IeS© to the NEWS

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THE RIGHT NOT TO VOTE

After the 1974 election returns showed that only 38 percent of the voting-age population cast ballots the American people have been subjected to recriminations from do-gooders who bemoan the fail ure of the majority to do their "citizen's duty" and exercise their franchise.

Voting in the Soviet Union is an obligation -- enforced by the government in order to demonstrate a fictitious 99 percent support for the Communist Party candidates. Voting in the United States is not and should not be an obligation; it is a right that may be freely exercised or not, as the individual wishes.

By choosing not to yote, the citizen is consciously or subcon sciously expressing his view that it doesn't make any difference which candidate wins. This was precisely the message sent loud and clear by the 62 percent majority who chose not to vote in the 1974 election.

It is hard to blame the average citizen for concluding that there's not a dime's worth of difference between the.national candidates. In 1972, the voters rejected George McGovern as too out of step with America to be President, .but got Richard Nixon who *soan* proved to be also out of step.

In 1968 the voters chose Richard Nixon and his conservative plat form, and then after the election saw him adopt Hubert Humphrey's liberal policies. In 1964 the voters selected LYI'.ldoh Johnson, the so-called man of peace, over Barry Goldwater who was alleged to be a trigger-happy warmonger. And what did we get after the election? Eight years of war.

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It is time to do some innovative thinking about alternative methods of giving the voters an honest choice. After all, fuere is nothing in the U.S. Constitution that binds us to the two-party sys tem. It is grafted onto our system of government by a network of state laws that can be changed if the voters choose to do so. If the two-party system really has the vitality claimed for it, it can survive without its artificial props.

Maybe we ·should experiment with ballots for national and state elections that group candidates by the office they seek instead of by party. This is already done in many local elections, and would enable Presidential, Congressional, and state candidates to run on their individual merits and to be held individually accountable by the voters.

In any event, those who are makiiig plans for 1976 must figure into their equation the fact that the Independent bloc of voters now accounts for about one-third of the electorate -- more than the nwn ber of Republican voters. The surprise victory of Independent James Longley as Governor of Maine nror indicate a new desire by the voters to look for candidates not affiliated with eith r of the two major parties. In past elections, Republicans have been the chief bene ficiaries of the -Independent voters, but that certainly was not true in 1974.

The balance of power **in** American p litics lies in the millions of unaffiliated voters. The big question is, which :party and **which** candidates will relate to their problems and their hopes?

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