

CARTER'S FIRST YEAR: PEANUTS!

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Jimmy Carter will have been in office one year this month. The honeymoon has been over for a while now.

As the list of unfulfilled campaign promises grows, dissatisfaction with the Carter administration is mounting, reflected in sagging ratings in the opinion polls, growing criticism from civil rights and labor leadership, and popular protest of its policies.

The source of growing disillusionment with Carter is the mile-wide gulf between promise and performance. Politicians automatically pledge more on election day than they will deliver once in office and everybody knows it. But few have promised so much and delivered so little as Jimmy Carter. Let's take an inventory.

THE JOBS ISSUE

Carter promised to reduce unemployment "substantially" and pledged his support for the Humphrey-Hawkins Bill, which in its original form aimed at creating full employment by making the federal government the employer of last resort.

Now, a year later, Carter has slashed unemployment by exactly 0.3%. 6,700,000 people who are looking for jobs can't find them, and the unemployment rate for Blacks is actually rising.

The Humphrey-Hawkins bill has had all its teeth pulled through four revisions, with the blessings of the administration. If passed in its present form, it would not create a single job! All it would obligate the government to do is draw up a "full employment plan" which it would then have no responsibility to implement.

Not only has Carter failed to come up with the jobs, but he's made it that much harder to get along without one. The administration cut back the extension of unemployment benefits, cut back the foodstamp program, cut back federal welfare payments, and reneged on the promise of a tax rebate.

With the economy sluggish (the rate of economic growth dropped to 3.8% this quarter as opposed to 6.2% and 7.7% for the two previous quarters) there is no reason to believe that the jobs situation will improve and every reason to expect that it will get worse if the Carter administration is left to its own devices. Carter, like Ford before him, is playing the game of keeping the lid on inflation — at the

expense of the unemployed and employed alike — in order to satisfy Big Business.

AFL-CIO LEFT OUT IN COLD

The unions went all out for Jimmy in November, turning out the labor vote and pouring \$11 million into his campaign coffers. In return the AFL-CIO leadership expected support for its most ambitious legislative program in years.

What has Carter delivered? Humphrey-Hawkins, labor's number one priority, is dead in all but name. The call for extension of coverage by the minimum wage law was axed in the Congress, and the demand for a \$3.00 minimum fell victim to a Carter-inspired compromise.

Further, the current labor reform law, which aims at removing some of the legal obstacles to organizing the unorganized, awaits an uncertain fate in Congress with only lukewarm support from the administration. Carter cannot even find the time for symbolic gestures like attending the AFL-CIO convention, something even Republicans like Richard Nixon managed to do.

FOR BLACK PEOPLE: SAME OLD TUNE

The burden of Carter's failure on the jobs front falls heaviest on Black people who turned out in record numbers to give Carter 94% of the Black vote and put him in the White House. Beyond this, Candidate Carter told a conference of the nation's mayors that "America's number one economic problem is our cities." He pledged that the inner cities, where the majority of Black people as well as Puerto Rican and Chicano minorities live, would "have a friend, an ally, and a partner in the White House."

But after a year in office, "friend" Carter has done virtually nothing beyond taking a jaunt through the South Bronx to demonstrate his concern. And the projected program that is emerging in Washington does not even scratch the surface of the problem.

Besides an administrative reorganization of existing aid programs, the Carter program calls for an urban development bank that would provide low interest loans to businesses willing to expand or relocate in designated urban areas. That's it. One administration insider characterized the program as: "better management plus a bank". Consistent with Carter's

overall policy, this program represents yet another subsidy for big business.

Another critical concern of labor, the poor and national minorities is welfare reform. Under Carter's much ballyhooed plan, a family of four with no other source of income would receive \$4,200 a year, or about two-thirds of the official poverty standard. This figure is actually lower than welfare recipients currently receive in all but 12 border and southern states. In other words, Carter's "reform" would actually cut the income of the vast majority of the 30 million welfare recipients in the US.

RETREAT ON DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

While the courts and Congress busy themselves with dismantling the political gains of the civil rights movement, Carter has largely remained aloof. On the one hand, he has avoided siding openly with the most outspoken opponents of equality. On the other, he has refused to use the authority of this office to oppose this drive.

Recently, after much handwringing, the Carter Justice Dept. filed a friend of the court brief in the Bakke case, favoring affirmative action but opposing quotas. Talking out of both sides of the mouth has become a Carter trademark.

For Black people the Carter administration represents a continuation of the racist policy of "benign neglect". As the NY Coalition of Black Trade Unionists put it: "They're playing that old familiar tune again. . . slow down, don't make waves, progress is coming. . . after all you've got Andy Young and Martin Luther King Sr. is a good friend of Carter."

These same policies threaten the democratic advance of all the oppressed nationalities and women as well. In addition Carter has particularly aroused the Chicano community with his so-called "amnesty" for undocumented workers (See *Organizer* Vol. 3 No. 8, Oct. 1977). A major blow to women, particularly poor and national minority women, was the Carter-inspired elimination of Medicare payments for abortion.

The list goes on and on. During the campaign Carter said that reducing the cost of health care was "one of my most important priorities". Health care costs rose by over 15% last year. Carter's attempt to limit the increase to 9% was

scuttled in Congress with only token objections from the White House.

On energy Carter has publicly lashed out at the oil companies for "profiteering" and staging "the biggest ripoff in history". Meanwhile, his actual energy program represents a handout to the energy monopolies and higher costs to the consumer. (See *Organizer* Vol. 3 No. 4., June 1977)

HUMAN RIGHTS: AT HOME AND ABROAD

In the realm of foreign affairs, Carter has for the most part been content to tread the path blazed by Henry Kissinger. His one new twist is the "human rights issue". In trying to polish up the US tarnished international image, Carter has gone after the USSR for "human rights violations", and urged the US' most reactionary allies in South Africa, Chile, South Korea and elsewhere to clean up their act.

This effort has fallen flat abroad. The Soviets have seen Carter's attacks as a violation of the spirit of detente and have acted accordingly. None of the dictatorial fascist-minded regimes which the US supports have done any major face-lifting: the fact that the US nevertheless continues its support has further exposed the real intentions of US policy. . . that the US seeks cosmetic changes in these regimes in order to forestall the coming to power of forces genuinely committed to national independence.

Furthermore, the human rights campaign abroad has underlined the lack of human rights at home. To broad sections of the American people, it has served to underline the hypocrisy of an administration which, while piously taking the Soviet Union to task for its treatment of "dissidents", holds hundreds of political prisoners like the Wilmington Ten, and the Four Puerto Rican Nationalists in its own jails. The repressive policies of the FBI, CIA, and local police have caused thousands to ask "What about human rights here?"

JIMMY'S IMAGE WILTING

Finally we all remember Carter's campaign rhetoric about "morality" and "love" — his pledge to run an open and honest administration. Early on Carter scored high marks with many attending town meetings in New England, getting down in Mississippi, staging telethons and fireside chats from the White House. But all that "just plain folks" stuff is no substitute for a job and that Ultra-Brite smile doesn't pay the fuel bills.

Anyway, these carefully orchestrated efforts at "openness" had little to do with the real decision-making process which was already sewn up by the Georgia good ol' boys that have a monopoly on Jimmy's ear, and the Big Business crowd that hold the mortgage on his political future. As for "new standards of political morality", the Bert Lance affair finished off any illusions anyone might have had on that score.

LESSONS OF CARTER'S DILEMMA

In the face of these across-the-board failures, critics have raised the question "Can Carter cut it?" But Carter's dilemma is not fundamentally a question of his personal competence. Carter has tried to straddle the conflicting needs of the monopoly capitalist class which he represents and the political constituencies which elected him.

Every capitalist politician faces this dilemma, but for Carter it has been particularly acute. The demand of the monopoly capitalists for a policy of austerity and cutbacks is at sharp odds with the growing demands of the working people for democracy, a better standard of living and peace.

Carter's attempt to deliver the goods for the monopolists while maintaining his base of support among the people who elected him was bound to fail. He has not succeeded in meeting the expectations he raised in the course of getting elected. His popularity rating has slipped from

75% to 47%. And at the same time, his monopoly backers are unhappy with even the few crumbs he has thrown to the people. Thus he faces the prospect of becoming a one term president and perhaps even a very early lame duck.

The pitiful timidity and vacillations of organized labor and conservative civil rights leadership in the face of Carter's backsliding presents an obstacle to reversing the administration's current direction. George Meany made hostile noises in his Labor Day address but now says the President is doing a good job. In July Vernon Jordan of the Urban League lambasted Carter, but after Jimmy responded by strolling through the South Bronx, Jordan praised his compassion. John Gunther, representing the US Conference of Mayors, thinks its too early to judge Carter. "If by February they haven't come up with something, we will raise all kinds of hell," he added.

The time for raising hell was yesterday — but today will do. Only if the American people organize and put the heat on Washington can any concessions be expected.

The larger lesson of Carter's first year in office is the futility of relying on the Democratic Party; it underlines our need for independent political action. Following Carter's election last November the *Organizer* noted: "The next four years should intensify the potential for independent political action. The Democratic Party, for the first time since the Johnson years, now bears unambiguous responsibility for governing the country, controlling both the executive and legislative branches. Given this, its inability to provide real solutions will stand out in even sharper relief.

"But unless left and progressive forces begin working to build an independent party, this exposure will only translate into cynicism and passivity at best. At worst, it will be the ultra-right which will be the beneficiary of a discredited liberalism."