

Post
12-24-76

Mr. Carter's Appointees

FIRST, let's take the hardest case among the three latest additions to the Carter team, New York lawyer and former Kennedy White House aide Theodore Sorenson to be chief intelligence adviser (Director of Central Intelligence) and to run the Central Intelligence Agency. Frankly we find this choice baffling—and therefore troubling. Notwithstanding the impression the President-elect gave in Plains, Mr. Sorenson did not have real foreign-policy responsibilities while serving as JFK's special counsel—at least by his own account. He later wrote, "I was not involved in the multitudinous problems of day-to-day foreign policy to the extent I was in domestic." On the Bay of Pigs: "I knew nothing of the question until after it was over." He would be on sounder ground sticking to that line in his confirmation hearings, in our view, than he would be by leaning too heavily on the claims made on his behalf by Mr. Carter yesterday. To hear the President-elect tell it, Mr. Sorenson was not only President Kennedy's closest confidant but his contact man with the CIA; merely on the basis of what the Church Committee has seen fit to reveal of the abuses and excesses conceived or committed by the CIA in the Kennedy years, that recommendation, if it should turn out to be literally true, would be grounds for barring him from going anywhere near the CIA. Assuming that it is not true, what else is there in Mr. Sorenson's background? He is famous for the soaring rhetoric he has contributed to the speeches of assorted political figures, mostly Kennedys. He has not much administrative experience—and if the CIA has demonstrated a need for any particular talent, it is a need for tight, sound management. As a lawyer, he has been the legal agent of several African governments; it is not clear how that would help prepare him to preside over the U.S. government's espionage agents. He is able and intelligent, to be sure, but he is also better known for loyalty to one chief than for independent judgment. He makes much of not having sought the job and, frankly, we don't know what to make of that. In any event, it will be interesting to learn, at his confirmation hearing, his views on leading intelligence issues, not least the question of whether his two posts should be separated later on. But it will be more important for him to show an awareness that he must deal with the doubts his nomination stirs.

Joseph Califano has been this newspaper's counsel. Knowing him well, we are delighted with his appointment to Health, Education and Welfare. We have high faith in his intelligence, his command of governmental process, and his compassion. There is a certain poetic justice to his appointment: He will now have to run programs that he had much to do with creating when he was President Lyndon Johnson's top man for domestic affairs at the White House. Since Mr. Carter criticized the administration and scope of many of those same programs in his campaign, Mr. Califano will surely be asked, at confirmation time, how he intends to proceed to make HEW more manageable and its myriad programs more effective. His work in the apparatus of the Democratic Party should help him in coping with what is

not only, in his words, "the people's department," but the politicians' department—the principal arena in which the nation's various social ambitions are worked out. To an old friend, we offer our special congratulations—but no free ride.

The third man named yesterday, James Schlesinger, an economist by training, becomes Mr. Carter's White House energy coordinator; he would later be put in charge of the proposed Department of Energy. Mr. Carter wanted to use his formidable talent for defining and forcing choices but found it politically difficult to do so directly in the national security field—though, as we have noted, energy is smack in the middle of that field. Mr. Schlesinger would be the new administration's only cabinet-level Republican. He would also be the only appointee who has previously served and resigned.

Mr. Carter said he would hold no more press conferences to announce appointees. We hope, nonetheless, he will find occasion to lend the status of presidential presentation to his choices for, in particular, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the Agency for International Development. Their importance rates his personal imprimatur.

With most of the key jobs filled, however, it becomes possible to conclude that Jimmy Carter is going about planning his administration in a distinctively serious way. It is silly to term his choices "the best." Who knows who's the best, or even what the term means? Nor does it make much sense to flay him for a lack of imagination or, if you can bear the word once more, "freshness." He is not, after all, casting a Broadway show or investing one or another faction's pantheon. The people he has listed, while not uniformly pleasing to everyone, strike us generally as a solid and able crew representing a good sample of the diverse talents available and needed to operate a national administration. Of the group, we have the most reservations—of a quite different order—about Griffin Bell, would-be Attorney General, and Mr. Sorenson. The confirmation hearings should provide the necessary tests.

If the team chosen by Mr. Carter seems to reflect more the challenges of governing than the rigors of the campaign, then that is not altogether a bad thing, though the President-elect may have to account politically for it. In the last analysis his choices will be judged by how they perform—especially, how they work with the President. It is at the second and third levels of the administration, in any event, that perceived deficits in the hiring of one or another group in the population should be remedied. That most of the Carter appointees served at lower positions in previous administrations underlines the point. Selecting lieutenants is always the first—though not the definitive—test of a new administration. With the reservations noted, we are inclined to say that Jimmy Carter has done a thoughtful and impressive job of assembling a group of advisers and administrators that, on the face of it, would seem to have as good a prospect as any he might have picked of fulfilling the promise he held out to the electorate last fall.