

Slouch By Jim Earle



"It had to happen! A bunch of freshmen in that outfit are claiming that they have been held captive as hostages since September by sophomores."

Reagan's regime in critical period

By DAVID S. BRODER

WASHINGTON — It seems a foolish thing to say about an administration which has been around for less than a year and has at least three more years to go. But there is a growing sense that both politically and governmentally, the Reagan administration may have entered the most critical six months of its life.

The President's pollster, Richard B. Wirthlin, said just before Thanksgiving that these next six months could be decisive for the political fortunes of the administration and the Republican Party. Wirthlin is worried that if the free-fall recession now under way has not hit bottom and begun to turn around by late spring, then recovery is not likely to be visible enough by autumn to give the Republicans strong ground on which to fight the mid-term election.

The other day, one of the more reflective of the President's senior staff members made a similar point in conversation about the governmental world, arguing that it is in the period from 9 to 15 months after inauguration, that "a new President comes to terms with reality."

His comments triggered a faint memory and, sure enough, the files turned up a column by this reporter, published exactly four years ago today (Dec. 7, 1977), on "the second transition" of the Carter administration.

Looking back a year to the 1976 Ford-to-Carter transition, I wrote: "Then, it was a time for announcing 'superb' appointees and 'comprehensive' solutions to long-simmering problems. Now, it is a time for taking a second look at some less-than-superb performers and some comprehensive plans that proved less than compelling in practice."

With the wisdom of hindsight, it is easy to say now that President Carter failed to use his "second transition" opportunity to weed out the weak performers in his White House and Cabinet or to sort out his priority programs from those which he should have learned were unrealistic.

What is striking is that some Reagan advisers — like some of their counterparts in the Carter circle four years ago — recognize this as a critical passage for their President.

Personnel decisions — whether to replace the ineffectual national security and domestic policy advisers Richard Allen and

Martin Anderson, the crippled Budget Director David Stockman or the contentious Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. — are the most obvious choices facing the President.

But equally compelling are the policy choices involved in the current presidential review of fiscal 1983 budget decisions. For the first time since he became President, Reagan is hearing from men he picked to run Cabinet departments and agencies the argument that they cannot absorb cuts of the scale Stockman is recommending, without crippling programs they believe vital.

The President can respond to their arguments by reiterating his campaign rhetoric about all the "waste, fraud and abuse" in the domestic side of government. Or he can adjust to reality — not by abandoning his goal of budgetary discipline but by tailoring it to the facts to which he is now being exposed in this budget review.

Those who are hoping for the pragmatists in Reagan to prevail argue that the policy problems in the unfolding budget picture are manageable in a four-fold approach:

— Modest reductions in the planned expansion of national defense and the "safety net" entitlement programs like Social Security, both of which the President has rhetorically put off limits.

— A modest increase in taxes, probably through excises, rather than delaying the scheduled individual rate reductions.

— A modest easing of monetary policy, in order to bring down interest rates fast enough to assure the late-spring economic recovery for which Wirthlin and all GOP candidates pray.

— And a modest shift in presidential rhetoric, to point out that a recession year deficit of less than \$100 billion in an economy of about \$3.5 trillion is not by itself a huge inflationary force.

All of these points go somewhat against the grain for Reagan. But the choice as the pragmatists in his circle, of advisers see it, is to make a relatively modest course correction now — or risk letting the policy initiative slip into other hands: to Congress, the interest groups or the political opposition. That is what happened to Carter.

Whether Reagan accepts this advice or follows a different, perhaps more purist or ideological course, one thing is clear: This is, in fact, the most critical time in his presidency.

Bartlett's quotations: a way to cope

Each person has his or her own way of coping with trouble and strife. Some people turn to drink; some to the Bible; some to hard work.

I turn to "Bartlett's Familiar Quotations."

While lacking the hedonistic appeal of alcohol, the spiritual authority of religion and the financial reward of industriousness, Bartlett's has a certain fey charm. It offers some of the wisest — and some of the stupidest — things ever said by human beings.

During this ugly time in the academic year, perhaps stopping for a moment to ponder some of Bartlett's choicer morsels would be helpful. Here are some of my favorites:

"History is more or less bunk," Henry Ford (1863-1947). This is for everyone struggling through American history and trying to recall the date of the Gadsden purchase. And before you history professors get too self-righteous, just remember who was a multimillionaire and who is not.

"Conscience is the inner voice that warns us somebody may be looking," Henry Louis Mencken (1880-1956). Why doesn't anyone write like that anymore? Mencken had a million of these, by the way; the library has a number of his books and most of them sound just like that.

"Conscience and cowardice are really the same thing," Oscar Wilde (1854-1900). Obviously great minds think alike but I

Daniel Puckett



think Wilde wins the succinctness award.

"Life is just one damned thing after another," Frank Ward O'Malley (1875-1932). Truer words were never spoken, and now you know where Gilda Radner gets her lines.

"In the United States there is more space where nobody is than where anybody is." This is what makes America what it is," Gertrude Stein (1874-1946). Stein had a funny way of looking at things, a funnier way of saying things and even funnier way of making brownies. But occasionally she rose out of her hashish haze and wrote something like this. I think I understand it, but knowing Stein's work, I'm probably wrong.

"We live under a government of men and morning newspapers," Wendell Phillips (1811-1884). The Battalion comes out in the afternoon, so we wouldn't know.

"Lawsuit, n: a machine which you go into as a pig and come out of as a sausage,"

Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914). Small words, perhaps, but dedicated to our alma mater and its long-suffering officials.

"America is the only nation in history which miraculously has gone directly from barbarism to degeneration without usual interval of civilization," Georges Clemenceau (1841-1929). Some foreigners like us and some foreigners, notably the French, don't. The French can be pleasant when you think that this statement is attributed to one of the architects of the Versailles Peace Treaty, you begin to wonder if World War I was worth it after all.

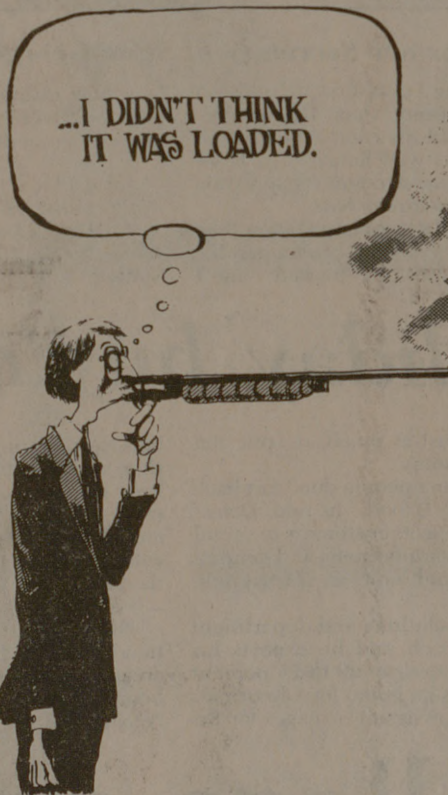
"The sergeant's widow told me she flogged her. I never flogged her. She flogged herself," Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852). This is from "The Inspector General" and probably was the inspiration for that African dictatorship which kept a political prisoner who died while trying to escape." Life does not get any better, Oscar.

"A man may build himself a throne of bayonets, but he cannot sit on it," Ralph Inge (1860-1954). Not if he sits anywhere else for a while.

"Every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better," Emile Coue (1857-1926). This statement was the foundation of Coueism, a pseudo-philosophy which was popular in the 1920s. I guess you were there.

Now don't you feel better?

THE COLUMBIAN DISPATCH AND TRIBUNE CHICAGO ILLUSTRATION BY HENRY M. SHAW



It's your turn

Sports editor's column criticized

Editor:

I understand that The Battalion is a publication by which journalism students at Texas A&M can practice and polish their writing skills, and at the same time I realize that every person has a right to his own opinions, but I do not feel that space should be wasted in any issue of the Battalion with any material of the type in Ritchie Priddy's sports editorial on Monday, Dec. 7. I am not writing this letter because I am a smitten Oiler fan, because I am not. I have always rooted for the Dallas Cowboys, and I consider it a disgrace to that organization that any of its fans would stoop to the low level that Mr. Priddy used in his Monday editorial. Never before in my life have I seen such a ridiculous hodge-podge collection of convoluted logic, prejudices, and even racism. If The Battalion is to remain a quality publication, only quality material should be included in its text. I would like to suggest to Mr. Priddy that, the next time he can not think of a decent topic to logically write about in an editorial, he refrain from even picking up a pen and spare us the embarrassment of having to see such garbage in our fine campus paper. Oh, in case you didn't know, Mr. Priddy, the Houston Oilers were AFL champions for the first two years of their existence, a feat the Dallas Cowboys were quite unable to achieve during their first two years in the NFL.

David Patlovany '82

cerning the quality of teaching at Texas A&M. Everybody loves to complain about a certain professor or department seldom do they compliment the excellent teachers.

The Freshman Chemistry Program at Texas A&M is superior in both its learning resources and its teaching. Students at

other universities are having a hard time mastering or even becoming competent in chemistry. The high percentage of excellent chemistry grades reflects an excellent well organized program. The program serves to be lauded.

Mike Wheeler

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The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography courses within the Department of Communications.

Questions or comments concerning any editorial matter should be directed to the editor.

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Letters to the Editor should not exceed 300 words in length, and are subject to being cut if they are longer. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must also be signed, show the author's name and phone number of the writer.

Columns and guest editorials are also welcome, and are not subject to the same length constraints as letters. Address all inquiries and correspondence to: Editor, The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843.

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the small society

by Brickman



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