38, an Irving Trust Co. vice president; John Mills, 47, a manager from Monsanto Co.; Robert Jorgensen, 55, a wholesaler from Livingston, Mont.; John Guyer, 39, an executive from the American Investment Counseling Co.; and Thomas Roeser, 41, a former public relations man for Quaker Oats.

One staff member, projecting the Nixonization process into the future, remarked wryly: "I wonder what Latin Americans are going to say when the president of United Fruit shows up as their Peace Corps director."

Behind Nixon's Decision

Several readers have inquired about the policy-making machinery that produced President Nixon's Cambodian decision.

Normally such decisions are ground out by the National Security Council, which has exhaustive intelligence at its disposal. The NSC is guided by overall policy guidelines, which have been prepared with elaborate care.

As we reported immediately after the Cambodian move, the decision was based upon the paperwork of a secret task force known as the Washington Special Action Group, headed by the President's national security adviser, Henry Kissinger.

In other words, the NSC was largely bypassed in the Cambodian planning, although the President took up the question with the NSC at two meetings on April 22 and 26.