

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-19NEW YORK TIMES
19 JULY 1979

ESSAY

Tricks
Of
The Trade

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WASHINGTON, July 18 — In a flurry of speeches and background messages of newsmen, Jimmy Carter accused the American people of being self-indulgent, materialistic and morally dispirited. This from the man who promised to provide "a government as good as the people."

In this first week of his campaigning for renomination in 1980, he came down from the mountain with a hatful of tricks:

1. *The following-leadership trick:* With his support eroding, he reached back for his 1976 campaign gimmick: make a show of "listening to the people." This costs nothing and shows respect.

The point of the long buildup was that he was a good listener, which is to say he would do what most people wanted. He then came before us to say "I will lead." But that is the opposite of leadership: that's followership. The trick is to call it leadership.

2. *The can't-lick-'em, join-'em trick:* He apologized for his 30 months of failure ("mixed success") and offered this alibi: that he had been too busy "managing the Government" to lead the people. But if you would lead a nation, you must show some talent at managing it: most Americans have concluded that he has not been good at that.

Mr. Carter will even join in that criticism, too: With much fanfare, he has elicited the mass resignations of his Administration. And in front of a gaping Cabinet, he has finally given a tongue-lashing to Ambassador Andrew Young. Thus, he shifts the blame for his own mismanagement to his aides, with whom he was supposedly so busy managing the Government instead of leading. (Neither Stansfield Turner of the C.I.A. nor William Miller of the Federal Reserve, his most disappointing appointments, were included in "the Tuesday Morning Massacre.") As one wag puts it: "They're serving Kool-Aid in the White House Mess."

3. *The switch-the-target trick:* With pollster Pat Caddell holding the weathervane aloft at Camp David, the President diagnosed a "crisis of the spirit" and did for the French word "malaise" what Henry Kissinger did for "détente."

But the "crisis" is not of the nation's spirit, it is of the Carter Administration's epitude. The American people have not lost confidence in themselves; they have lost confidence in Mr. Carter. The way he turned that around was neat.

4. *The satisfying non-sacrifice trick:* People like to be called on to make sacrifices in general, which is ennobling, but when the sacrifice is specified, it becomes unfair. The President could have stimulated U.S. oil production by removing the price controls that subsidize waste, or — if the "crisis" is as severe as he says it is — could have cut demand by rationing.

But that would have meant specific sacrifice by real people rather than satisfying non-sacrifice. He took the route least likely to upset anybody. He appointed a committee (or "board") to "cut through red tape," which draws applause until the tape turns out to be the clean air law.

5. *The timid boldness trick:* "We will protect our environment," he intoned forcefully, and 65 million viewers leaned forward to hear what he would do about nuclear power. Silence; that was too controversial. Next day, when fewer people were listening, he put in a line in its favor. The oxymoronic trick in this is never to be timid in using a strong voice to say the word "bold."

6. *The high-base statistic trick:* The most dramatic moment in Mr. Carter's War on Prosperity came with his resounding "Never!" He was quothung at not importing more oil than in 1977. Why pick that year? Because it was the highest import year, higher than 1973, higher than this year. Contrary to his audience's belief, the President promised no belt-tightening at all. No ceiling for Mr. Carter, perhaps a headache for his successor in 1981: that trick was one he learned in the SALT negotiations.

7. *The bully-in-the-pulpit trick:* With a severe recession on the way that will overshadow even the Lance trial and Curran grand jury findings this fall, Mr. Carter has laid the blame on (a) OPEC, per Stu Eizenstat's memo, and (b) Washington, run by a Democratic Congress and opposed by the leading resident of Camp David, Maryland.

8. *The changing-characters-in-mid-stream trick:* The man on the screen, in a last-ditch effort to save his political skin, shed his skin. Having changed the part in his hair to no avail, he proceeded to change the part in his mind.

No longer did we see the real Jimmy Carter — cool, soft-spoken, managerial, the smiling preacher promising salvation. We now see the "new" Carter — strident, loud, fist-clenching on cue, the preacher threatening hellfire and damnation. It is not the same man, nor is this Rafshoon concoction the real man. If we have come to distrust the real Carter, will we trust the unreal Carter?

He seems not to care if his tough demeanor and slap-dash decisions have weakened the dollar and shaken the institution of the Presidency. To save his political life, the President has been willing to plunge the nation into an artificial crisis; to meet that crisis, he has created a false and unnatural personality. And that is quite a trick.