

The Daily Tar Heel

94th year of editorial freedom

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Editorials

The questions remain — still

President Reagan — apparently, at least — realized the gravity of his arms deal with Iran last week, and addressed the problem in a televised speech to the American people. No, he said, the United States had not struck a deal with terrorists. No, he said, his administration had not played under-the-table politics to free Americans held captive in the Middle East.

Clearly, the president hoped to assuage fears that the chief executive had deliberately misled the public regarding an important foreign policy matter. He could've done a much better job.

Reagan's central claim — that the arms delivered to Iran basically had no strings attached — may indeed be true, but the assertion raises more questions than it answers. Why would the United States send weapons to a fervently anti-American nation without expecting something tangible in return? Why would administration officials cover-up such a deal if they are so convinced the mission promotes international goodwill? And why, of all nations, Iran?

Judging from his Thursday address, Reagan thinks the public shouldn't ask such important questions. He even admonished the press for publishing reports from, among others, Danish sailors that the United States cut a deal with Iran to free the hostages. Never mind that those sailors professed to hauling the shipments.

Perhaps the president has forgotten the purpose of a responsible press: Simply, to seek answers from knowledgeable sources to obtain the truth. Reagan himself had a chance to respond to the allegations a week and a half ago. Instead, he said nothing — then

implored the media not to report on the matter, calling it a sensitive issue, one that may affect the safety of the hostages.

Questions concerning international intrigue aside, Reagan has demonstrated masterful doublespeak in the Iranian fiasco. Yes, he finally admitted Thursday, he had authorized the transfer of weapons and spare parts to Iran. It was a goodwill gesture, he said, part of an effort to bring an end to the bitter Iran-Iraq War.

In practically the same breath, though, the president claimed the arms shipments were small enough "to easily fit into a single cargo plane" and probably would not affect the war's outcome. If so, how can he entertain hopes of swaying even moderate Iranians toward the West's side?

The president even alienated Cabinet officials and many top Republican Congressmen. Secretary of State George Shultz presented Reagan a problem rare to any administration by publicly opposing a key presidential policy — in this case, calling for an end to Iran-bound arms shipments.

Still, after Reagan's address, the questions remain. That the president and many top executives fail to understand why the public and press seek answers bodes ill for the establishment of firm foreign policy.

Perhaps the core of the matter was expressed by presidential aide Donald Regan, who, when quizzed about the Iranian affair in a recent interview, exploded: "Who are you going to believe? Some Danish sailor or the president?"

Good question.



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Tar Heel Forum

Enlightenment victim of conformity

Pierre Tristam
 Of Mice and Men

On the other hand, what if the university really was a place for learning? Considering the number of universities in the United States and the number of people attending them, it follows that we should be the most learned people on earth, maybe even in the solar system. And since every citizen of academe thinks that more knowledge means a better life for all, we should be leading the way in the bettering of the human race, as Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy thought we were.

But with the illusions of the '50s and '60s forgotten (that massive higher education is progressive), American universities have all too openly become a business. That's a fine achievement. As long as they are profitable, universities will not vanish or become schools of chaos and indifference on the French and West German models, where money and motivation are scarce.

But let's face it: An overabundance of universities only makes for facts in excess, not for an increase in knowledge, whatever that may be. Facts are born, argued, revised and, within a matter of years, give way to "new evidence," like a detergent that is replaced by a "new, improved" version, probably enhanced by lemon. The constant flow of information feeds reading lists of seminars and provokes lengthy if not pointless discussions that change no one's opinions or perceptions, but instead titillate the egos of eager orators or simply fulfill a degree requirement.

I am reminded of my own department, where for the sake of a better understanding of history, classes are created to teach students how to hunt and capture facts in every conceivable form. Fittingly, those students become Ph.D. victims, scurrying after apocalyptically lengthy bibliographies and supporting one obscure thesis after another. With rare exceptions, these theses end their active life on library shelves or in boxed microfoms. A few get mentioned in the footnotes of academic papers, because professors in search of tenure or peer-recognition crank out enough of those to rival the paper towel industry, and teeming

footnotes are the academic paper's status symbol. The printer never stops ticking, and the whole enterprise perpetuates an institution proud of its ability to produce more facts than Job could recite lamentations.

Admittedly, academe has never been the oasis of creativity that its dons like to think it is. Pervasive bureaucratic structures and disciplines are not meant to encourage the creative mind. They are meant to mold and stricture it along a specific image. In graduate school especially, the student finds himself at the mercy of whatever image his department wishes to project. More often than not, the graduate experience consists of learning how to identify and submit to higher, wiser authority rather than exercise independent thought. It is a curious reversal, back to the days of childhood, and one not at all pleasant for those who can do without the intellectual parenting of faculty. Whether intentional or subconscious, the parenting is evident, and it poses severe restrictions against creativity and intellectual development. What's more, relations between adviser and student are too intimate, and risks of jeopardizing a fellowship by displeasing departmental ideology loom too great to encourage independent thinking.

In many cases students do not want to think independently, or cannot. The omnipotent professor comes in handy then, as the relationship of domination and submission is smoothly played out. Clearly, the message from the professor to the doctoral candidate is: "The only way to succeed is through me." Hence, academics thrive on the mysterious belief that without their guidance a student is lost, or at any rate quite crippled in his quest for a degree. The notion of advice and consent is so firmly entrenched in the framework of graduate studies that any attempt to diverge from it is considered disrespectful. A professor will

feel his credibility undermined. For like everyone else, professors relish and often depend on exercising their power on students who remind them of their own years of submission. They have gained power, and they do not want it tampered with.

After all, that professors are endowed with a virtuous task does not disinherit them from an array of unvirtuous human instincts. To the contrary, academics tend to float in the abstractions of their disciplines, and if one has ideas of using his studies at the university as a mean to gaining a better understanding of the world at large, he is more likely to be deceived than satisfied. His role models, to begin with, are masons of ivory towers.

In sum, the educational process seems both futile and infantile. It is not geared towards refining one's knowledge and taste so much as to teach specific techniques of learning and habits of abiding by a given authority. While the system works well in nurturing pawns in its own image, it does not tolerate dissent.

As a result, the rate of attrition among students, especially graduate students, is high. Dropouts plagued UNC's history department in recent years so much that surveys (more studies!) were carried out, and doctoral programs were eventually tightened. But the restructuring only further restricts students and increases dependency on faculty. It is not broadening choices, let alone minds.

It is a sad fact that one cannot go far in society without first participating in the charade of academe. In the guise of reassurance, a professor recently told me that irrationalities inside academe cannot even begin to compete with those of the "outside world." Maybe so. But whereas the university is often thought of as a cradle of novelty and change, it would be more correctly described as a breeding ground of conformity. Especially in the land of trained minds who like to get their facts straight.

Staff Columnist Pierre Tristam is a graduate student in history from Carrboro.

Show remorse

To the editor:
 Recently, the University was subjected to the tragic deaths of three students. To many citizens of Chapel Hill, these deaths were particularly sad; all three were fine individuals with so much ahead of them — they left behind many sad friends and relatives.

It seems only fitting that the University should recognize such tragedy by flying the flag in Polk Place at half-mast as a sign of our respect for these students and as a strong signal to their friends and relatives that the University mourns with them.

SCOTT MARTIN
 Junior
 Comparative Literature

Fund shortage

The author is co-chair of Human Rights Week '86.

To the editor:
 On Thursday, David Hood and Jeff Taylor wrote about the limited vision of Human Rights Week '86. I would like to address these charges and give some correct information about Campus Y.

Our theme was "Educating the world about itself." One must divide the world into areas to provide orderly information. We devoted days to areas in the world so people could learn about specific areas as they chose.

The theme was also used hoping that some would learn something about others' human rights and would help stop violations. Hood and Taylor are obviously informed about many human rights



violations throughout the world. Where were they when we had the meeting for people who wanted to work on Human Rights Week '86? Where were they when there was a meeting of groups wanting to put programs in the Week?

Both were advertised beforehand, but possibly these two people are concerned with violations only to ridicule the only campus program that attempts to address them. Events that Hood and Taylor said were not covered were not because no one came forward with programs on those areas.

In January, there will be a search for two co-chairs for next year's Human Rights

Week. I suggest that Hood and Taylor, or anyone else who is informed on human rights, attempt this job. Put your money where your mouth is and make the 5th Human Rights Week even better than this year. Our goal of getting students active about human rights violations worked to some degree. Let's see what you can do. I will support anyone who wishes to try.

There will be obstacles, the biggest obstacle being the one factual mistake Hood and Taylor made in their column. The Campus Y does not get student fees — it exists on fundraising events and the membership fees voluntarily paid by Y members. It's very

hard to get enough money from this school to make a good Week. One program and many ideas on speakers had to be scratched this year because of lack of funds. In the future, it would be advantageous to make Human Rights Week a campus committee and therefore receive student fees.

Human Rights Week '86 did leave out many vital areas. To make the Week complete, we need informed students like Hood and Taylor to use their ideas to build a good Week, instead of using their words to destroy it.

RICHARD ARCHIE
 Sophomore
 Economics/Political Science

Defend human rights in Write-a-thon

The purpose of Human Rights Week was to educate our community about human rights abuses in the world. But now that the programs have ended, many people are left with a sense of hopelessness, wondering how a college student in North Carolina could possibly have an effect on the injustices that exist in practically every corner of the world.

Unfortunately, the truth is that no one person can end torture in Syria or stop clandestine death squads from executing people in the streets of Chile. But as a community of angry, concerned citizens, the potential power is incredible.

This power cannot be measured in megatons. Instead, the strength evolves simply from the pen and a piece of paper. For twenty-five years, Amnesty International has derived its strength solely from the unity of nearly half a million people worldwide. The formula of gathering information and writing letters to government officials on

Deborah Rzasa
 Guest Writer

behalf of prisoners of conscience is very effective.

For instance, a released prisoner of conscience from Paraguay had this to say about Amnesty:

"For years I was held in tiny cell. My only human contact was with my torturers . . . My only company were the cockroaches and mice. . . . On Christmas Eve the door to my cell opened, and the guard tossed me a crumpled piece of paper. It said, 'Take heart. The world knows you're alive. We're with you. Regards, Monica, Amnesty International.' That letter saved my life."

In celebration of Amnesty's 25th anniversary, Jack Healey, the executive director of AIUSA, conceptualized a new event to increase interest in the group, raise money and, most importantly, generate letters for prisoners. This concept is a "Write-a-thon for Human Rights."

The Chapel Hill chapter of Amnesty International is participating in this event and has designated the next two months for an intensive letter-writing campaign on

behalf of prisoners in Chile, Syria, and other countries. Participation is easy and takes little time. The participants agree to write as many letters as possible, and then find sponsors to pledge financial support for the letters. As a result, the writers generate thousands of letters on behalf of prisoners, raise awareness about abuses and collect money to further Amnesty's work.

Amnesty International invites any individual or organization to join us in our Write-a-thon. For more information or to receive a Write-a-thon packet with complete instructions, contact our local Amnesty group at 933-6154.

You may never know if your letter is the one that finally compels a foreign leader to release a prisoner. But — if you doubt the strength generated by the coming together of a greatly diverse people on behalf of a prisoner for the simple reason that he is a human being whose rights have been violated — thousands of freed prisoners of conscience around the world would argue otherwise.

Join us. Your letter just might make a difference.

Deborah Rzasa is a sophomore journalism major from Cary.