

The amnesty question

To have, or to have not

By DAVID E. ANDERSON
WASHINGTON (UPI) — Slowly, painfully, Americans are becoming aware of a giant problem that is a by-product of the Vietnam cease-fire.

What shall be done about the young men who regard themselves as "the other victims" of the war — the young men who refused to wage it, in many cases claiming they had moral objections to the war itself.

It is first a human problem, involving the lives and futures of tens of thousands of young men. Some of them already are in jail, or are in exile, or are under indictment. Others are underground, hiding. Still others bear the onus of being felons, or have a less than honorable discharge from the military.

But it also is a question of social policy: What shall be done? How? When? Should anything be done at all?

The issue is amnesty — literally, to forget. Amnesty

opens a Pandora's box of questions as complex as those spawned by the war itself.

Vietnam has created a group of young men which the most conservative of estimates place near 100,000. Cursed as cowards or hailed as heroes, these men refused induction — by deserting from the armed forces, by hiding underground in the ghettos of America, by exiling themselves from their families and friends by fleeing to Canada or Europe.

No one is really certain of the number of men involved. Estimates have varied widely and wildly.

Amnesty proponents who said they used government and non-government sources claim between 40,000 and 70,000 war opponents have crossed into Canada. There are still 450 exiles in Sweden and at one time were as many as 700. There are 5,000 men in the United States who have served or are serving jail time as Selective Service

violators and another 25,000 who still could be prosecuted.

A wide variety of groups are beginning to formulate plans they hope will result in the repatriation of the exiles and an end to the penalties that have been meted out to draft opponents and military resisters.

But it will be a long and tough campaign, proponents of amnesty admit.

President Nixon has already drawn the battle lines sharply rejecting any form of amnesty.

Nixon told a recent press conference, "Now amnesty means forgiveness. We cannot provide forgiveness for them. Those who served paid their price. Those who deserted must pay their price . . ."

This view has been supported by some groups, including the American Legion.

Joe Matthews of Fort Worth, Tex., national commander of the Legion, said, "America's first obligation is to those who served — not those who ran."

"We are opposed to any blanket amnesty," said Matthews. "We ask that each individual case be decided on its own merit through procedures available to the President and the courts. We insist on prosecution to the full

extent of the law of those found guilty of either draft evasion or desertion."

The supporters of amnesty, of course, differ sharply with this viewpoint.

"When the parents of sons who died or were disabled in Vietnam — and I am one of them — and the families of the prisoners of war, and the disabled veterans themselves, begin to ask for amnesty — and I am convinced they will — the President will discover how generous this nation really is," Dr. Robert Moss, president of the United Church of Christ, told a recent news conference. Moss called it was "almost beyond belief" that Nixon could dispatch his national security affairs adviser, Henry Kissinger, to Hanoi to talk about rebuilding Indochina while announcing his opposition to amnesty for those who refused to participate.

Echoing Moss was William Homans, the Massachusetts coordinator for the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW).

"Our brothers in exile are not cowards for their refusal to fight in a cowardly war," Homans told UPI. "They, too, are prisoners of war — like our pilots in Hanoi or

the inmates of the tiger cages of Con Son."

Homans said he was in touch with exile groups in Canada, adding that VVAW would "follow the requests" of those exiles, many of whom reject amnesty as it is presently being discussed in the United States.

That discussion has centered around legislative attempts at amnesty, many of which would be only partial and conditional.

At least five bills already have been offered in Congress this session.

Probably the strongest was introduced by Rep. Bella Abzug, D-N.Y., which asks universal, unconditional amnesty for all war resisters and includes antiwar demonstrators who have been arrested at protests.

Another would authorize an unconditional amnesty to "all war objectors."

Other bills, however, would offer only a partial and conditional amnesty, for instance, restricted to draft resisters and not deserters from the armed forces. These require some sort of alternative national service.

Many of the young men themselves reject both partial amnesty and the idea of any alternative service.

An individual choice

By IAN WESTERGREN

STOCKHOLM UPI — Lew Simon, who deserted the U.S. Army during the Vietnam war, says he will not return to the United States unless there is an unconditional amnesty.

The 28-year-old New Yorker and college graduate says his stand is typical for most of the 500 or so American deserters and draft evaders, who have found a haven in Sweden.

"Very few would go back unless there was an unconditional amnesty," he says.

"We don't want to perform any alternative service or take any punishment like that. It's not that we mind working for the Peace Corps — in fact many of us will probably do that type of work when we finally go back."

"No, it's a question of who the real criminals are in this war."

"We don't feel guilty for 300,000 U.S. casualties in Vietnam. We feel it's the politicians who are the criminals in this immoral war, not us."

Simon works as a coordinator for "Up from Exile," an organization among U.S. deserters and draft dodgers in Sweden.

"Up from Exile" works solely with the amnesty problem. It took over from the "American Deserters Committee," which was a militant antiwar organization.

Simon, like many of his fellow Americans in Sweden, believes amnesty will be a big issue now that the war is coming to an end.

"This will be the logical new issue for the antiwar groups in the United States," he says.

"We will be working with them for unconditional amnesty for all the people, who have been participating in one way or another in resistance to the war and have been punished for it."

Simon, who deserted from Ft. Devens, Mass., in January, 1969, and fled to Sweden, says he will remain for good in Sweden if the Nixon administration is not

forced by public opinion to change its negative stand to amnesty.

The fact that President Nixon has found it necessary to speak out against amnesty on a number of occasions "is in itself evidence that he understands that this will be the big postwar issue once all U.A. troops and POWs are home from Indochina," he said.

"He will no longer be in a position to use patriotic arguments against us."

Robert Argente, who works as a social coordinator for the Americans in Sweden, predicts it will take another four years before U.S. public opinion is ready for unconditional amnesty.

"I believe most of the guys here in Sweden would consider going back under such conditions," he says.

"But as the situation is now only about 10 per cent are ready to go back and face the music."

Argente, 28, originally of Miami, Fla., says he personally is not interested in going back. He came to Sweden five years ago as a deserter from the U.S. armed forces. In the meantime he has raised a family, he speaks almost fluent Swedish and he has found himself a new homeland.

"I have my work and my family here. I couldn't afford to lose nine or 10 years of my life waiting to get back to the States," he says.

"I will be building my future here in Sweden. I believe three out of four of the other Americans in Sweden feel the same way today."

"But many of them would, of course, feel differently if there was an unconditional amnesty."

Some like it not

By EMIL SVEILIS

MONTREAL — The "Hell No! We Won't Go!" chant of American antiwar demonstrators in the 1960s may once again be revived — this time by those U.S. draft dodgers and deserters, who, if offered amnesty, would rather stay in Canada.

The mere mention of the word "amnesty" infuriates a majority of the expatriots. "We want restoration of civil liberties, not amnesty," said Gary Davis, 21, of Virginia Beach, Va.

Michael, 26, of Seattle, Wash., agrees. He called President Nixon the "greatest murderer alive and so far as amnesty is concerned, it is still a moot point because there is nothing to give us amnesty for."

Davis, a spokesman for the Montreal Council to Aid War Resisters and a Canadian resident for the past two years, said if the United States does

declare a general amnesty "I would hope that people who have evaded the draft would not run back."

"The false image now created is that all draft dodgers in Canada are standing by the border with their track shoes on waiting to run back."

"I definitely believe the majority of us in Montreal would stay, but we still would like to have the right to return to the United States if we wanted to."

Some estimates are that there are about 70,000 to 100,000 draft dodgers and deserters in Canada. Many of those who came in the 1960s are now eligible to apply for Canadian citizenship and a substantial number have indicated a desire to settle down on a permanent basis, according to Canadian draft counselors.

Leavy, who has lived in Vancouver for 2½ years as a draft dodger, said he believes Nixon will grant some kind of amnesty. "I'm quite sure Nixon will

within six months or so start talking about it," he said in an interview. "It will be conditional, very conditional" and will not include deserters.

Carmine Manelli, a 20-year-old New Yorker of deep-rooted Italian origin, kissed his weeping mother gently on the forehead on the morning of Nov. 3, 1972, hitched a ride to Montreal and became a draft dodger.

Manelli, a pseudonym because he is living in Canada illegally, is reluctant to give his Montreal address to his parents lest they contact the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who could arrest him and subsequently deport him to the United States.

"Family honor is at stake," he said. "My parents knew I was leaving, but they were dead against it. I would not put it past them to try to get me back one way or another."

Since he is not a legal resident of Canada, Manelli cannot hold a responsible job because he does not have any working papers. "My philosophy for survival: Eat as little as possible and earn spending money by trying to find odd jobs like baby sitting and

doing leg work on student research projects.

"Even with my present difficulties of living underground, I don't think that I would go back to the States. The only possibility for me returning would be if an unconditional amnesty was declared, and then only maybe."

Manelli is not an exception in the struggle for survival amongst U.S. draft dodgers in Canada.

Howie Prince, a 22-year-old U.S. Army deserter from Buffalo, N.Y., who now lives in Toronto, remembers his first four months in Canada well.

He panhandled to make ends meet and ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Things are not much better for him today.

During his two years in Canada, which have been spent in Toronto, Prince has been briefly employed as a heat treater in a steel company and with a community newspaper funded with a government local initiatives program grant.

Prince and his wife and their two-year-old child live in a two-bedroom attic apartment and collect \$70 a week in unemployment insurance.

He wants amnesty—universal and unconditional—because he wants to return to the United States. "Mainly, it's on account of my wife. She misses her folks," he said.

Prince, who was trained as a chemical laboratory technician in high school, said he has not been able to get work in this line in Toronto because "85 per cent of the Canadian chemical industry is controlled by Americans," and he said, these companies do not hire U.S. war resisters.

He mentioned by name two firms which had turned him down. One was Schenectady Chemicals of Canada Ltd. Howard Geiger, executive vice president of the company, said Prince "must have a guilty conscience. This company has no policy against deserters or draft dodgers."

If and when Prince returns to the United States, he plans to get into "political work."

Asked if that meant working for the Democrats or the Republicans, Prince said "oh no, not that." He refused to elaborate.

Monday, February 19, 1973