



# Resisting Reagan's draft

DAN HAGEN

**A**NONYMOUS PATRIOTS tell Benjamin Sasway he's a coward. They fill his mailbox with unsigned letters and rattle his phone off the hook with hateful calls. Some of them suggest that even five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine isn't punishment enough for a guy who refuses to register for the draft. One caller threatened to burn down his parents' house in Vista, California. "So far they're delinquent on those threats," the twenty-one-year-old Humboldt State University student said.

Some 675,000 young men have failed to register for the draft. The Justice Department, in an attempt to enforce the law, has begun prosecuting nonregistrants. The first of a half-dozen indictments went to Sasway, making him the first American indicted for draft law violation since 1975. Because the number of nonregistrants is twenty times greater than the entire federal prison population, the government can't hope to imprison all the Sasways. But the Selective Service System predicts that the example of indictments and prosecutions will bring more young men in to register. Ben Sasway is to serve as part of that example.

"I can't allow myself to respond to fear," Sasway said. "That's what the administration is betting on—that they can scare us into doing something that's wrong."

"I think they pick twenty-one-year-olds or eighteen-year-olds because they can buffalo them. These are people that really don't have an active franchise. They don't vote. They're not involved. They don't have money to buy their way in and out of situations. So that appears to me to be a free license to push them around."

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But Sasway is one who's passionately pushing back. "Frankly, I don't think it makes any sense to guard against oppression and slavery from the outside by oppressing and enslaving our own people."

"I felt obligated to protest a spirit of militarism that I feel is responsible for the arms race, military intervention in Third World countries, and for conscription."

"And, moreover, I think that this is an important decision—to kill or not to kill. It's a fundamental decision that we ought to have the freedom to make. We can't defer a decision of this impor-



tance to a government, any government.

"I don't want to be a hero," he said. "I don't care if I'm the first one to be prosecuted or the hundredth one. I just want to do what I think is right, and to try to make as big a dent as possible in the system."

Hero worship irritates Sasway. He has little patience with any form of pack behavior. "If it's an alligator on your shirt now that you're supposed to wear, I'll go out of my way not to wear it. I won't see *E.T.* until it's three years old."

Since his indictment June 30, Sasway has been swamped with requests for interviews and personal appearances. If he didn't feel he had to help the cause, he'd vanish into the Sierras with a backpack for a while and he'd be likely to take a book along: "I got a great deal of mental support from writers like Thoreau and Martin Luther King—people who preached

that it was possible to break a law and be true to your conscience.

"It's something that's always been a part of me. I can't remember when I wasn't, in this sense, a radical—a person who's willing to go that extra distance and force a confrontation between me and what I consider to be the oppressors." Sasway paused, then added apologetically, "I don't know if I can say that without sounding inflammatory."

Sasway is unimpressed by the claim that the volunteer army is inadequate. "It's absolute crap, I think. I'm skeptical of whether we actually need the numbers they say we need. And we have all the numbers that they say we need, so there is absolutely no reason at all for a draft."

But defense isn't the only argument some make for a new draft. In order to eliminate the "inequalities" of the volunteer army, some liberals are calling for universal conscription with an alternative-service option. "There are grave social injustices involved in the military system," Sasway said. "But it doesn't make any sense to me to heap more injustice on top of injustice by forcing people into a system against their will. Furthermore, blacks and chicanos died twice the number of their representation in the country in Vietnam—when there was a draft."

The Carter and Reagan administrations reinstated draft registration because they wanted to send a message to the world, he said. "It's an armor-clanging device. It's saying, 'We're going to enforce our chauvinistic will throughout the world. We're going to get what we want, even if that happens to violate our charter as a country.'"

"The administration is really in a bind. They can't turn me loose because then nobody will register. And they can't throw me in jail for a long time—because public outrage would just create political havoc."

Meanwhile, the letters pile up in Vista. Sasway is encouraged by a Chicago veteran who writes that he went to Vietnam to serve God and country, and finished by throwing away his fourteen medals. The personal attacks don't bother Sasway much. Everybody's entitled to an opinion. "But it kind of irritates me to have people call me a coward and then refuse to give me their names."

"I don't happen to think I'm that big a coward. I don't think I'm a Superman, but I don't think I'm a coward."



# Russia's African flop

JONATHAN MARSHALL

ONCE UPON A TIME, according to a popular myth, the United States was strong and determined enough to impose its will on the world, aside from a few minor setbacks like the fall of China, the stalemate in Korea, and the neutralization of India and much of the Third World. Then came our defeat in Vietnam, the post-Vietnam syndrome, and worst of all, Jimmy Carter. While President Carter fiddled, Iran, Nicaragua, and Afghanistan burned. And as America retreated from world leadership, the Soviet Union moved in to fill the vacuum. This supposed shift in the balance of power was precisely what candidate Ronald Reagan pledged during his 1980 campaign to correct.

Until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, critics of the Carter administration—both Republicans and neoconservative Democrats—invariably seized upon Africa for proof that Soviet imperialism was marching invincibly against U.S. interests. While a post-Vietnam America agonized, they claimed, African nations were falling like dominoes into the Soviet orbit. Military strategists and popular news magazines alike spoke darkly of the peril to our sea lanes and our supplies of vital raw materials, and drew arrows and red blotches to show the thrust of the Soviet Union's advance along an "arc of crisis" from southern Africa to southwest Asia.

Republican politicians led this barrage of criticism. Senator S. I. Hayakawa of California, then the ranking minority member of the Subcommittee on African Affairs, stated the case most starkly in 1979. "We have been completely permissive in letting the Soviets do whatever they damn please all around Africa," he complained. "This is what has necessitated the end

to a bipartisan foreign policy. As Americans and Republicans we are not content to see the permissive attitude this administration has shown toward Soviet adventurism in Africa." Robert Dole chimed in with his opinion that "the Soviet Union appears to have selected the African continent as a staging ground for a strategic showdown, to test the will of the United States." Thanks to Carter's inaction, or so Gerald Ford told the South African Foreign Trade Organization in 1978, the Soviets were fighting an "undeclared war" for control of Africa, and would "take over every nation if given the opportunity." Henry Kissinger, always the devotee of linkage theory, advised that the United States had lost influence in the Middle East because we failed to halt the "Soviet march through Africa." The Republican platform in 1980 registered its "strong opposition to the effort of the Soviet Union and its militant allies to subvert" the continent, and Ronald Reagan proposed as a first step that the United States send arms to anti-government guerrillas in leftist Angola.

Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, Henry Kissinger—they are all respected and experienced statesmen. Their warnings had all the more impact because key figures in the Carter administration accepted their basic premises. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's national security adviser, urged a tough line on Africa and would later accuse the Soviets of "burying" SALT "in the sands of the Ogaden." And Carter's number-two man at the CIA, Frank Carlucci (who would become deputy defense secretary under Reagan), told a Senate subcommittee in 1978 that "We are witnessing the most determined campaign to expand foreign influence in this troubled region since it was carved up by the European powers in the late nineteenth century."

Strong rhetoric, indeed. If such talk, by virtue of its sheer volume, had any

real substance, then one would expect the Soviets to be masters by now of the entire African continent. But several years have passed since the height of the scare, and now we can see just how little ground the Soviets have gained, despite U.S. indecision and congressionally enforced nonintervention. A clearheaded look at the realities of African politics shows without a doubt that the Soviets have suffered one setback after another, the result on the one hand of their own stupidity, greed, and heavy-handedness, and on the other, of tenacious African nationalism. A conspicuously negligible factor in the Soviets' fall from grace was U.S. military intervention; rather, the lure of American trade and investment has drawn African nations to us far more effectively than the big stick.

Some of the Soviet Union's most abject failures are already well known. After they lavished aid on Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana and established at Accra the KGB's African headquarters, a military coup in 1966 sent Nkrumah packing and reestablished friendly relations with the West. In Somalia, strongman Siad Barre lost his ardor for the Soviets when they opposed his unprovoked invasion of Ethiopia. Seemingly ungrateful for the more than \$1 billion in weapons and technical assistance the Soviets had lavished on Somalia, Barre kicked them out of Berbera, the finest naval base they enjoyed in Africa. Most notorious of all is the case of Egypt. The late president Anwar Sadat signed a friendship treaty with the Soviets in 1971 (after first imprisoning the pro-Soviet wing of Egypt's political leadership), then expelled 20,000 Soviet advisers fourteen months later, and in 1976 abrogated the treaty of friendship. Later he turned his military facilities over to the United States for dry runs of the Rapid Deployment Force.

Throughout Africa, the Soviets suffered less spectacular, but no less significant, political defeats. Guinea was long one of the Soviets' choicest allies in West Africa; since 1958 that terribly poor country received more than \$150 million in Soviet aid, over twice what the West has given. Nonetheless, the Soviets never had an easy time of it there. In 1961, for example, Guinea threw out all Soviet and Eastern-bloc diplomats, then denied the Soviets permission to land planes en route to Cuba during the 1962 missile crisis. Guinea fully opened up to the Soviet Union again only in 1973, when the

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