

Halifax dailies voice support

Nixon's proposals ineffective, archaic

Usually the content of Halifax's daily newspapers doesn't require comment. It isn't worth the trouble. The Chronicle Herald and Mail Star constantly avoid controversial issues and when they do cover something important it is done in an obscure manner.

The editorial policy is extremely bland as a matter of course. But for once, they have swerved away from this middle-of-the-road course and taken an abrupt turn to the right.

In a recent editorial, Wednesday, March 14, these papers voiced whole-hearted support for President Nixon's anti-crime measures.

Nixon has proposed that the death penalty be reinstated for murder cases under the federal government's jurisdiction, and for treason and other war related crimes.

Nixon also proposed much stiffer penalties for drug offences, a minimum sentence of five years for anyone convicted of selling heroin, a minimum of 10 years to life for major traffickers and life imprisonment without parole for offenders with a previous drug conviction as well as continuing to enforce the present laws against possession, sale or use of marijuana.

These are a few of the methods Nixon proposes in his efforts to combat crimes.

The weaknesses of these are not difficult to see. Nixon is not hitting at crime where it really exists. He is trying to rid the country of small time killers, thieves and pushers. Perhaps hard-hitting tactics will make a few people think twice before putting a bullet into someone. But that's as far as it goes. Nixon's proposals do not suggest any way of eliminating the crime that is really effecting the United States — organized crime. Perhaps that would be hitting too close to home. The corruption that exists in the government and police

forces of the U.S. is increasing constantly.

This crime is what is really threatening the United States as well as Canada. Yet Nixon has no suggestions as to how to rid the country of this type of crime.

There is still much controversy over whether the absence of the death penalty has led to an increase in the murder rate. Sending people to prison for life without parole for drug offences is certainly a primitive measure.

Nixon is taking a very simple and backward look at the country's problems. It is very simple to execute or lock up for life anyone who causes problems, and take no more responsibility for them.

Nixon's proposals seem totally archaic. He simply dismisses all the research that has gone into determining why a person commits a crime and the different factors of society and background that may cause his actions. In fact he goes so far as to take a stand against those who feel society should bear some of the blame for the actions of a criminal.

He also makes no mention of prison reform. These archaic methods cannot have any effect but to put the country back uncountable years.

By taking these outrageously simplistic views of crime and the solutions to it, Nixon has ignored the real problems — the solution to organized crime for one, as well as failing to propose a realistic solution to crime in the streets.

However, the fact that our daily newspapers came out in complete support of these proposals is almost as deplorable. The editorial which appeared in the papers took an overly simplified view of Nixon's proposals and then gave him their approval.

The editorial says: "President Nixon's words, his proposals are tough. No one will deny that. Yet they

should be widely applauded and supported, not because they represent the best of two or more choices available to him but rather because it was really the only course offering any real hope in the fight to contain and eliminate crime and he had the courage to recommend that course to his people" To believe this is to be incredibly naive.

The editorial concludes by stating: "His call for restoration of the death penalty and for severe, meaningless penalties for other major crimes is in reality a call for a return to the kind of law and order good citizens deserve and have every right to expect in a democratic country. It's the kind of law and order in which the rights of the victims take precedence over the rights of the convicted criminal."

No one could deny that citizens deserve to be protected and free from the actions of criminals. However, these proposals will certainly not ensure such freedom.

This editorial is representative of a current backstepping movement to the right, that is taking place in society. It is a dangerous movement. This may seem like a small matter on the surface but it can lead to far more repressive and anti-democratic measures to be taken by governments and police forces.

It is sad to see a newspaper which is supposed to fight for the freedom of people, to condone so vehemently Nixon's proposals without criticism of any sort. A naive and simplistic approach to issues is often taken by these papers. This is a regrettable thing.

Surely a newspaper should take some responsibility in looking at the measures of government in a realistic and critical manner. Halifax's daily newspapers are sadly lacking in this respect.

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