

opinion

Press ignoring Afghanistan?

by Maxwell Glen and Cody Shearer

For spring break this year, two Ivy Leaguers passed up the delights of Hilton Head, Ft. Lauderdale and Aspen for a trip to no man's land.

Gregory D'Elia, a Yale junior, and Charles Bork, who graduated from Yale in 1981, entered Afghanistan dressed as refugees one month ago to prove that the American press ignores the resistance by anti-Soviet Afghan guerillas. Yet, while the trip was illuminating, Bork and D'Elia may have only dramatized how the continuing conflict in South Asia frustrates even the most aggressive of news hounds.

On Feb. 26, Bork and D'Elia set off for Rawalpindi. The two staff members of the right-wing-minded Yale Free Press had solicited \$9,000 from various conservative think-tanks (Accuracy in Media, Inc. and Fund for Objective News Reporting, among others) early this year to underwrite plane tickets, camera equipment and incidental expenses.

They eventually rendezvoused with representatives of the Afghan resistance — or Mujahideen — in Peshawar, a Pakistani city about 40 miles from the Khyber Pass. For the ever-necessary disguise, they purchased turbans, capes and other local garb (one Mujahideen member blackened Bork's blond beard with dye and a toothbrush). It was then by bus to a border refugee camp where, late one afternoon, they crossed into Afghanistan with the help of a guide.

Bork, 24, and D'Elia, 20, stayed in

Afghanistan's Pektia province for five days, visiting a school for refugee children, surveying bombed-out villages and farms and meeting other resistance soldiers. They also took more than 1,000 photographs (Bork, who is a military photography buff, hauled an antique plate camera and tripod along).

The Yalies spent one day at a resistance center, where many Afghan nationalists were gathering for a nighttime assault on a government garrison two miles away. "We were a little concerned that this wasn't the best place to be at that moment," admitted Bork, who added that helicopter air attacks made the sparsely-equipped Afghans vulnerable at all times.

After two weeks in the region, Bork and D'Elia concluded that American news organizations were inadequately reporting the Afghan story and need to station full-time correspondents in Peshawar.

Yet, Henry S. Bradsher, who has covered Afghanistan over the last 25 years for the Associated Press, the now-defunct Washington Star and the London-based Economist, dismisses the news bureau as an inadequate solution.

For one, he says, since the Soviet-backed regime of Habrak Karmal routinely denies Western journalists visas or freedom of movement, firsthand reporting is irregular if not non-existent. Most American editors must rely on the secondhand reports from "diplomatic sources" in Islamabad or New Delhi, or

Mujahideen representatives in Peshawar — an unreliable system at best.

Secondly, the Afghan conflict's hit-and-run nature prevents reporters from gathering much news. Bradsher, who recently authored a study of Soviet-Afghan relations for the Duke University Press, told our associate Michael Duffy that "there are no ongoing battles to speak of. Most reporters end up only with footage of Afghans walking around the mountains or lobbying shells for amusement."

Unfortunately, the news gap helps to explain why Americans don't follow Afghan developments with much enthusiasm. Indeed, a recent survey of public attitudes toward U.S. foreign policy by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations overlooked questions about Afghanistan; other polls have shown that the issue faded from the public interest within 10 months of the December 1979 invasion.

Though neither Bork nor D'Elia thought that their trip would single-handedly improve U.S. coverage, each believes that more regular reportage, particularly by television crews, could mobilize public opinion against Soviet adventurism.

For the plucky pair at Yale, however, the lesson of their unorthodox spring break may be that the news media are doing the best job under the circumstances. While editors choose to ignore most Afghan-related dispatches, no conspiracy exists to spike the story, as some of Bork's and D'Elia's benefactors might believe.

Slouch By Jim Earle



"I was afraid that you might not have had a chance to celebrate and enjoy the festivities on April 1."

Compromise: Word meaning survival

by Arnold Sawislak
United Press International

WASHINGTON — The cliché about politics is that it is "the art of the possible." The trick for politicians who practice that art is to make it appear as if they have accomplished the impossible.

Ronald Reagan demonstrated on both the jobs bill and the Social Security rescue legislation that he understands "the art of the possible" means compromise. He also showed that he can make a deal he has cut with his opponents look like unconditional victory for himself.

The jobs measure Reagan accepted was almost the same bill he denounced as a "pork barrel" full of "make work" jobs a few months ago. The Social Security legislation carried tax increases that the president said last year were unacceptable.

But when Congress passed both bills, Reagan praised the lawmakers for rising above partisanship and demagoguery and declared that his promise to protect the needy had been fulfilled. Against all odds, it seemed, the president had come through again.

The plain truth was that both bills had elements distasteful to Reagan and his Democratic opponents, but neither side could pass the kind of legislation it preferred.

Unemployment was rising, Social Security was headed toward deficit, and the 1982 elections gave no smashing mandate to either side. It looked like a continued standoff would only make things worse for the public in 1983 and the politicians in 1984, so the politicians compromised.

Now the battle moves on to the budget, with the focus on defense spending. The

president wants to increase it about 10 percent; the Democrats in control of the House passed a budget with an increase of 4 percent. Republican leaders in the Senate are said to be thinking about a neighborhood of 7 percent for defense.

If the difference were split, the result would be 5.5 percent. But it will surprise if the final figure is close to that, which Reagan could point to as a victory, given the House action.

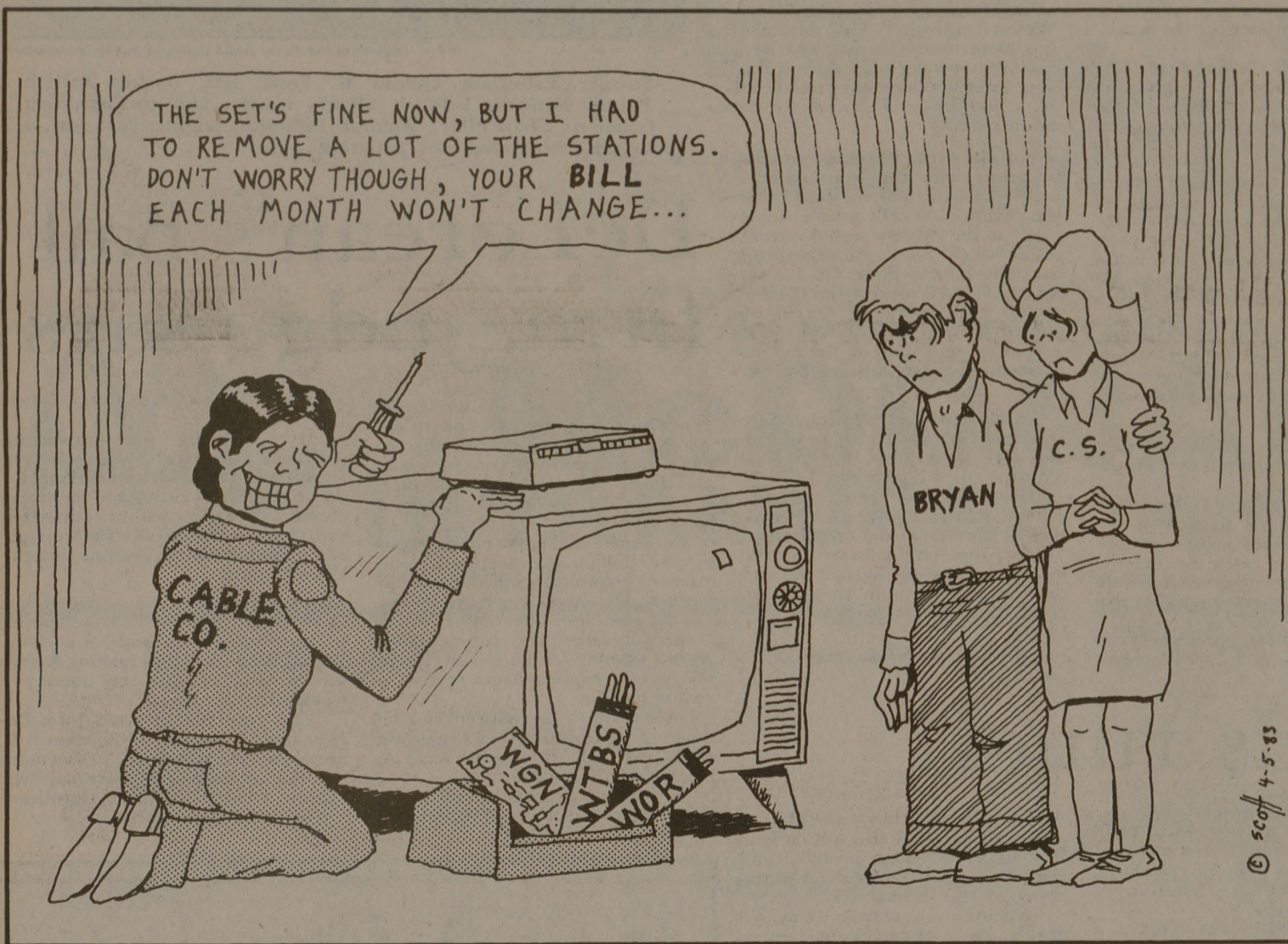
That does not mean that the president will have had the better of his fiscal House budget also has restored funding for a number of social programs and food stamps and legal services for the poor that the Democrats want to cut. They might give a little on defense spending to achieve that.

That leaves taxes as an obstacle. Democrats favor repeal of the tax cut this summer to reduce the \$200 billion plus deficit. The president also is opposed by the deficit, but he is lashed to the cross on a 1983 tax cut.

But there still might be room for compromise. The tax cut is due July 1, a considerable nick could be made by delaying it until, say, Dec. 31. Or Reagan might be able to save the tax cut by agreeing to delay the elimination of "bracket creep" from the tax structure, now scheduled for 1984. Deficits still are running high.

Both sides can be expected to survive on these possibilities now. Both sides will look good in a budget deal, and both Reagan and his opponents shown they can deal with each other when it becomes necessary.

As the heat rises in Washington this summer, the art form called compromise might start looking attractive once



Letters: Use of photo criticized

Editor:

The photograph of the female cadet playing the tuba which appeared on the front page of Friday's edition of The Battalion, and the oh-so-cute caption which accompanied it, only served to re-emphasize that your publication is indeed the "lap dog of the administration." Your attempt to make light of the fact that the Fightin' Texas Aggie Band refuses to break sacred tradition and allow qualified women into its ranks fell flat. That you would condone a federally funded organization's chauvinistic and blatantly illegal exclusionary practice is not only demeaning to your publication, but to the women who attend this University as well.

I cannot believe that it was meant to be an attempt at subtle satire. The recent publication of The Aggie Rag demonstrated that you are incapable of blatant satire.

Who does your publication cater to, the administration or the student body? Unfortunately, there are too many people on this campus who found the photograph and caption amusing, and it is exactly this sort of thinking which impedes any attempts to make this University great.

It would have been nice if you hadn't had to add the last two words to the caption. It would have made your homage to The Battalion, which appeared in the

same issue's weekend supplement, easier to stomach if you had left the whole thing out all together.

Michelle Lynch '83

Critique continued

Editor:

Is there no limit to your insensitivity? Your shocking front page photo and caption in the April 1 edition, passed off as an April Fool joke, constitute your active support for the illegal and immoral discrimination against women on this campus. Instead of fighting for social equality, you seem content to bless us with inspiring news about ring sales and dance attendance.

Your avoidance of controversy at all cost is particularly galling in light of the disgustingly self-congratulatory At Ease in the same issue. How ironic that in the same article that hails The Battalion as being "among the top 10 percent in quality of university newspapers," we find the mathematically startling information that by increasing from eight to 80 week-

ly pages the paper "quadrupled in size." No wonder you can't put two and two together.

I have no objection to your use (three times, no less!) of the British spelling of the word "humor." You're just helping make this a world university, right? And I loved your incisive analysis of Slouch who "has become less subtle and less rough around the issues," whatever that means.

But you forgot to finish the cover title. It should have read, How The Battalion Is Produced ... Poorly.

Michael Halpern

Thanks

Editor:

To the fella in fencing 199 Tuesday and Thursday from 10:15 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. — thanks. You are a special person. I really appreciate your honesty in turning in the diamond earring I lost in the class before yours. I do not know who you are but thanks so much for being honest. You are a good Ag!

Shera Wasilewsky
Mobiltown Dr.

The Battalion

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The Battalion also serves as a laboratory for students in reporting, editing and photographing within the Department of Communications. Questions or comments concerning an editorial matter should be directed to the editor.

Letters Policy

Letters to the Editor should not exceed 300 words in length, and are subject to being cut if they are too long. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must also be signed and show the address and phone number of the writer.

Columns and guest editorials are also welcome, but are not subject to the same length constraints as letters. Address all inquiries and correspondence to The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843, or phone (713) 291-11.

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