

# Peace Corps, Revived, Seeks New Challenges

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 26 — Some months after proposing the Peace Corps in spring 1961, President Kennedy remarked, "I gave Sarge a lemon and he made lemonade."

The lemon was the difficult task of translating an idea into reality. The resulting lemonade was Sargent Shriver's carefully constructed framework for a workable Peace Corps, one of the true innovations of the Kennedy Administration.

Now, after more than a decade of low visibility, the Peace Corps has regained an independent status it had lost when President Nixon, seeking to downgrade programs inherited from his Democratic predecessors, folded it into an umbrella agency called Action. Last December Congress voted to separate the corps from Action, effective last Monday.

More to the point, Loret Miller Ruppe, a moderate Republican chosen by President Reagan to be director of

Independence alone does not insure the recapturing of that very special aura in which the Peace Corps basked in its earlier years, a time when young people, full of idealism and eager to serve, volunteered by the tens of thousands to be of service to the poor of developing nations.

Much of that idealism was shattered by American involvement in the Vietnam War. Being relegated to obscurity as part of Action, without even stationery bearing the words Peace Corps, was another blow to the corps.

The Peace Corps also came under attack from political critics who felt that the presence of volunteers in countries ideologically opposed to the United States was counterproductive. And recent cuts in funds by the Reagan Administration trimmed the ranks of volunteers to a low of about 5,000, from a high of more than 15,000 in 1966.

Despite its newly acquired independence, the Peace Corps faces other problems. Critics charge that Mrs. Ruppe has been under heavy pressure from some within the Reagan Administration not only to politicize her top staff in Washington but also to choose

only Republican loyalists as corps directors overseas.

Until recently there were a number of vacancies in these country director posts. But a spokesman for the corps says that all but two of the country directorates have now been filled by "very qualified people, many of whom are apolitical."

Mrs. Ruppe is hoping for greater visibility because she says that Mr. Reagan is totally committed to the corps.

President Reagan himself underscored his support of the Peace Corps on Wednesday when he said in a speech to the Organization of American States that he would seek the active participation of the business community in improving the economic conditions in the Caribbean nations, in concert with the Peace Corps.

"The Peace Corps already has 861 volunteers in Caribbean Basin countries," the President said, "and we'll give special emphasis to recruiting volunteers with skills in developing local enterprise."

## Shriver Hails Efforts

Mr. Shriver, now a Washington lawyer, is the first to applaud Mrs. Ruppe's efforts to rejuvenate the Peace Corps that he headed in its first six formative years. "She's the kind of Republican we tried to recruit into management when we first started out," Mr. Shriver commented.

But Mr. Shriver is not convinced that even Mrs. Ruppe can restore the zeal that characterized the Peace Corps in its earlier years. Noting that Mr. Reagan had repeatedly criticized big government and the bureaucracy, he said, "It's a tragedy that our own Government has been made the enemy."

There was certainly no government-as-enemy atmosphere at the time the first Peace Corps volunteer, Tom Livingston of Woodale, Ill., reported for duty as an English teacher in a school in Dodowa, Ghana, on Sept. 12, 1961.

Since those early beginnings, more than 80,000 Americans have served tours of duty in the Peace Corps.

## Advocate of Independence

Much of the credit for the Peace Corps' newly regained independence from Action goes to one of those early volunteers, Tom Scanlon, now an independent Washington consultant on international development. In the last 10 years or so, he has as made repeated appearances before Congressional committees, urging that the Peace Corps be removed from Action so that it could once again be the effective agency he had once known.

As a young volunteer, just shortly out of Notre Dame, Mr. Scanlon became something of a model for Peace Corpsmen of those early years when Kennedy, speaking to a group of Government interns in the summer of 1962, remarked:

"Recently, I heard a story of a young Peace Corpsman named Tom Scanlon who is working in Chile. He works in a village about 40 miles from an Indian village which prides itself on being Communist. The village is up a long, winding road which Scanlon has gone on many occasions to see the chief. Each time, the chief avoided seeing him."

The President then continued telling this story: Finally, the chief agreed to see the young Peace Corpsman, who asked what he would have to do to help. The chief replied that the snows would come in a few weeks and the volunteer would have to park his jeep 20 miles away and walk.

"The Communists are willing to do that," the chief told the young volunteer. "Are you?"

A few days later, a friend saw Mr. Scanlon and asked what he was doing.

"I'm waiting for the snow," the Peace Corpsman replied.



Loret Miller Ruppe

the corps, declared that the agency was alive and well and looking for new challenges and ways to solve them.