

Richard Redux

By William Safire

WASHINGTON—Those who still defiantly wear Richard Nixon tie clasps—a slim bar terminating in a trained Presidential seal—can find much to admire in the campaign techniques of Jimmy Carter.

More than any candidate in either party, Mr. Carter is following the precepts set down by candidate Nixon in his 1968 campaign.

1. *Stay fuzzy on the issues through Labor Day, then inundate the press with complex stands in lengthy position papers and radio speeches.* Little is to be gained, and much to be lost, in spelling out positions in the primaries. Mr. Carter has made his necessary concessions to the specific—the obeisance to labor in opposing Taft-Hartley's 14-B, the sop to the liberals with support of the makework job bill, the muted appeal to blacks with his whispered call for repeal of the Byrd Amendment that permits importation of Rhodesian chrome—but these are doled out sparingly, without hoopla.

The Carter position on the Panama Canal is a perfect expression of the Nixon rule: He opposes "relinquishing actual control" of the canal to Panama, which pleases the silent majority, but is willing to remove the word "perpetuity" from the treaty, which pleases the Establishment responsibilities.

2. *Keep a tight circle of young, long-time advisers, and trust nobody else.* Mr. Carter's inner circle of Hamilton Jordan, Jerry Rafshoon, and Jody Powell are even younger than were Nixon aides Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Zeigler. In both cases, the inner circle is made up of men whose lives are totally dominated by their leader's long quest for the Presidency. In both cases, the press secretary has had the advantage of no previous experience as a reporter.

And in both cases, the campaigns were burned by the breaching of this rule. In 1968, conservative outside speechwriter Richard Whalen stormed out of the Nixon camp on principle, and in 1976, liberal outside speechwriter Robert Shrum gagged when he was offered a spoonful of Carter's political pragmatism.

"I don't want any more statements on the Middle East or Lebanon," Mr. Shrum says Mr. Carter told him privately. "Jackson has all the Jews anyway. It doesn't matter how far I go, I don't get over 4 percent of the Jewish vote anyway, so forget it. We get the Christians." "That's not anti-Semitic, that's pro-politic; candidate Nixon thought the same way, although—perversely—he went on to espouse the pro-Israel view he proved later he held.

3. *Damn your opponents with faint praise.* "Never go after them person-

ally," Mr. Nixon used to instruct Mr. Agnew; "Say 'my wife likes them,' or something." Carter carries this out well; he often says, "My opponents, they're good people, I don't want to criticize them."

But even as Mr. Carter doesn't criticize, he does what playwright Arthur Miller calls "acting against the words"—saying one thing in a way calculated to cause the audience to believe the opposite. Mr. Nixon would do this with a rather heavy hand; Mr. Carter has a lighter, more devastating touch.

4. *Keep your eye on the ball, and remember only the Ins are guilty.* Singlemindedness is required. While Governors Rockefeller and Reagan were busy running their states, Mr. Nixon spent full time pursuing the Presidency, and won it in the primaries; while Messrs. Humphrey, Jackson and Udall were phumphing around in Washington, Mr. Carter was out organizing in the primary states.

Mr. Nixon was among the first to see that running against Washington would be profitable, and that the American people did not want to be blamed for the Vietnam War. Mr. Carter, uniquely among present candidates, has a way of absolving us all from Vietnam—and Watergate—and blaming it on a scapegoated "them." Guilt is a loser; pride goeth before the fall campaign.

Of course, there are differences between the 1968 Nixon and the 1976 Carter. While Mr. Nixon had a lifelong interest in foreign affairs, Mr. Carter is picking his up as he goes along. While Nixon had a few close personal friends, Carter has none. While Nixon downplayed his Quaker fatalism, Carter parades his piety.

And one precept of Mr. Nixon's is not being followed by Mr. Carter: *Try never to let the cruelty and ruthlessness show.* If wounded, a candidate must never let the voters see him bleeding icewater; if Mr. Carter wants to go into a general campaign with his party behind him, he would do well to choke back his inner rage at "those who" would stand in his way.

When Hubert Humphrey refused to lead the charge, shedding a tear as he let his last chance go, the gracious reaction one might expect from the front-runner was absent. Instead, Jimmy Carter allowed as how he was sorry Hubert didn't enter the New Jersey primary; the loss of the opportunity to personally humiliate the old warrior seemed to distress him. The Carter staff must warn him about letting such cool vindictiveness show.

But taken as a whole, the similarity of the '68 Nixon and '76 Carter campaigns is startling. Some of us polish our tie clasps and smile at the way today's candidate holds up a triumphant index finger as if to say: "Carter's the One."