

States of the Union

SHUFFLING FOR A NEW DEAL

BY RICHARD J. MARGOLIS



GRIFFIN BELL

JIMMY CARTER'S Cabinet may not be the best in history, but on balance it seems better than most and surely superior to what we have grown accustomed to of late. Those who complain that the faces are somewhat less fresh than Carter had promised need only recall some of Richard Nixon's original picks—John Mitchell, for instance,

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or Earl Butz—to realize that obscurity is no guarantee of wisdom or probity.

It is true that Griffin Bell's civil rights record borders on the tawdry, and that his defense of that record has been less candid than the public has a right to expect from its attorney general, but not even Jesse Jackson believes that Bell will attempt to slow desegregation. As a civil rights leader remarked to me recently, "We think Bell may turn out all right, but we have to oppose him publicly."

By making life tough for Bell at the outset, black leaders seem to be counting on "the Hickel effect," whereby a Cabinet member is compelled to bend backward in order to live down his shameful past. Just as Walter Hickel, the man who once told a Congressional committee that "if you've seen one tree you've seen them all," became a passionate conservationist as head of Interior, so may Griffin Bell develop into an ardent desegregationist as attorney general. (The most telling proof of Hickel's change of heart, of course, was that Nixon fired him.)

HUD's Patricia Roberts Harris

may be in a similar bind. Having all too carelessly, and noisily, dismissed any future need for public housing, she now finds herself presiding over a multi-billion-dollar public housing system that she is unlikely to dismantle. Indeed, if the Hickel effect holds, we can expect soon a dramatic increase in public housing construction.

The most controversial of Carter's choices turned out to be neither a segregationist nor a conservative, but a somewhat tarnished knight left over from Camelot. If Ted Sorensen's CIA nomination did not exactly enrapture the liberals here—some of whom would have settled for no one to the right of Dr. Spock—it threw a 72-hour scare into the minions of what passes for the military-intelligence establishment. Sorensen was on record as favoring a more "open" CIA, one that told fewer lies and indulged in fewer covert actions—ideas that were plainly upsetting to the spy fraternity. Besides, he was an outsider, one of those softhearted rhetoricians with regrettably humane instincts. He had to go.

To mention a few more in the new lineup: Secretary of State Cyrus Vance disapproves of shuttle diplomacy, and that will be a relief; Ray Marshall, the new Secretary of Labor, is a white Texan who spoke out for Negro equality as early as two decades ago, when the expression of such sentiments could be punishable by death; HEW's Joseph Califano is an experienced and compassionate student of welfare, a returnee from the Great Society; and Robert Bergland, of Agriculture, is a former Minnesota Congressman, a liberal farmer with a mildly populist bent. In the early '50s, following a series of droughts in Minnesota, Bergland and his family lived for a time in Florida, where he took a job as crew foreman at a cabinet-making shop. His boss instructed him to "work those guys until they wear out." Instead, Bergland organized the first union for

the construction trades in that part of Florida—and was instantly fired.

Add to this list some foundation and academic types, a businessman or two, a couple of Georgians, and a potato-lover from Idaho, and you have the whole Carter scorecard, a reasonably solid collection of pros that is strong up the middle but a bit weak in left field. It's a team with only one star: the manager.

There are those in Washington who compare this early period of the Carter Administration with The First 100 Days of the New Deal, and some of the similarities are striking. Like Roosevelt, Carter has had to choose between two major priorities: either to reorganize the government in an effort to save money and increase efficiency, or else to spend still more money in an attempt to stimulate the economy; and, again like FDR, he has taken the latter course, announcing plans for a two-year employment and public works program that in many respects could have been written by Harold Ickes. And he did all this not within his first 100 days of office, but during the last 75 days of Gerald Ford's Presidency.

Carter seems better organized than Roosevelt was, and perhaps more decisive, but that may be because his Democratic Congress is not dominated by the conservative Southern wing, a political force Roosevelt had to keep mollifying. FDR solved this, in part, by appealing over Congress' head to the public, a recourse that may not suit Carter's particular talents. Then, too, FDR was trying to doctor a nation in economic collapse, one suffering from 30 per cent unemployment; a desperate citizenry was ready to follow just about any leader—Roosevelt, Huey Long, Francis Townsend—who promised relief.

Whether Carter will ever get around to pushing his other priority, that of reorganizing the Federal bureaucracy along thriftier lines, is an open question. He is by vocation an engineer and by avocation a

manager, which is to say he abhors waste. Before he got the nomination, Carter frequently portrayed himself as a computer-minded cost-accounting expert who had rescued Georgia's government from the lowlands of inefficiency and could do the same for the government in Washington; even in that first, near-disastrous debate with Ford, Carter was promising to streamline the Federal octopus.

Yet the logic of one's candidacy may differ from the logic of one's incumbency. The voter expects his candidate to deplore profligate overspending, but in times of unemployment he expects his President to do whatever is necessary to get the show back on the road. Roosevelt played the game better than most. In a famous 1932 campaign speech, delivered in Pittsburgh, he pledged a 25 per cent reduction in government expenditures, "a figure," recalls Rexford Tugwell in *Roosevelt's Revolution*, "that he clung to as though he had some special information."

Tugwell, a member of Roosevelt's progressive-minded "Brain Trust," was appalled at the promise and amazed that so many voters took it seriously, as if budget-slashing could cure the worst depression in U.S. history. "Roosevelt had seemed to say that all bureaucracies were a nuisance, and that there ought to be fewer of them," observes Tugwell. The public lapped it up.

IT WAS MORE than campaign rhetoric. FDR then, like Carter now, sincerely believed in cost-cuttings, and many of his appointees—notably Henry Morgenthau, Secretary of the Treasury, and Budget Director Lewis Douglas—reflected his viewpoint. Douglas, as penny-pinching a budget man as we shall ever see, went so far as to impound emergency relief funds, declaring that they were inflationary and, in any case, not needed. Only a memo from the White House pried the money loose.

But the other side of Roosevelt,

the New Deal side, was also well represented in his Administration. Rex Tugwell, Harold Ickes, Henry Wallace and others were New Dealers of a distinctly liberal stripe, and they fought continually with the Douglas-Morgenthau phalanx. One of the big differences between Roosevelt and Carter (thus far) is that Roosevelt was willing to appoint people of widely differing philosophies. (He let them argue, sometimes for years, until ultimately he settled the argument.) If Roosevelt were in Carter's shoes today, he probably would have chosen at least one Vietnam dove for his Cabinet.

Withal, people here seem hopeful that Carter can move us toward recovery and nearer to passage of some long-overdue social reforms; particularly in health, welfare and housing. It may not be a New Deal or a Fair Deal, nor even a New Frontier or a Great Society, yet that, too, is part of Carter's charm. By and large, he has shunned labels and slogans, kept a modest profile and never promised us a rose garden. After Nixon, who needs promises?

The new President and his Cabinet face no big crises, no enormous emergencies of the sort that confronted FDR in 1933. When Roosevelt spoke of "the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid," he was speaking of possibly half the nation; the malady was endemic. Carter's "forgotten man" of 1977 represents only about a fifth of the population, and he is, more often than not, hidden away in an urban slum or a rural shack; the problem is chronic but largely invisible, except where it generates crime. Much of American life—in particular, white, middle-class life—seems able to maintain a separate orbit, on a path that seldom if ever intersects with that of those traveling the lower depths. Carter's challenge is to demonstrate the real but hard-to-understand indivisibility of the two circuits.