

Point of View

To Be Equal

WHAT'S A "SPECIAL INTEREST"?

By John E. Jacob

I'm old enough to remember when the term "special interest" referred to a narrow group supporting measures for its own private gain.

But in recent years the pollution of the language has extended to include a distortion of the phrase — instead of referring to private greed it has been applied to those advocating the public good.

The perversion of the term's traditional meaning and its transformation into a means of abusing advocates of measures that would benefit the total society is not something to be shrugged off, for it reflects a way of thinking that could frustrate efforts to improve our society.

At the turn of the century, "special interests" was used to describe monopolists. Today it is used to describe — and to condemn — groups working to make our nation a better place for all.

Just pinning a label like "special interest" on those working for the public good replaces thinking. Instead of projecting a vision of a better America from a different standpoint, the dema-

gogues just pin the "special interest" label on whatever they oppose.

The civil rights movement, for example, was never perceived as a "special interest" for it was recognized that measures to assure the constitutional rights of all and to bring the large black minority fully into the mainstream are in the national interest.

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Sure, the policies it advocates would primarily benefit blacks, minorities and all of the poor. But they would also put America well on the road to being a nation of peace and prosperity for all.

That's not a special interest but a national interest. How can it possibly be described by a term that used to be reserved for a handful of speculators trying to ram through some legislation that would benefit them alone?

Organized labor is another group stigmatized by the special interest label. But unions represent over 20 million working people and advocate positions like

full employment and wage and labor standards that benefit all working people.

In the context of national policy you can't fairly label such a mass organization of Americans as a "special interest" nor can you pretend that advocates of civil rights, better working conditions, and other social reforms are

spokespeople for narrow viewpoints at odds with the general good.

You might oppose some or all of the things such groups stand for, but to refuse to take their ideas as serious debating points and to try to smear them with the brush of "special interests" is unfair, unprincipled, and untrue.

The new, distorted meaning given "special interests" is brought to us by the same people that try to change the word "conservative" from something that stood for stability and patriotism into something that stands for greed and narrow nationalism.

It comes from the same people who try to redefine poverty in such a way as to exclude poor peo-



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ple who get in-kind benefits like subsidized housing and Medicaid.

It comes from many of the same people that

label affirmative action's goals as "quotas" and attempts to desegregate America as "reverse discrimination."

If we keep on this path we'll wind up calling war, peace; poverty, affluence; and oppression, freedom. This is 1984, and George Orwell's famous book of the same name depicted a society whose language was "Newspeak" — consisting of just the perversions of meaning I have discussed here.

One way to assure that the fictional 1984 doesn't become reality is to insist on recapturing the integrity of those loaded

phrases whose meaning is being distorted today.

And the place to start is by reclaiming "special interest" as a term depicting private greed and not the broad-based groups fighting to make America work for all its people.



Mouthwash, a product used daily and basically considered harmless, can sometimes cause severe illness or death if consumed by a child, according to a recent broadcast sponsored by the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center and The Prudential Insurance Company.

William Troutman, director of the New Mexico Poison Information Center, reports that the heavy concentration of drinking alcohol, or ethanol, in mouthwash can poison the child. "Of the major marketed brands of mouthwash, the lowest ethanol content is about 28 proof and the highest close to 54 proof. This approaches whiskey, which is 86 proof," says Troutman.

Children drink mouthwash because it is sweet, attractive, and they don't realize it is not meant to be swallowed. If they drink enough of the product they can become drunk which, may result in a loss of ability to maintain body temperature. They can also lose their protective reflexes or become comatose. If left untreated, a child can die in this condition.

While no reported deaths have been attributed to mouthwash ingestion, Dr. Troutman advises keeping the product away from children. He advocates the use of small-volume, child-resistant containers, and proposes a reduction of alcohol content in these products.

Editorial

Vanessa Williams, the first Black Miss America, gave up her title this week because of having posed for pictures in the nude in a compromising position with another woman. The pictures are being published in the September issue of Penthouse Magazine.

This dilemma has rocked America, especially Black America. Rather than outline the moral issues inherent in this dilemma, we feel that we should look at some more practical considerations.

At the time of her posing for the pictures, Vanessa Williams had no idea that she might become "Miss America." She neglected to protect her "real flank", which is to say that she did not stop to think of possible long-term consequences of her actions. Apparently she was dazzled by the "scene" in which she was employed at the moment. It is quite possible that curiosity "got the upper hand." In the process, this young and inexperienced woman apparently gave in to her curiosity with possible suggestions or subtle pressures from an experienced professional.

Had her perspective reached a little farther, she would have taken the time to consult with time-tested advisors such as her parents, her minister, her teachers, her more mature friends, and/or her attorney. It would have been better for her to secure, in writing before her performance, the terms under which the items may or may not be used, and to read and re-read the contract and look for hidden loopholes.

In setting our list of priorities, we must never forget to keep moral and spiritual values at the top of the list, always remembering that that which one does today may affect his/her entire future. Today's excitement can be tomorrow's nightmare.

We must never neglect to think for ourselves, and consider all possible far-reaching consequences.

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