

CHAPTER 8

THE ROLE OF THE COUNTERPLAN IN POLICY DEBATE

Debaters should be aware that counterplan strategies are discouraged by coaches and judges in some parts of the nation; be sure to consult with your coach before deciding whether it would be productive to use a counterplan.

The traditional approach of the negative team is to defend the present system. Sometimes, however, a negative team may decide that the present system cannot be persuasively defended; the alternative is a negative counterplan.

COUNTERPLAN REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for a counterplan are nontopicality, competitiveness, and advantage. The *nontopicality* requirement means that the counterplan must defend the nonresolution. The affirmative team offers its affirmative plan as an example of the resolution in an effort to prove the worth of the resolution. If a negative team has advocated a topical counterplan, it has simply given the judge another reason to vote for the resolution.

Nontopicality means that the counterplan must fail to meet one or more words in the resolution. If the resolution calls for “the U.S. federal government to substantially increase its funding for secondary education in the United States,” a nontopical counterplan could do any of the following:

1. State governments could substantially increase their funding for secondary education;
2. The federal government could abolish its Department of Education and end all funding of secondary education;
3. The federal government could substantially increase its funding of elementary education.

In each of the foregoing examples, the counterplan advocates an action outside of the resolution.

The *competitiveness* requirement means that the counterplan must “force choice”—it must give the judge a reason to vote against the affirmative plan. Suppose a member of the legislature has proposed the legalization of gambling. During the debate another legislator rises in opposition, declaring that we should instead legalize the sale of marijuana for medicinal purposes. Anyone listening to the debate would quickly