

Ford AD

NYTimes

JUL 2 1975

Another Truman?

By William V. Shannon

WASHINGTON, July 1—The selling of Gerald R. Ford as a plausible President is well advanced. Under the management of the shrewd politicians and businessmen who comprise his "kitchen Cabinet," Mr. Ford is being marketed as another Harry Truman, another honest, decent, friendly Middle Westerner who talks simply and acts on readily understandable human instincts.

This marketing strategy derives from the old maxim, "If all you have is lemons, make lemonade." Since Mr. Ford could hardly be presented as a leader of brilliant intellect, inspiring vision, or broad experience, the Truman ploy is about the best approach that could be devised. The two men do have in common the fact that President Ford, like his Democratic predecessor of 25 years ago, is a professional politician capable of a good deal more calculation and alert defense of his own interests than his amiable, homespun manner might suggest.

One does not have to be an unqualified admirer of Mr. Truman, however, to discern at least two critical differences. Behind the bourbon-drinking and bonhomie of the outgoing politician, Mr. Truman was a closet intellectual. A part of him never ceased to be the near-sighted boy who loved to read books and daydream about history. He became an inveterate reader of Government reports, and his comments on men and issues were salty and pungent. He did not spend his Sundays playing golf with steel and automobile company lobbyists.

Secondly, and much more important, Mr. Truman regarded himself as a political disciple of Andrew Jackson, as a tribune of the plain people of America—the farmers, workers and small businessmen, the blacks and the impoverished.

Having been a farmer and having gone bankrupt himself as a clothing store proprietor in the recession of 1922, Mr. Truman had a lifelong sympathy for farmers and small businessmen in their struggle to get credit at reasonable rates. He would never have retained as Secretary of the Treasury a Wall Street bond trader who believes high interest rates are necessary and desirable. Nor would he have a chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers who regards a budget deficit as a bigger danger than severe unemployment.

Harry Truman stood up boldly to the pressures of the oil industry in vetoing the tidelands oil bill and opposing the deregulation of natural gas prices. He would never have mouthed the propaganda of the oil-gas-coal conglomerates that are exploiting today's energy crisis to enhance their own profits. He would not have twice vetoed bills to control the strip mining that is now ravaging Western lands and water as it has already devastated Appalachia.

A doughty defender of the family-sized farm, Mr. Truman would be appalled by the current spectacle of thousands of small dairy farmers being squeezed off the land. He would not have as his Secretary of Agriculture a sympathizer with agribusiness nor would he approve of leaving small farmers and livestock raisers unprotected against violent swings in grain prices.

Although wage and price controls were philosophically as uncongenial to him as they are to President Ford, Mr. Truman defended them when he thought they were needed in 1946 and again during the Korean War. He would not have remained passive if he had been confronted with today's inflation.

Mr. Truman made an important breakthrough for the nation when he appointed a Presidential commission on civil rights and championed its recommendations. Despite his Confederate ancestors and his Southern sympathies, despite Strom Thurmond's walkout to form the Dixiecrat party, Mr. Truman stood firm for racial equality. His legislative recommendations were finally translated into law in the 1960's and wiped out a century of second-class citizenship. He would not have appointed—as Mr. Ford has just done—a right-wing Georgia politician as his campaign manager in order to win favor with Southern reactionaries.

President Truman advocated the positive use of Government power to promote social justice and reduce human hardships. He proposed a broad range of ambitious and imaginative proposals—the Marshall Plan, the St. Lawrence Seaway, cradle-to-grave health insurance, comprehensive Federal aid to education, housing programs, civil rights legislation. His record contrasts sharply with the negativism of the present Administration.

Gerald Ford may somewhat resemble Mr. Truman in his style but in his politics, he is another McKinley, another Coolidge. He is a little brother of the rich, a faithful servitor of the financial and industrial interests. He has hung Mr. Truman's portrait in the Cabinet Room and sometimes invokes his name there. But it would be a mistake to believe that Harry Truman's humane and feisty spirit lives again within those walls.

William V. Shannon is substituting for James Reston, who is on vacation.