

FORD AD

NYTimes SEP 23 1976

# Decent Is as Decent Does

By Anthony Lewis

BOSTON, Sept. 22 — Some liberals who are uneasy about Jimmy Carter for one reason or another have taken to speaking of President Ford's "decency." That overworked word, covering a variety of rationalizations, has taken on a code significance. A California Democrat said: "We don't really know Carter. And Ford's not so bad—he's decent."

In personal relations Gerald Ford undoubtedly is a considerate person. One cannot imagine him being unkind to children or dogs or neighbors. But decency in political leadership must be more than that. It connotes a sensitivity to human needs, a breadth of wisdom and humanity.

Does Mr. Ford measure up to the demands of decency in political leadership? His responses on a number of issues provide a fair basis for judgment.

**Human Rights.** In his two years as President Mr. Ford has taken no interest in the growing world problem of official brutality: the use of torture and other inhumanities by governments of the left and right. He has strongly resisted Congressional efforts to secure human rights in countries supported by the United States such as Chile. He snubbed the man who is the foremost symbol of resistance to official tyranny, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Sensitive? Wise? Decent?

Law. Mr. Ford never criticized the violations of law disclosed in investigations of the C.I.A. and F.B.I., and to date no legal action has been taken against any official of those agencies. Shortly before Richard Nixon's resignation, when in addition to the public record Vice President Ford had been privately advised of Mr. Nixon's criminality, he said in a speech: "I can say from the bottom of my heart, the President of the United States is innocent and he is right."

Sensitive? Wise? Decent?

Secrecy. The other day Mr. Ford praised a new "sunshine law" for Federal agencies as he signed it before the cameras. But one of his early actions as President was to veto an improvement of the Freedom of Information Act so widely accepted that Congress easily overrode the veto. After the disclosure of abuses by the intelligence agencies, Mr. Ford proposed the toughest law in American history to conceal information related to claimed intelligence methods.

Sensitive? Wise? Decent?

War. As the thirty-year war in Vietnam drew to a close in 1975, Mr. Ford tried to keep it going with an urgent appeal for \$1 billion more in American arms. He took punitive—and blundering—military action over the Cambodian seizure of the ship *Mayaguez*, in the teeth of a law expressly forbidding the use of U.S. forces in Indochina. He secretly aided

one side in the Angolan civil war and wanted to increase that intervention when Congress said no.

Sensitive? Wise? Decent?

Arms. Escalating American arms sales to such countries as Iran and Saudi Arabia have aroused concern among many students of international security affairs. When Jimmy Carter suggested that the policy was dangerous, Mr. Ford told a Jewish organization: "Does the gentleman want Soviet arms to have a monopoly in the world? Does he want our adversaries to arm not only the radical Arabs but the more moderate Arabs?"

Sensitive? Wise? Decent?

Amnesty. As "an act of mercy" Mr. Ford in 1975 created a program of "clemency" for Vietnam draft evaders and deserters. Because he was opposed to a blanket pardon, men were to be treated on a case-by-case basis. But the program was so complex, the standards so vague, the administration so quixotic that a former U. S. Attorney in Utah, William J. Lockhart, has spoken of the process he saw as "inevitably inconsistent and discriminatory."

Sensitive? Wise? Decent?

Abortion. A year ago, Mr. Ford was against a constitutional amendment to limit abortions. But as the chance for Catholic votes seemed to glimmer in the campaign, he said he was for letting the states limit abortions as they wished—a step that would require a constitutional amendment.

Sensitive? Wise? Decent?

The record of Gerald Ford should be the central issue in this campaign. It is the narrow conservative record of a narrow conservative man. It ought to please voters who have no interest in human rights, who do not care about official obedience to the law, who believe in government secrecy, who are not willing to forgive or forget resistance to the Vietnam war, and so on.

But for liberal-minded voters to accept that record is something else. It is indecent for those who care about sensitivity and humanity in politics to talk of the decency of Gerald Ford.