

WASHINGTON

Merry-Go-Round

by Jack Anderson



Ford Men Botch Up Economy

WASHINGTON - Our White House sources tell us regretfully that President Ford is mismanaging the economy worse than former President Nixon did during the Watergate crisis. There is confusion in the White House, they say, over how to cope with economic problems.

The President is still insisting that inflation is the nation's number one problem. The measures he has adopted to fight inflation, meanwhile, are pushing the nation into a recession, and this, many economists believe, has become the number-one problem.

There is now evidence that the President got his economic wires crossed. White House insiders say his economic advisors delivered a confidential forecast to him several weeks ago that unemployment would hit 7 per cent next year. This would be a sure sign of a recession.

But their confidential prediction never reached the Economic Policy Board while it was working out the President's economic program.

This board is the nation's top economic policymaking group. Yet its members went ahead with a plan to fight inflation unaware that the President's economic advisors, in effect, expected a recession.

Thus, an increasing number of economists believe the President is fighting the wrong economic war with the wrong weapons at the wrong time.

War Drums: Once again, the Middle East tinderbox is threatening to explode into flames.

The Arab nations have formally designated the Palestinian Liberation Organization as the bargaining body for all Palestinians. But the Israelis, who regard the PLO as a terrorist group, swear they won't negotiate with them. The only alternative, it appears, is war.

Already, the two sides are preparing for battle. Russia is pouring armaments into Syria. The Israelis are clamoring for rush deliveries of U.S. arms, including sophisticated missiles.

This has led intelligence analysts to believe the Israelis may even be planning a preemptive strike against the Arabs. The Israelis reportedly expect Egypt and Syria to launch long-range, ground-to-ground missiles at cities. To prevent this, they may decide to launch their missiles first.

Intelligence experts fear this would be the first step toward a nuclear exchange. As we reported several years ago, the Israelis already possess nuclear weapons. And the Egyptians have been promised a nuclear reactor from the United States.

The CIA has also picked up hints that India may provide the Syrians with a nuclear reactor. The deal was struck, according to intelligence reports, when the Indian defense minister visited Damascus in late September.

The Middle East, clearly, has become the most dangerous spot on the map.

Ford to Quit?: Sources close to Gerald Ford now believe he will not try to stay in the White House after 1976.

The reasons are both personal and political. The primary reason, of course, is his wife's poor health. Betty Ford, even before her breast surgery, had been urging her husband to retire from politics.

Friends say that Ford depends heavily on his wife for political advice. He has sorely missed her views during her illness. If she now asks him to step down, he probably would do so.

The man himself may also be tiring of the fray. In the past, he has enjoyed political barnstorming. But his performance this fall was lackluster.

Privately, GOP leaders

fear his bland style will also hurt Republican chances in 1976. They know him well enough to tell him about their apprehensions.

It is just possible, therefore, that Gerald Ford may be content to settle for his assured place in history: a caretaker president who saw the nation through a crisis.

Hill Reform: The new Congress will be dominated by junior members who have been elected within the last six years. Even before the election, 61 senior members retired, rather than face the electorate again. Most of them were obstructionists who have helped to block reform.

Now a majority appears to favor reform. The first test will come in December when the House Democrats hold their organizing caucus. The newcomers will set up a howl for congressional reforms.

They are also talking about checking the power of the

president. There will be renewed support for a constitutional amendment that would permit Congress to remove a president in a three-fourths vote of each House.

There is even talk of establishing a ceremonial president who would attend to the formalities of the office, while a constitutional president will concentrate on governing the nation.

Some of the lessons of Watergate, it appears, may finally be adopted by the new Congress.

Washington Whirl: During the last days of the Nixon Administration, one irate citizen forwarded a package of dried cow dung to the White House. The package broke open at the post office and perplexed authorities wondered what to do. They decided that regulations are regulations, so they wrapped up the cow chips and dispatched them to the Executive Mansion....