

JFK Intimate Returns

Sorensen, Director-Designate of the CIA, Impressed Carter With His Intelligence

12 24 76
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About a year ago, Theodore C. Sorensen invited a small group of New York Democrats to a luncheon at the 21 Club to meet Jimmy Carter and contribute to his campaign.

Sorensen, whose entire career in presidential politics had been associated with the Kennedys, explains that he found Carter an attractive candidate but was not fully committed. "My wife supports Carter," he told one guest.

But if Sorensen was not an impassioned early booster, he impressed Carter with his intelligence and, in his cautious way, he proved good at picking a winner.

"I'll help any Democrat I think can win," he told a reporter about the same time, "and I think Carter could win."

Now, the man who wrote for John F. Kennedy many of the ringing phrases that are among America's most enduring reminders of the enthusiasms of the Cold War, pre-Vietnam era, will be running the intelligence agency born from similar passions.

Sorensen, now 48, joined John F. Kennedy's staff in 1952 and became the President's special counsel and closest adviser with the exception of Robert F. Kennedy.

"My intellectual blood bank," Kennedy called him. Sorensen worked so closely with John Kennedy both in the 1960 presidential campaign and in the White House and the two men thought so much alike that some called Sorensen "a lobe of Kennedy's brain."

He was the lobe that wrote many of the balanced, inverted and alliterative sentences that distinguished Kennedy's speeches, but many in the White House believed he was even more important for his grasp of details and analysis of problems. "No one at the White House worked harder or more carefully," Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. wrote in his account of Kennedy's thousand days.

"Only a President can knot" how valuable he is, Lyndon B. Johnson said.

President Kennedy depended on Sorensen in crises and in later years Robert Kennedy turned to him for help in his bid for the presidency and Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) telephoned for advice in the first hours after Mary Jo Kopechne died at Chappaquiddick.

Sorensen, who had known only Nebraska, where he grew up and went to

college and law school, and working for Kennedy, left the Johnson White House in February, 1964, to write a Kennedy book and then join the prominent and politically involved New York law firm Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton and Garrison.

At a farewell ceremony, then Secretary of State Dean Rusk voiced the hope that Sorensen would soon be back working in the capital.

It has been 12 years, but Sorensen would have had it fewer. He would certainly have come back had there ever been a Robert Kennedy administration and he tried his own hand at running for office without success.

In 1970 he finished third in the Democratic primary to pick a Senate candidate to succeed Robert Kennedy. One of his slogans was "Kennedy trusted me, so can you." He had been confident of victory and told the man decorating his new apartment to take into account that the Sorensens would be moving to Washington.

Sorensen's qualifications to be the director of central intelligence and head of the Central Intelligence Agency go back to his days in the White House, although Carter and Sorensen spoke yesterday of his international contacts through his law practice.

"I was a consumer of the product," Sorensen said of his time reading intelligence reports in the White House.

In 1969 he wrote that he and President Kennedy were stunned by the "unproven assumptions and biased conclusions" they found in some CIA work. They made their finds after the disaster of the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba eight years earlier.

Sorensen's books said nothing of the CIA plans to assassinate foreign leaders hatched during the Kennedy years and when Sorensen testified in secret to the Church committee investigating intelligence agency abuses, he told reporters that he was certain President Kennedy did not know of the schemes.

If brilliant is the word most often used by acquaintances in describing Sorensen, most of them quickly add disparaging words about his personality.

"He has many talents," one said, "but human relations is not one of them."

"He's got the personality of a wet sock," said a second. "He's tactless and insensitive without even knowing it," another said.

He, like the President-elect, is not known for modesty. A reporter interviewed Carter and Sorensen in November, 1975, and asked each how they had met.

Each replied: "He asked to see me."