

Campaign Strategy

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MEMORANDUM FOR: DAVE GERGEN
FROM: GEORGE VAN CLEVE
SUBJECT: THE GENERAL ELECTION -- PART I

In February, 1976, a New York Times survey showed that, when the issues positions of supporters of various candidates were examined and averaged, Gerald Ford was very close to the center on the right side of a liberal conservative spectrum, and Jimmy Carter was very close to the center on the left side of the spectrum. Recent political science theory and survey data indicates that the relative positioning of the two candidates in October, 1976 will determine which of them is the next President.

The initial Times political spectrum survey was done before the Presidential primaries. In those primaries, NBC survey data shows that Jimmy Carter received most of his votes from people who identified themselves as moderates or conservatives, while other Democratic candidates received the lion's share of the liberal votes. President Ford received most of his votes from liberals and moderates, generally losing heavily to Governor Reagan among Republican conservatives. I strongly suspect that the primaries had the following effect on public perceptions of the spectrum positioning of Ford and Carter: Carter is now seen as closer to the center, while the President is now seen as further to the right (I don't have any data to confirm this).



The primaries, and later events, have had additional effects on the public images of the two candidates. Carter is now seen as a strong, successful candidate (nothing succeeds like success) who can lead his party (and therefore, perhaps, the country). The Democrats have given up, for the time being, their fratricidal warfare. The Republicans, on the other hand, are clearly internally split, with powerful emotions (if very little in the way of issues) dividing them. The President, whose strong suit has never been his perceived leadership abilities, is now seen as weaker than ever.

A NOTE ON THE ISSUES

Barring some change in the current international situation, nothing could be clearer than that domestic issues will be the major voting issues in the general election. All current poll data indicates that economic concerns are far more important to the general public than are foreign policy questions. While perceptions of relative foreign policy ability and expertise will affect public views of the candidates, whatever strategy ~~we~~ develop must depend for its success far more on domestic programs than on foreign policy. This is not to say that steps should not be taken to strengthen the President's position in the foreign policy area, but the steps I would recommend are dealt with largely in another memorandum.

CARTER'S DILEMMA AND PROBABLE DEMOCRATIC STRATEGY

Carter's dilemma is an easy one to describe: he must attempt to become more specific on the issues in order to avoid a terminal case of Deweyitis without alienating too much of his current support.

Carter's strategy for the center has been a simple one: straddle the fence on every issue, while reassuring the center that you believe in the old American virtues -- patriotism, hard work, God and motherhood -- that they believe in, and that you fully intend to bring them back to America when you are President.

And, sure enough, the center has responded. Note, however, that in a series of contested Democratic primaries held in the same states that held primaries in 1972, about 10% less votes were cast than were cast in those primaries in 1972 (while the voting population increased substantially). Much of this dropoff was no doubt due to the fact that Republicans who had crossed over decided to vote in GOP primaries. But some of it was also due to the fact that all the candidates looked a lot less attractive this year, particularly to former Wallace voters. So Carter's current problem with the Democratic center is apathy, an apathy he can ill afford. If Carter's support is confined to traditionally Democratic groups, he needs a relatively high turnout to win, and current data supports the view that turnout will not be very high this Fall.



Carter's problem with center apathy is certainly part of the reason he is wooing George Meany. Carter needs more than a labor endorsement -- he needs labor out there hustling for him. And Meany seems to be holding out until Carter is ready to go down the line with labor on Humphrey-Hawkins and/or 14-B.

Carter's other, and bigger, problem is with the liberals. They're the ones who keep worrying about specificity. And, of course, what they mean by specificity is specific endorsements of their traditional panaceas, which they haven't been getting from Carter. Here Carter seems to have a good deal more bargaining leverage (as the platform meetings clearly showed, with Joe Duffy and Anne Wechsler out hustling for Carter) -- where else can the liberals go? McCarthy doesn't seem like a serious threat at this point, and the possibility of liberal defections to Ford seems relatively remote. Still, Carter has two problems: (1) If there is enough ranting about his lack of specificity, it may scare away some of his center support, and (2) the liberals may decide to sit out part of a close election. While their decision to do so no longer has any real impact on the campaign itself because there are no serious financing problems, it does have an impact on voter turnout.

CARTER'S PROBABLE STRATEGY

A large part of Carter's strategy will be an attempt to avoid the problems just described. He'll probably use the following tactics!

1. Tie Nixon and Ford together.

Watergate and the Nixon pardon are a couple of very important Democratic issues. Carter knows that. In keeping with his "nice guy" strategy, he seems to have indicated that he doesn't believe the pardon should be a campaign issue. Instead, he's figured out a clever way of keeping it alive in the public mind -- and that is to tie Nixon and Ford together whenever this is possible. A good example of what's in store was the New York foreign policy speech Carter gave two weeks ago, in which he condemned the "Nixon-Ford" foreign policy by attacking the "secretiveness, etc." of HAK. If that type of approach isn't calculated to keep these issues alive, I don't know what is. Add to this Carter's talk about "open government" and you can see the outlines of an attempt to milk this issue for all it's worth.



2. Attack Ford and the Washington establishment, and all other large and powerful institutions (except big labor, if possible)

This must be done nicely, by telling people that you're going to "green" the bureaucrats and by tying yourself to FDR's ghost's coattails. Carter's whole "unresponsive government" approach is really just a clever, more socially acceptable, twist to George Wallace's "pointy-headed bureacurats" line. And Carter really hasn't attempted to sell anything but compassion and concern on this issue -- and, among Democrats, it seels very well. The "common touch" has always been a big asset for a Democrat, and Carter's religion gives him just that. Carter's announcement that the New Deal will rise again to the Mayor's conference was an example of this approach.

3. When you can't think of anything else to say, or when you need to move left and want to cushion the effect, talk religion.

By now, the press and most of the public are completely convinced that Carter really is religious. More than that, it means something to them that he is religious. Quite simply, what it means to many people is that Carter is getting divine guidance, that he is less likely to be crooked, and more likely to be truthful, etc. But Carter's religiosity also has another very important effect. beyond the lift it gives ~~to~~ anti-Semites of various hues to know that they're about to get a true believer in the White House. To conservatives, Carter's religiosity makes Carter look more conservative, thus reassuring them that he is no "wild-eyed radical and dampening the effect of certain liberal positions which Carter has taken or will take to hold the liberals (a little bit like Nixon going to China). At the same time, to the liberals it seems that Carter is a "social gopeller" whose compassion extends to the poor and needy, for whom he can be counted on to do something even though he occassionally sounds rather conservative (like Gene McCarthy).

4. Make sure the Congress and Democratic bureaucrats like the people at the BLS give the President all the trouble they can.

If Congress decides, for example, to investigate Henry Kissinger's conduct of the office of Secretary of State in order to see whether Kissinger has been telling Americans the truth for the last eight



years -- well, so much the better. One can easily think of half a dozen nice things the Congress could do which would bring back the good old days when Sam Ervin and company were getting all that great TV coverage.

5. Keep announcing that certain programs are going to be undertaken the day after you become President.

This certainly makes one sound Presidential, and it has the added advantage of being the best way to avoid certain controversial issues. Announce that you intend to introduce legislation, now being drafted, just after you're elected. It's too early to say specifically what the legislation will look like, but if folks will come back right after the election they can look all they please. A great variation on the old "secret plan" move.

CARTER AND THE INTEREST GROUPS

To the extent that the various ploys described above don't seem to be working well enough to complete the job, Carter will have to deal with various interest groups. Analyzing the programmatic interests of the various groups gives some clues as to the potential issues which Carter will stress.

1. The Blacks.

Carter may feel that his black support is so solid that he can ignore the blacks. As the politically most liberal group in the population, they may have no place else to go. Certainly Carter's busing position to date (and the Atlanta program on which it is based) have been less than enthusiastically received by the NAACP, but Carter hasn't changed it. Carter's "ethnic purity" remark and his anti-big government theme both reinforce the impression that Carter doesn't think he can lose the black vote. If this analysis is correct, then Carter will have more freedom of movement for dealing with other groups, particularly the white ethnics.

2. The Jews.

Carter moved swiftly to mollify Jewish leaders after publication of the Shrum comments, an event which followed hard on the overwhelmingly negative reaction among Jewish leaders to Carter's "ethnic purity" comments. But Carter's move to



conciliate this group may have been more of an attempt to stave off wholesale defections than the beginning of a real campaign to win the Jews over. So far, Carter has taken a standard pro-Israel line, and he has opposed aid to religious schools, but he ~~does~~ not seem to have exhibited any great enthusiasm about dealing with this group. Again, ~~the~~ Jewish, as the second most liberal group in the population, may have no place else to go, unless they become as outraged with Carter as they were with McGovern. And I think it possible that if Carter feels confident of black support he would be willing to write off the Jews in order to gain support elsewhere.

Catholics -- This really is an important northern vote for Carter if we get the Jewish vote. As I indicate elsewhere in this memo, there should be a fairly good "fit" between Carter's image and the positions of these traditionally Democratic voters. Yet, as I have indicated in another memorandum, Carter has taken certain positions which should damage him with these voters.

Senior Citizens --

Because senior citizens, who are a population as large as young voters, vote three times as heavily, they are extremely important. Their national organization has indicated that their priority concerns are: (1) Inflation/Social security and (2) National Health Care.

Although many of these voters are conservatives, right now Carter is probably in a better ~~position~~ position with them than we are.

Northern Rural Protestants

This group is another extremely important one for Carter. These traditionally Republican farmers and small businessmen are attracted by Carter's religiosity, the fact that he is a farmer, and his perceived fiscal conservatism. Carter received a heavy rural vote in the primaries.

Labor

Carter's problem with labor was discussed above. There is, of course, an overlap between his approach to the Catholics and his approach to the labor vote.



THE PROGRAM

Based on Carter's sense of where his potential support lies, I would imagine that some or all of the following positions would be likely to be ones which Carter would either take or want badly to finesse:

1. Carter will continue to take a "hard" line in foreign policy, suggesting that we have been outraded by the Russians. His call for strengthening of European alliances is essentially a conservative position.
2. Carter will not take any dramatically pro-Israel position for fear of alienating non-Jewish groups.
3. Carter has a difficult choice to make on economic policy. He would like to convince people that we can have full employment without inflation, but since that won't be possible, he's got to choose between concentrating on jobs and concentrating on the cost of living.

If Carter chooses jobs (and deficit spending), he stands to gain support from labor, the blacks, and the urban ethnics. At the same time however, he is likely to lose some Jewish support, part of his rural Protestant support, and part of his support among senior citizens. If Carter does not choose jobs, then he risks defections by traditional Democrats (or does he?) as the price for an attempt to cut into our traditional support.

Part of the way Carter apparently proposes to resolve this dilemma is through the use of wage/price controls, which may be a politically popular position.

4. Because of the cost questions involved, the politics of the health care issue look somewhat similar. Again, Carter has a choice to make here.
5. Carter will, because of the importance of the rural vote, support a program involving heavy farm subsidies of the usual Democratic variety.
6. Another difficult problem for Carter may be his position on oil company divestiture. The oil industry is concentrated heavily in the South, and a pro-divestiture position (which Carter has not taken) would hurt him badly there. But an anti position



like the one he is currently on record with will certainly cost him in the Northeast, where prices are high and expected to become higher.

7. Because of his problem with the liberals, criminal justice issues should be particularly hard ones for Carter. A tough position here, which would have broad public support, would cost Carter dearly with the liberals. And the issue is an important one to the urban ethnics.

