

Opinion

Death penalty would deter tampering

The citizens of the United States have experienced for the past several years an outbreak of contaminating store-bought products with sodium cyanide. Not only does this destroy consumers' confidence in the product, but this tampering results in the death of the consumer.



Mark Ude

Because many people are aware of the attacks on gelatin-capsule medicines, they have avoided such products, fearing a potential or actual threat. This unorthodox boycott has led to the decision of manufacturers to discontinue the capsule version of their medicine. Authorities even caught a person suspected of attempting to corner the stock market by tampering with these products, then buying up shares of the company's stock when it started to drop. And by then we thought it was all over.

But the attacks upon the populace continue. Sure, we had isolated cases appear throughout the country, but we dismissed them as unrelated and purely copy-cat crimes. Unfortunately, most tamper scares cannot be dismissed so easily.

To date, there have been threats upon Accent seasoning salt in Houston and Jello brand gelatin in the Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin region. There have even been reports of contamination of soft drink bottles, and Monday, a rumour of contaminated Aim toothpaste proved false. Even Bryan-College Station has not been immune to the wave of product tampering. On March 21, an unidentified caller told a Bryan pharmacist that cyanide had been placed in packets of Dextrin diet pills.

So where does this leave us? Do consumers live in fear of psychopathic weirdos who find some warped glee in causing undue suffering across the nation? Must we be at the mercy of any Tom, Dick or Harry who calls up a store and reports that some fatal chemical has been injected into a popular, name brand product just for kicks?

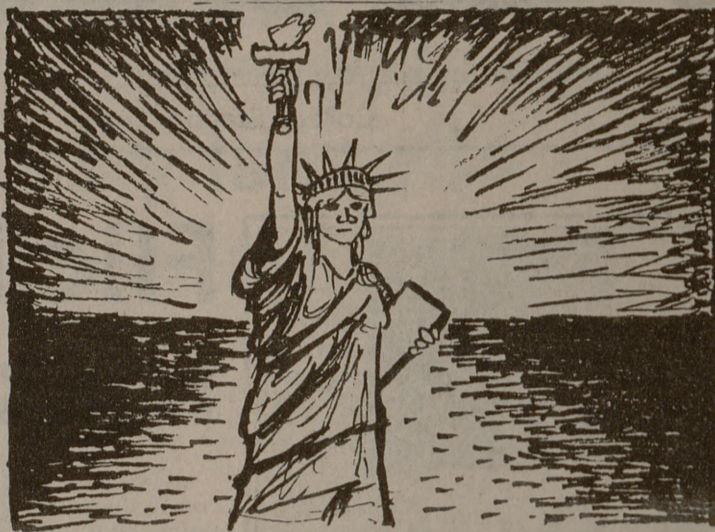
While increased security could help lessen the chance of such incidences occurring, it would not prevent future attempts at food contamination. I have the final solution to the problem. I am a strong believer in deterrence and feel that if we adequately provide warnings to future tamperers, we could alleviate the majority of the problem.

The entire motive of these perverted individuals is to gain recognition — however anonymous — just like the infamous terrorist. If Congress would have enough initiative to pass a bill with strong penalties enacted against such offenders, perhaps the amount of contaminations would decrease.

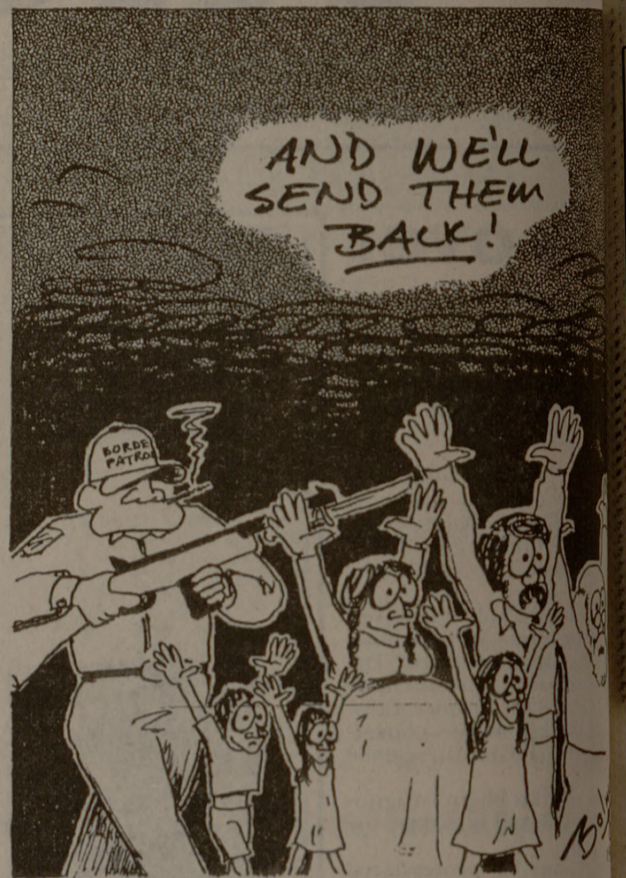
And I mean *strong* penalties. I don't expect one to three years in a minimum security facility. The victims have consumed the product in confidence, unaware of the consequences imposed by vermin who delight in terror. If medicine tamperers received harsh punishment, such as the death penalty (by lethal injection seems appropriate), I suspect that there would be no more joy tricks to "scare" the public.

Unfortunately, some people maintain that such terrorists have rights that are more equal than others', and that the death penalty is reminiscent of cruel and unusual punishment in an age of enlightenment. So while defense lawyers argue for leniency and understanding, probably even insanity, more and more cases of contamination will appear, causing social fear that will overshadow the present discomfort.

Mark Ude is a senior geography major and a columnist for The Battalion.

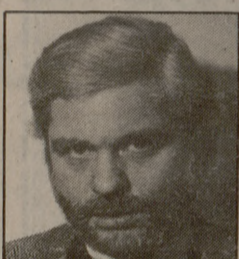


Give me your tired,
your poor,
Your huddled masses, yearning
to breathe free.....



Less tactful followers in line to uphold Reagan's legacy

A recent White House "issues lunch" reportedly went this way: The report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography came up. Patrick J. Buchanan, the White House director of communications, had what is for him a modest proposal — ban the sale of *Penthouse* and *Playboy* from military bases. There was a pause until someone said, "Well, that would certainly do wonders for our recruiting program," at which point everyone, President Reagan included, laughed. Next item, please.



Richard Cohen

The anecdote is instructive. In Buchanan we have an uncompromising conservative — what you might call Reaganism without the smile. And in the president we have the aw-shucks version of the same thing. One we like; one we by and large do not like. But it is Buchanan, not Reagan, who has logic on his side. If these magazines are, as a government commission now says, pornographic, then they certainly ought to be banned from post exchanges. After all, can the military do less than 7-Eleven?

It probably did not occur to either the president or members of his senior staff that Buchanan had, in his uncompromising logic, put a finger on what might be the most troubling aspect of the Reagan legacy: the eventual absence of Reagan himself. When it comes to the so-called social agenda, Reagan has acted as his own best brake.

His utterance aside, the president has

been loath to use either his popularity or his office to implement what for him are commendable social values. So far, he has saved his ammo for more substantial issues — foreign affairs and tax policy, to name two. Unlike Contra aid, for instance, the president has not gone to Congress ten times on school prayer.

But there are others, and Buchanan is an example, who burn with conviction where Reagan merely glows with aspiration. They not only lack the president's disarming touch, but unlike Reagan, their own lives do not suggest that they understand there's many a slip between the cup and the lip.

The president, for instance, advocates church attendance, yet he himself does not go. He extols stable marriages, but he has been divorced. He believes in close-knit families yet his has been anything but. He promotes the stabilizing value to society of heterosexuality, but he counts homosexuals as his friends. And he deputizes his attorney general to clean up smut and then laughs away a suggestion that the insidious logic of his own government's report be implemented.

The problem, though, is that where Reagan hesitates to tread, others will rush right in, attempting to do by government decree what Reagan attempts with a speech and an Oval Office photo opportunity. The pornography commission is a case in point. Already it has gone too far. *Playboy* and *Penthouse* are both tasteless and (yes, Buchanan) sexist, but they are not, by contemporary standards, pornographic.

Yet a high-ranking presidential assistant suggests their removal from military post exchanges — a suggestion that

a Reagan heir, less popular and less sure, might not be able to laugh. As any soldier can tell you, the more the Buchanan proposal is punitive — *Playboy* and *Penthouse* censorship at point of purchase.

Similarly, Reagan has taken a and-let-live attitude toward homosexuals. In fact, his personal and public conduct toward gays always has been decent if only because, like any dealer of Hollywood, he can count some friends and acquaintances. Yet he bestowed his personal approval on those, like the Rev. Jerry Falwell, who have used demagogic techniques of issue to raise funds.

In doing so, the president has sanctioned a surge in homophobia that can no longer control, and which has legal voice in the recent Supreme Court decision upholding the Georgia sodomy law. The same people Reagan welcomed to the White House, Falwell would be of the most elemental civil rights — the Georgia police could bust.

Whether the president realizes he sanctioned some ugly currents in American society is hard to tell. But there is nothing funny about Buchanan's suggestion. Instead of saying so, the president let a laugh do what a buke should have — and the message dissipated in laughter.

Unless Reagan appreciates that disarming smile will go out of the president with him, his legacy will be left to those who have no compunction against governmental authority to implement their own values — claiming, in process, the Reagan mantle. Stop laughing, gentlemen. There is nothing funny about that.

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Mail Call

Witch-hunt psychology alive and well

EDITOR:

Thank you so much for your editorial that spoke out against the Supreme Court ruling that state governments may choose to prohibit certain forms of sexual expression between adults. Anyone who feels that this is a free government's privilege must be a fool!

It is interesting, as well as appalling, that right-wingers seem to feel government should be as uninvolved in our lives as possible, except in our bedrooms. Ludicrous! This notion is obviously the result of fear and bigotry and is a vicious anti-gay tactic, as is this late Supreme Court decision.

The witch-hunt psychology still exists in this country, and the Salem witch hunters claimed moral rightness on their side, too.

Ramsey L. Sealy
Graduate Student
Horticulture Sciences

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. 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 be signed and must include the address and telephone number of the writer.

Archives stores information of past, present

A few days ago a student working on an impressionistic paper for a freshman English class came into the Archives to look around so she could record her first impressions of the building, which she previously had not visited. As she left she remarked that she was surprised to find such a modern facility. It was obvious that she expected the Archives to be an old place full of old stuff.

Charles R. Schultz
Guest Columnist

Over the years I have had numerous conversations with fellow airplane passengers about occupations. The normal response when I tell them that I am an archivist is "That's nice," or "That must be interesting." To me, it certainly is nice, and it definitely is interesting, but few people outside the archival profession know how "nice" or how "interesting" it really is.

At a meeting of archivists a few years ago, I had a brief conversation about occupations with a young woman. When I said I was an archivist, she appeared puzzled, and it was obvious she was not familiar with the term. I told her that archivists collect records. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "Like 78s and 45s." I then ex-

plained that, while some archives do indeed collect musical recordings, the vast majority collect primarily paper records with an ever increasing number acquiring machine-readable records.

Recently, in discussing a class report with a student, I asked him what he thought an archives is. He replied "It is a place where you can see old things, like a museum." I quickly disabused him of his notion by informing him that that day's *Battalion* was as much a part of the archives as was the act of the Texas Legislature which established Texas A&M.

Because of these experiences, it seems to me that few people really understand what an archivist is or what an archivist does.

If an archives is not simply a place for old files and musical recordings, an old place full of old stuff or something like a museum, what is it?

An archives is a place that is very much alive where well trained, experienced, knowledgeable professionals help people to understand the past and document the present, so that future generations will be able to understand the present as well as the current generation understands the past.

By making available appropriate collections of letters, diaries, photographs, reminiscences, oral history memoirs, re-

ports of institutions and organizations, newspapers, motion pictures, video tapes, a variety of ephemeral publications and an assortment of artifacts, an archivist can help researchers better understand the past.

These documents can help to put real flesh onto skeletal family histories which would otherwise consist simply of names with birth and death dates. While the archives may not have such records from every family, its holdings of papers of some families in some regions may help greatly in gaining an understanding of how people lived in a particular area at a given time.

Such records also can help researchers to understand more fully the real meaning of wars, disease epidemics, lonely life on the plains, racial unrest and many other aspects of history which normally seem to be only dry facts mentioned in history classes.

Through the judicious collecting of current records (a task complicated by the failure of people to keep diaries, the propensity to communicate by telephone rather than letters, the frequent use of unstable color film instead of more durable black and white, and the increasing use of electronic mail) archivists are endeavoring to retain the records which will permit future genera-

tions of researchers to understand the 1980s as well as current researchers do the 1880s and 1780s.

By using new technological devices such as microfilm, microfiche, laser disks and computers, archivists are attempting to provide for the permanent preservation of at least the information contained in both old and new records. Due to their impermanence, preservation of the documents in their original form may not be possible. These new technological devices also help provide greater and faster access to the wealth of information in archives.

Visit the archives on campus or one in your home city, state and nation and become familiar with your past. Get to know the archivist, for he or she can be of great help to you in discovering where to find the information you need and in learning what to save from, as well as how to preserve, your own personal historical records. Only in this way can you really learn how "nice" it is to be an archivist and how "interesting" the job is.

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The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Journalism.

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