

The Democrats revolt against Jimmy Carter

by Kathleen Murphy

At his weekly press conference June 7, the powerful Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) cautioned reporters “not to jump to conclusions the day or week after the primaries are over” about who will ultimately become the Democratic presidential candidate. “At this point, anything is conceivable,” Byrd said, despite President Carter’s technical lock on the nomination.

Byrd’s comments accurately reflect the pandemonium which has broken out in the party’s ranks over the last two weeks, as it has become inescapably clear that a Carter candidacy not only spells certain defeat in the November presidential elections, but also implies a continued commitment to policies that have brought the country to the brink of economic and strategic disaster.

Party regulars as well as the “fixers”—the Eastern Establishment elite that has traditionally rigged both the Republican and Democratic nominations—are now working overtime to deny Carter the nomination, while casting desperately about for a viable substitute.

Since the primaries ended “Super Tuesday,” June 3, Carter has been hit with steadily intensifying attacks from the media, Congress, and key constituencies within his own party. This, in turn, is feeding into growing popular support for an open Democratic Party convention.

With the Eastern elites now committed to Carter’s political demise, their press outlets have been going after Carter with a degree of open contempt not seen since Watergate. In addition to suddenly reporting the actual extent of public opposition to Carter, the media is also

attempting to convince the President he will lose to Reagan in November. Knowledgeable sources say this is the only way to force Carter out of the race.

Both the *New York Times* and the *Baltimore Sun*, for instance, carried similar articles in their June 8 editions which concluded, on the basis of analyzing the primary results, that Carter would lose to Ronald Reagan several states essential to a November victory, including California, Pennsylvania, Texas, Ohio, Florida, and possibly New York.

More immediate, however, is the revolt against Carter policy which is spreading throughout the Democratic Party.

Congress has launched a virtual guerrilla war on Carter’s economic policy, which it kicked off last week by defiantly rejecting Carter’s proposed oil import surcharge. As the *Washington Post* put it: “A Democratic Congress just didn’t override the Democratic president for the first time in 28 years; it registered a gesture of contempt toward him. That’s more than defeat; it’s a humiliation.”

A core group of senators, led by Byrd, are now aiming at the heart of Carter’s anti-inflation program: his tight-money policy. In a statement issued June 10, Byrd urged the administration to pressure the Federal Reserve Board into removing the credit restraints it had imposed in March. The day before, House Banking Committee chairman Henry Reuss (D-Wisc.), who had called for Carter to withdraw from the presidential race two months ago, similarly demanded that the administration lift the credit restraints. Reuss warned that unless

this were done, he would personally see to it that Congress repealed the Credit Control Act of 1969.

The Senate has already repealed the act on the grounds that, as one Democratic senator put it last week, "it has contributed greatly to the current recession."

Significantly, with Congress blocking most of his major legislative proposals, Carter is being forced to rely more and more on the extraordinary "emergency powers" granted the President by the Credit Control Act.

Thus, Congress's threat to repeal the act entirely, as well as other congressional moves against the White House, would deprive Carter of his last prop. This will heighten his sense of isolation and political immobility and force him into the petty, paranoid reactions that his opponents are accustomed to using against him.

Carter's method of curing inflation by forcing unemployment up toward the 10 percent mark and withholding vital credit from U.S. industry is not the only crucial policy area that has provoked congressional action. The patent lack of a competent national defense strategy, brought home hard by the Iran rescue mission debacle, has panicked spokesmen for the more reality-rooted military traditionalists into taking on the Carter administration's military policy. They are attacking the

rescue mission, his defense budget, his renomination of General Jones as Joint Chiefs chairman, and his refusal to reinstitute the draft in place of the All-Volunteer Force catastrophe.

Out of the Rose Garden, into the briar patch

The anti-Carter sentiment in Congress is just a pale reflection of the overall mood in the party and the country at large. Carter got a bitter taste of it personally when he hit the campaign trail June 10.

Even before he left Washington, Carter received a preview of what to expect when he met with the Congressional Black Caucus June 9. Though details of their discussions have not been revealed, caucus spokesman Cardiss Collins (D-Ill.) told reporters afterwards: "We have come away with a feeling of real disappointment, disappointment because we feel there are two ships passing in the night."

Asserting that Mr. Carter did not fully understand "the intensity of the situation" in the country, Rep. Collins said that the caucus would meet with Carter in two weeks to see if he is willing to realign his economic policies. If not, she threatened, the black representatives

The press on Carter

A sampling of national press coverage of President Carter follows:

Washington Post, June 8, Columnist Haynes Johnson:

To report that all's not well along the Potomac is a bit like telling someone strapped in the electric chair that the forthcoming shock might hurt. But even in these sullen times the sense of disarray between Capitol Hill and the White House has to be seen to be believed.

A Democratic Congress didn't just override the veto of a Democratic President Friday for the first time in 28 years; it registered a gesture of contempt toward him. . . . That's more than a defeat, it's a humiliation.

. . . A careful look at the political map today shows Carter in peril in virtually every section of the country, including his native South. . . .

New York Times, June 6, op-ed by Tom Wicker:

The final primary round on Super Tuesday confirmed what has been apparent for weeks—that Democrats are profoundly unhappy about nominating

Jimmy Carter or Edward Kennedy, so much so that many threaten to bolt either candidate in the fall. . . .

The hard truths exposed by that day of eight primaries are . . . Mr. Carter came out looking like a basket case and Mr. Kennedy like a welfare case.

New York Times, June 6, "Europe Looks Askance at Choice for U.S. President," by R.W. Apple, Jr.:

The *Spectator*, a conservative British weekly, carries in its current issue a long editorial assessing the prospect of a Presidential race between Carter and Reagan.

"What a choice!" says the headline over the piece—and that summed up the mood in Western Europe as the primary season came to an end this week. With some exceptions, Europeans consider the nominating process insanely complex, and they view the apparent victors as political pygmies unfit to lead the Western alliance. . . .

The head of one of France's largest corporations said of the United States, "you lack a man." Francesco Izzo, an assistant at Naples University, commented: "There is no choice; they are both shallow persons." And Claude Monnier, a prominent Swiss journalist, remarked that "many Europeans ask with stupefaction how the biggest and richest power in the world is reduced to nominating for the country's highest position two such weak personalities."

would withdraw their support from the President.

Leaders of the black community who gathered to hear Carter defend his urban policy were equally hostile. "I don't agree with his budget," NAACP national director Benjamin Hooks said after Carter's speech. "I still think his budget has impacted on the poor."

On the first stop of his tour, Miami, Carter was greeted by hundreds of booing demonstrators carrying placards which read: "Hey, Mr. Peanut Man, we need more peanuts." Recently torn apart by violent riots, Miami officials, too, were not in the mood to hear Carter self-righteously warn, "It would be a very serious mistake to think the federal government would pick up the entire tab for riot relief." Miami Mayor Maurice Ferre publicly termed Carter's tight-fisted aid offers "bland pabulum, a Gerber's delight," while the city's major newspaper, the *Miami Herald*, carried a lead editorial titled "Carter's Visit Short, Empty." Comparing it to a golf trip to the city by President Warren G. Harding in the 1920s, columnist Charles Whited wrote: "As the dust settles Monday night following Jimmy Carter's quick blitz of riot-shaky Miami, one's first reaction was that Harding's visit had more substance. At least he had a score."

While Carter's next stop, the annual Mayors Conference in Seattle, netted him an endorsement by the Democratic attendees, reports from the conference indicate that Carter's aides had to resort to federal funds cutoffs in order to secure it. The mayors, to his obvious discomfort, sat on their hands when Carter unveiled a new youth jobs program in his speech.

Anybody-but-Carter

While it is clear that most Democrats are lining up in the anybody-but-Carter column, the real unresolved question is who will replace him as the party's nominee. Every candidate mooted in the major press so far is unacceptable to one or another of the important Democratic Party interest groups.

Spokesmen for conservative Democrats are saying that the two options most favored by the East Coast liberal elite, Muskie and Mondale, are out of the question. As one insider put it: "There are people who want Carter out . . . but their strategy is to work out a deal. Mondale is being backed by the same people as Carter, as is Muskie. We can't accept either because it means the same policies and the same general danger of war." Sen. Henry Jackson (D-Wash.), another potential contender, is unacceptable to the liberal wing of the party.

This closed-circuit personnel search within the Democratic Party has done little to bring the nation face to face with the critical economic and foreign policy issues that must shape 1980 presidential politics if the nation is to recover from the Carter debacle. Just now, the boys in the back room at the Council on Foreign Relations are trying to keep things in the back-room.

Congress hits Carter on military policy

When Senator John Tower told a nationwide television audience June 8 that the Senate Armed Services Committee on which he sits should investigate the false alarms sounded last week by the U.S. air defense network's computer system, Capitol Hill was already abuzz with rumors that the computer's behavior was no accident. The alarms indicated falsely that a Soviet nuclear attack was underway, U.S. forces being placed on high alert until the report was "corrected."

The computer "errors," June 3 and again June 6, came as the administration was drastically foreshortening the timetable on its "China card" policy by publicly wining-and-dining the chief of the Chinese People's Liberation Army—and announcing sales of military equipment to Peking for the first time. Some of that equipment is considered an aid to Chinese "nuclearization," which the Soviet Union has repeatedly indicated it will not tolerate, as a matter of Soviet national security.

Speculation that the computer-errors were actually "simulations" ordered by administration officials were fueled when General David Jones, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, declared they had served a "useful function," because they showed the Soviet Union that the United States is prepared to take action if necessary.

But elite Eastern Establishment policymakers are worried about the fact that, contrary to Jones' unsettling statement, the United States absolutely is not prepared to take action if necessary—U.S. military capability is very badly eroded, and under Carter military and defense-spending proposals, will only get worse. On cue from the Eastern press, Congressmen began to attack the administration's defense policy—with Senator Tower's computer-investigation demand only one of a series.

The first flank against Carter was opened up June 5, when a "top secret" report on the Iran-rescue operation, commissioned by the Senate Armed Services Committee during hearings begun in April, was suddenly leaked to major news media. The report disclosed "major errors" in the operation, including inadequate training of personnel and inadequate equipment maintenance, poor contingency planning and execution, bad intelligence and "fragmentation of command responsibilities." The mission commander was the wrong man, and component