Americans Should Only Vote in the U.S.

Voting in one's country of origin an affront to oath

by Michael Warder

Should naturalized Serbian Americans be allowed to vote simultaneously for Pat Buchanan and Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic in future elections? The knotty little problem of dual citizenship is increasingly surfacing in America and other countries in sometimes surprising ways.

In the southwest United States it may well be that millions of naturalized Mexican American citizens will be allowed to vote for both the American candidate for president in 2000 and also the Mexican candidate in that same year. (The Mexican government is considering the question, already having eliminated a constitutional obstacle.) But there are other examples of this growing problem.

What of the Americans who return to Lithuania or Estonia, for example, to participate in public life in the country of their birth? What are their interests as they vote in these tiny countries while voting for U.S. senators who may vote on future NATO membership for these countries?

And what of the case last week of American citizens flying to Israel to vote for either Ehud Barak or Benjamin Netanyahu for prime minister?

Generally, people vote where they live. The idea is that you and your family will suffer or enjoy the consequences of voting in the place where you reside. Then, too, the govern-ment will know where to find you when it is time to collect taxes, call you to serve on a jury, issue your passport or notify you to serve in the military. Generally, people live in the same country where they work.

But it is not right that an American citizen living and working abroad, with the rights and duties of American citizenship, could simultaneously be a citizen of another country. Nor should new American citizens be allowed to vote simultaneously in the country of their origin. American citizenship is not so cheap, nor I suspect is the citizen-ship of most any other country.

The injustice done to Japanese Americans in World War II, when they were assigned to camps in California and elsewhere during the war, derives from the fact that most were U.S. citizens. If they were not loyal U.S. citizens, but rather citizens whose loyalty was to their country of origin, there was no injustice in their being distrusted for concerns about spying and subversion during war. In that case, they might likely have worked here to further the interest of their country, then an enemy of the United States.

To change citizenship is no light matter. Consider the oath each new citizen takes to become a U.S. citizen:

> *I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America against all — enemies, foreign and domestic…*

The idea that a new American citizen, after having taken such an oath, would then seek to vote for a foreign leader is an offense to the oath and to the United States.

If, in the case of Mexico, the Institutional Revolutionary Party

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(PRI) were to lose a close three-way race for the presidency in 2000, after 70 years of uninterrupted power, it might dispute the election results. It could easily allege in these presidential elections that the Drug Enforcement Agency or the CIA covertly and decisively tampered with the outcome by influencing the votes from the United States. There is, after all, a history of Mexican distrust concerning interference by its powerful neighbor to the north.

However implausible the accusation, it might well reverberate powerfully in Mexico and topple an incoming government. The same accusation of tampering could be leveled in the Baltics through votes cast or influence generated from Amer-ica, or Russia for that matter.

America is now becoming increasingly accepting of new Mexican American citizens. That is a good thing. And it is a fine thing that individual Americans seek to help the nations of their origin, as in the case of many Baltic Americans.

However, in this rapidly changing world, the obligations and interests of citizens should not be allowed to float so easily between nations. Such a situation invites questions of loyalty. The oath of citizenship is one that is not taken lightly, anywhere. The U.S. Congress should pass a law prohibiting all citizens of the United States from voting in foreign elections.