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Peace Corps Furor Over Nixon 'Insult'

Washington

The Peace Corps was up in arms yesterday over President Nixon's characterization of service in the volunteer agency as a "junket."

Peace Corps director Don Hess, who said he regretted the statement but did not believe that President Nixon meant to impugn the Peace Corps, requested a "clarification" from the White House.

R. Sargent Shriver, the first Peace Corps director, called the remark "an insensitive insult." And various former volunteers phoned the Peace Corps office in New York to denounce the President.

Mr. Nixon on Wednesday brought up the Peace Corps at a White House press conference while giving his views opposing amnesty for draft evaders and deserters.

STATEMENT

"Those who served paid their price," the President said. "Those who deserted must pay their price. And that price is not a junket in the Peace Corps or something like that as some have suggested. The price is a criminal penalty, for disobeying the laws of the United States.

The statement dismayed Peace Corps officials, who have been waging a persistent and largely successful battle to increase Peace Corps recruitments in the face of an increased emphasis on skilled volunteers and what Hess in a December interview called "a sweep of neo-isolationism." Ironically, the President's remark coincided with a recruiting campaign launched last Friday on the theme of "now that there's peace, what about the Peace Corps."

Several high-ranking officials in the agency said that the President's comment undercut the campaign and one called the remark "appalling."

"On Monday, the President sent to the hill a really good budget for Peace Corps," said another official. "On Wednesday, he stabbed us in the back."

Officially, the Peace Corps view as presented by Hess was that the \$77 million requested for Peace Corps in the 1974 budget was a far more important expression of the President's position than a chance remark at a press conference.

DISSENT

But some former volunteers, particularly those from the Shriver era, didn't see it that way.

"It's probably the first honest statement Nixon's made yet about what he feels about the Peace Corps," said Donovan McClure, a former Peace Corps director in Turkey and West Africa. "He still sees it as a Kennedy program and resents the involvement of the young people who run it."

Some of the strongest criticism came from Mr. Nixon's 1968 presidential opponent, Senator Hubert Humphrey.

INTERVIEW

"I wonder if the President really knows what goes on in the Peace Corps," Humphrey said in a televised interview. "The Peace Corps is hard work. The Peace Corps is men and women, young and old, going to parts of the world that very few people want to go to, to help people to lift themselves out of poverty and disease and ignorance. Mr. President, you ought not talk about the Peace Corps

as if it's a junket."

The Peace Corps has already served as an alternative for many young Americans who didn't want to fight in Vietnam and various draft boards have allowed conscientious objectors to serve in the Peace Corps.

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