

Opinion/Commentary/Letters

Carter's actions not meaningless

WASHINGTON — The complaint around Washington these days is that Jimmy Carter is still campaigning for President, rather than being President. "It's all image, no substance," one is told repeatedly in the White House press room.



David S. Broder

The complaint is accurate, but of limited importance. In the time-frame of a presidential term, rather than a daily or weekly journalistic deadline, what Carter is doing makes sense.

His tone-poem acceptance speech, his stroll down Pennsylvania Avenue, his trip to the Pittsburgh snows, his rambling "fireside chat," his lectures on economy to the Cabinet, his curbing of "Hail to the Chief," his first press conference — all these have been exercises in public relations, rather than decision-making.

But to label them for what they are is not to condemn them. The President is only doing what is required.

To understand why such post-election "campaigning" is necessary for Carter, one must understand the fundamental weakness of his political position.

Last November, he won a narrow, sectional majority, barely avoiding defeat in a contest where he had been strongly favored, and trailing the Democratic ticket almost everywhere.

He came to Washington as a stranger, with little knowledge of the city or its government and few natural allies. Three weeks after his own inauguration, he has only a skeleton administration in place.

The computerized "Talent Inventory Program" for filling government jobs proved about as useless as Richard Nixon's resort to "Who's Who" as a guide for staffing his administration. What with policy conflicts and cumbersome clearance procedures, Carter has found it hard to get past the first hundred appointments.

The rhetoric of the campaign has proved woefully inadequate as a policy base for the administration. The

"magic solutions" he offered on the stump — zero-base budgeting, radical restructuring of the bureaucracy, a slash in the Pentagon's "fat," the restoration of "morality" to foreign policy — have proved predictably to be considerably less than magical when measured against the hard realities of the world.

So, short of political leverage, short of people and short of policy, President Carter is doing what a good politician will always do in such a situation: He is moving to fill the vacuum with symbolic actions, rather than let the initiative pass from his hands.

Happily, he is managing to fill this time in ways that do neither him nor the country any harm. They may, in fact produce some benefits. He has not disguised problems, he

has not misrepresented problems and he has not closed off the policy options he may later wish to employ.

Turning down the White House thermostat and working in a sweater is not a substitute for energy policy, but it's a useful symbol of the seriousness of the energy problem. Putting the executive limousines up on blocks does not get at the real waste of bureaucracy, but it's a reminder that the waste is there.

Some of Carter's critics complain that the publicity and political benefits from such gestures are being earned on the cheap. They are right, in the sense that each of these symbolic actions has been carefully designed to offend no one and gratify a great many voters.

But again, that kind of tactic is necessary for a President in Carter's position. He can see now — if he could not before election day — that the cost will be high for every one of

the projects he has set for himself.

Congress is already picking apart his economic stimulus package. Jack Brooks has thrown down the gauntlet on the President's bid for reorganization powers.

Our allies and the Russians and Chinese are all asking whose interests will be sacrificed in the coming arms talks. And even Old Man Winter is making it tough for everyone, Carter included.

For Carter to have a chance to succeed in any of these struggles, he has to strengthen his public support. As of today, he is overmatched against Congress, the bureaucracy and the interest groups, and his clout with foreign governments remains unproven.

The kind of image-building he has been doing is not a substitute for leadership. But, given Carter's circumstances, it's a necessary preliminary for leadership.

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Creating another multiversity

Editor: On Tuesday, Jan. 25, A&M's Board of Regents appropriated \$10,000 to study the costs of three possible alternatives for the future of Legett Hall. Executive Vice President for Administration W. C. Freeman said the alternatives are conversion to office space, improvements for continued use as a dorm and razing.

Freeman said the Space Allocations Committee has determined that the school needs more office and classroom space. He said this is true even in light of the conversion of Milner Hall and all other construction projects such as those across Wellborn Road and the recently approved free enterprise center.

Legett Hall residents presented a petition to the Board of Regents protesting the proposed conversion of their dorm. The petition argues that over 100 students would have to move off campus and thus suffer a great financial burden. It states that there is a great demand for Legett. Witness the fact that 6,000 people are on the waiting list for campus housing. Legett does not need

much money in order to be repaired. Dorm rent can pay for some of the repairs, even after R.A., janitorial and utility fees have been paid.

From the writers' view, the most important point is that as campus living decreases, campus spirit will also decrease. Milner Hall has already been changed to offices. In view of the report by the Space Allocations Committee, Legett Hall may be the next dorm to go. When will the administration stop converting dorms? Which dorm will be next?

We don't know how much space A&M needs, but in our opinion, it appears that there will be enough by the time present construction is completed. We were under the impression that A&M enrollment would level off around 30,000 people.

However, the conversion of much needed dorm space into offices and classrooms forces us to believe that A&M is going to keep growing until it is larger than our neighbor in Austin.

—Steve Mayer, '78
—Scott Gregson, '78

Dorm policy was needed

Editor: Much controversy has arisen because of the new housing policy which will give dorm space to incoming freshmen. It has been argued that upperclassmen should be given the dorm space because of their seniority and because they have been waiting longer for the dorm space.

I agree that it would be nice for everyone who wanted to be on campus to be able to get a dorm space, however, at this time that appears to be an impossibility.

What I do not agree with are the arguments concerning the implementation of the housing plan. I feel that this plan would have had to be put into effect at some

point in Texas A&M's growth and the gradual introduction of it would not have made it any more acceptable.

I do sympathize with the students who have been on the dorm waiting list, but before they conclude that the lack of space is the fault of the new housing policy and the incoming freshmen they should re-evaluate the situation.

People who are already in dorms have top priority in the selection of dorm space. They may choose whether they are going to stay on campus or move off campus. These current residents will be the deciding factor as to how much dorm space is available to anyone.

—Carolyn Kemmerer, '80

Expectations are humiliating

Editor: Must students be treated as potential criminals in the Texas A&M Bookstore in the MSC?

I have gone in there several times and come out feeling disgusted because I was watched over and followed around as if I were a shoplifter.

On one incident, a friend and I went in the clothing department to buy warm-up suits for P.E. After

trying them on, my friend went to put them back on the rack while I was looking at clothes.

When one of the salesladies did not see me with my friend, she told another saleslady that someone was still in the dressing room. The saleslady then hurried over to the dressing room to find out where I was. When she came out, she saw me and went back behind the counter.

This incident may seem harmless, however, the way that I was treated as a customer was quite humiliating to me. I am not alone in my complaint. I have heard similar complaints expressed by several other students.

I realize that shoplifting is a problem which is hard for merchants to deal with, but I do not believe that it should be dealt with at the expense of the innocent customer.

Merchants should know that public relations is also a valuable asset to business.

Martha Maniord, '80

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Submit articles to Reed McDonald 217, College Station, Texas, 77843. Author's name and phone number must accompany all submissions.

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Man solving his problems

By MARK SWIRSKY

I read with interest the debate on capital punishment in the February 8 issue of The Battalion.

In the debate some crucial questions have been neglected. Why does man murder, steal, cheat, and rape? What is it that causes man to hold so little regard for his fellow man? Why do we even regard such things as murder and theft immoral and wrong and thus subject to punishment? What is there outside of our own beliefs and feelings that gives us the right to dictate that some acts are wrong and that perpetrators of those acts should be made to measure up to our standards and beliefs? But perhaps these questions have already been answered. Can we look to modern thinking to provide the answers to what man's nature is and where he is headed?

We should not be concerned with the rising crime rates, should we? After all, since the enlightened thinking of secular humanism has shown us that man is inherently good and that he is getting better, we should realize that the increase in crime statistics is no doubt due to better reporting of crimes coupled with the natural population growth.

All those scenes of alleged brutality we see on television aren't really a true picture of what is happening in America because we know how the media has to spend long hours searching for news items containing violence. All those violence-filled movies being shown today really don't cater to our violent natures as some would suggest. Rather, they show us what we once were and how far we have truly progressed. We can see in our own day-to-day experiences the truth that man is getting better. Look around and see how many locks you can see. It used to be that people locked everything to prevent theft, but we have obviously progressed beyond that point.

We shouldn't be concerned with punishing people. After all, haven't we been told that we are all products of our environment? Men like Gary Gilmore who committed a few indiscretions are no different than the rest of us except that he probably grew up in a bad environment. We shouldn't hold him accountable for what was obviously just an attempt to find himself. Rather, doesn't society owe him something for not providing him with a good environment? Can we hypocritically condemn Gary Gilmore for acts we would have committed if we had been brought up in his environment? To do so would imply that he was responsible for his own actions, wouldn't it?

Further, we should be grateful to Mr. Robinson and Mr. Mueller for not using the Bible in their discussion. That book has done more to confuse the real issues of today than any other, hasn't it? The Bible

claims absurdly that the problems we see today such as theft, murder, adultery, and deceit actually arise from man's own heart. It is a shame that men of old held such ideas; but in our sophisticated age, this idea has no place. Haven't many of our social scientists said so? The Bible further implies that all men have flawed characters. Doesn't this go directly against the commonly-accepted beliefs about man? Certainly the belief that man is basically good and improving and can solve his problems is the true description of the reality we see around it? I'm sure that such delusion on capital punishment be rendered obsolete evolves into a more realistic and the committing of it comes a thing of the past. Like the world wars, has man is, indeed, solving problems. After all, if man can solve problems, is there any can?

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