

Bush's pardons only raise more questions

Crime doesn't pay, unless you're a "patriot." At least, that seems to be the philosophy of President George Bush, the law and order president, and is the reasoning behind his pardoning former government officials who were implicated in the Iran-Contra scandal.

Bush gave the Christmas-eve pardons to former Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger; former Assistant Secretary of State, Elliott Abrams; former National Security Advisor, Robert McFarlane; and three CIA officials, Clair George, Alan Fiers and Duane Clarridge.

Bush said the six men "have already paid a high price," for their involvement with Iran-Contra. Apparently, lying to Congress, committing perjury and covertly sidestepping federal law takes its toll on a person, especially after spending the past six years dodging prosecution.

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Of those pardoned, three have pled guilty to lying to Congress — McFarlane, Fiers and Abrams. George was convicted on two counts of lying to Congress. Weinberger and Clarridge were scheduled to go on trial for perjury this year.

Bush has continued to proclaim his ignorance of the Iran-Contra deal, but recently discovered notes of Weinberger's and Bush's suggest otherwise.

Bush may have been motivated to issue the pardons in an effort to prevent the Weinberger case from going to trial. In such an event, Bush would likely have been called upon to testify, and his involvement in the scandal would have been revealed.

Bush compared his pardons to those issued by Andrew Johnson, who pardoned Confederate soldiers, and Jimmy Carter, who pardoned Vietnam draft dodgers. Curiously, he avoided comparisons to Gerald Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon.

Presidential pardons are absolute, and no further prosecution of the pardonees will ever occur. But if, as Bush claims, no crimes were committed, why was it necessary to issue the pardons?

Had his case gone to trial, the chances of an acquittal for Weinberger were pretty good. In any event, his guilt or innocence would have been clearly and openly established. But now, he, as well as the others, will forever have the cloud of assumed guilt hanging over them.

Perhaps George summed it up best in his testimony to the House Intelligence Committee in 1987 when he said, "This is a business that works outside the law." That ominous testimony seems to be holding true and has been reinforced by Bush's pardons.



COMMENTARY

Poor tax structure fuels OCA

By Jason W. Moore

As the fight over Ballot Measure 9 gripped the state's attention, action on the basic problems driving Oregon's descent into socio-economic oblivion remained painfully inadequate.

It is not a pretty picture — Oregon's days as a resource-dependent economy are limited, the promotion of "high-tech" industry has largely failed, our schools and universities are being stripped and shut down, and the most basic human services are, or soon will be, on the chopping block.

Politically, the scene is little better — from the proto-fascist Oregon Citizens Alliance to the dramatic rise in hate crimes to the dismal lack of funding for education and human services. On top of all that is the gradual, and under present conditions unstoppable, disintegration of the national economy.

This desperate situation (all the more desperate because so many continue to ignore it) is not without hope. Defeating Measure 9, supporting Measure 7, and helping the Democrats recapture the Oregon House were the best opportunities in the November election.

The election, at best, represented only the chance for a few feeble steps toward a few solutions. Democracy is not about spending a few minutes in a voting booth; it is about debate, action and education.

Democracy has never been a gift — what we have won through militant political struggle that, without exception, took place outside "the proper channels."

The election was important, but we need to look at the class forces that shape our politics. Oregon is a largely "middle-class" state; the degree of success achieved by the OCA serves as a barometer not just of the power of the Christian right nationally, but of the likelihood that upstanding middle-class folks will turn right and not left in times of social and economic crisis.

As jobs get fewer and worse, as the lack of social services

further squeezes the poor, as education budgets are hacked and as insecurity grows more pervasive and profound, society will become unglued, leading to more OCA-style politics.

No on 9 efforts have done little to erode the OCA's support among the threatened resource-dependent working class and their communities. Because of No on 9's basically defensive posture, the right is poised to score big by winning over "fear-of-falling" suburbanites scared of losing what's left of the American Dream.

For the present, they see the OCA as too crude. But just as Pat Buchanan articulated the fascist agenda better than David Duke, it is likely that a political force will soon emerge to win these pleasant suburbanites over to the ultra-right's agenda. Ross Perot's campaign clearly marked the appeal of can-do authoritarianism to the middle class.

It is critical to prop up the economy to forestall a middle class turn to the right, and the best way we could have helped out in this election was to support the struggle for revenue replacement and tax justice embodied in Measure 7, which would have split the property tax rolls between the homes in which people live and commercial property. Businesses would pay their fair share and homeowners would get real tax relief, promised but not delivered by Measure 5.

Since 1990, as many homeowners saw their property taxes increase, big commercial interests like utilities, railroads and banks received million-dollar tax breaks. Despite the "stop the tax" crowd's incessant fabrications about victimized small businessmen and poor, elderly, apartment-dwelling grandmothers, Measure 7 would have helped both small businesses and renters.

The former would have benefited from a healthier economy spurred by education and social service expenditures, and the latter from a renter's rebate program like the one abolished in the last legislative session. (Of course, many "stop the tax" supporters favor a sales tax that

hurts both small business and the poor.)

By restoring about 60 percent of the revenue lost by 1990's Measure 5, Measure 7 would have allowed for the exercise of some elementary economic good sense. The Oregon Legislature could maintain and enhance existing social services, which, when combined with fewer taxes on poor and working people, would effectively boost consumer spending at the most important part of the economy — the bottom.

We know there will be more investment in a state with a reasonable tax structure and that supports a quality educational system and social services; if one doubts the proposition, look at those states with the lowest tax burdens and the lowest levels of social spending, like Arkansas, where the top industries are chicken processing and toxic waste.

The struggle for tax justice, embodied in Measure 7, goes hand-in-hand with the fight against Measure 9. If we are to defeat the OCA right, we need to provide a degree of social and economic security that is impossible without fair taxation to pay for basic human services, including the right to an education.

Our responsibility did not end on Election Day. The defeat of Measure 9 or the victory of Measure 7, as with any progressive electoral victory, would have represented just the beginning.

If we wish to change Oregon, we have to build social movements that seek empowerment first, not vague notions of electing more Democrats to office. Only then can we reassert control over our schools, our neighborhoods and communities, and our workplaces. That is where we can find democracy on Election Day and every day after. That is where we will ultimately win or lose the struggle for social justice.

Jason W. Moore is coeditor of the Student Insurgent.

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