

The Politician's Art

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Perhaps the most unexpected fact about Jimmy Carter after almost a year in office is that he is uncontroversial. There are no pitched battles in sitting rooms about the President. His name is raised; quickly it is dismissed. There is almost more talk about Rep. Thomas P. O'Neill, who has rashly been discovered to be a man of rare wisdom and skill, a reincarnation which surprises many who have known him over the years in Massachusetts.

This lack of excitement is general. Only William Safire can sustain much passion, as he tries to prove that any President must be as bad as Richard Nixon, and any Vice President as bad as Spiro Agnew, the two masters whom he served with almost as much dedication as he serves himself. The Presidency has lost luster in the past decade, and luster is clearly what Jimmy Carter has not restored to it. Perhaps he does not wish to do so -- he may well not be either the exciting or the disturbing figure whom his admirers and his critics imagined -- but there is something that both groups miss in his performance. It is worth trying to identify what it is.

Judging by his performance so far, one can foresee no great calamity in the next three or seven years, except perhaps the most telling one, that he will leave a feeling of frustration with politics as such; that his administration will only reinforce the already too widespread idea that politics can and does achieve nothing, and that our lives are not greatly improved and not even much touched by it. For what Jimmy Carter seems to be offering the American people is yet another unpolitical President. A man who in many respects is superbly

equipped as a politician seems to be earnestly striving to be something else; and one suspects that he may pray at the foot of his bed each night, "Lord, let not thy miserable servant be only a politician, let him be a good President, a valid, relevant, meaningful, viable President, O Lord."

This criticism might be made of most of his immediate predecessors. The last truly political President of the United States was Harry Truman, and if he is something of a folk hero today, it is partly because one can even now feel the very stuff of a politician in his weave. Beyond him, of course, was FDR, the man who always crossed the line before his rivals because, if he found that he was behind them, he merely turned on his heels and ran in the other direction, and, since all the spectators had their eyes on him, they thought that the winning line must be wherever he chose to run. But in the past quarter of a century there has been a steady effort, conscious and unconscious, to depoliticize the Presidency. If the Presidency is in trouble as an institution, it is not so much because it has become imperial as that it has been made increasingly unpolitical.

But there is more to it than that. Politics itself is in danger of being depoliticized. This danger is not only American. In all of the democracies there is a "credibility gap" about the activity of politics itself, caused less by the words and deeds of politicians than by a general lack of understanding of what politics can and should attempt to do. Many of the criticisms that are made today of individual politicians are really no more than an uncomprehending and ignorant censure of the political life as such. In response to such misconceptions, which seem sometimes to be malignant, even politicians try not to be politicians.

People usually begin by defining politics as the handmaiden of some lofty purpose. Although I am all for lofty purposes in their place, this is putting the cart before the horse. It is the activity of politics that defines the purpose of politics. But if a lofty definition is wanted, the purpose of politics is very much what Dean Acheson says is the

purpose of foreign policy: "To maintain and foster an environment in which our national life and individual freedom can survive and prosper." That is enough to elevate us, and we may turn to ask what it is that politicians do, in ways that could hardly be bettered, by arts that are not to be found elsewhere.

Let us begin with an illustration of what one means by a depoliticized Presidency. It was only last year that the transition from one President to another became "The Transition," that it was talked about as if it were some kind of beatification. Of course the problems of passing the Presidency from one man to another are peculiar in America, with the long interval between election and inauguration. They have often been debated, committees have examined them, and Congress provides what seem absurdly large sums of money to make the transition orderly. But it was only last year that the transition was talked about as The Transition, as if what is by definition a state of nonbeing is in fact a state of being. People were described as Members of the Transition, as if they were members of the Order of the Garter, and there are still people in Washington who did not get the jobs they expected, who sulk about the place saying how hard they worked for the Transition.

This is ludicrous, but also dangerous. One danger is that it seems as if something important is happening when what is happening is only routine. But, more than that, The Transition is an extension of the campaign, when the campaign is over, and for that reason it is unpolitical at the very moment when the President-Elect should be transforming himself into a politician. By whom is he surrounded during The Transition? By the campaign staff that helped him win the election. There may seem to be nothing wrong in this. But the fact is that election campaigns in our democracies are becoming more and more unpolitical in character. Less and less are they won by politicians acting as politicians, with the help of political parties and of advisers who are themselves politicians. They are won by politicians acting as media stars, with the help of personal bodyguards of centurions whose political experience is slight. It is these who

surround the President-Elect and then the President, and, as a result, the campaign is carried into The Transition, and from there into the Presidency, and the depoliticizing is at once institutionalized.

"Jody Powell is the most dangerous man in the country," a wise and usually mild-spoken man said to me one evening, and although I think that he gave the wrong reasons for his opinion, his remark is to the point. Jody Powell is not a politician, and there is no hint in him, either in his public performance or even in the most fleeting moment of conversation, that he will ever be one. This may be said of Hamilton Jordan as well, and of most of the present White House staff; but it may also be said of the White House staffs of most recent Presidents. A President will be a politician insofar as he chooses to be served by politicians, and not by the centurions who had carried him to victory in his campaign.

Franklin Roosevelt of course dipped into his campaign staff to form his very personal administration. But the contrast makes the point: an election campaign was then still political; it had not yet become a media event. Roosevelt's staff did not think that they could put their man in office by their own ingenious manipulation of his image. They gloried in the politician in the man -- it was the politician in him that they served -- and so they, too, learned to be politicians. They did not try to protect him; he needed no protection. They did not form a circle round him with their shields, like a band of medieval knights guarding their sovereign's body as the fount of honor. They could say, as FDR's assistant Louis Howe once did in answer to a request from him, "Tell the President to go to hell." A man as devoted to Roosevelt as Harry Hopkins was nevertheless himself a pure politician, searching out his own intuitions of what could and needed to be done, and ready to pit them, as deviously and abrasively as any politician, not only against those of his colleagues who were no less politicians, but even against those of his master. At no time in twelve years did the White House of Franklin Roosevelt ever resemble a court.

It is a long time since we have had Presidents surrounded by men like these. We have had the nonpoliticians, what I call the centurions: Kenneth O'Donnell and Ted Sorenson, Bill Moyers and Jack Valenti, John Erhlichman and Bob Haldeman, and now Jody Powell and Hamilton Jordan. There has not been, and is not now, a true political instinct among them. Their Presidents were, and are, to them largely media creations, packaged and presented by them; and it is no coincidence that Moyers and Valenti are now employed in the media, and that others from succeeding White House staffs have followed them, and will no doubt follow in turn from the present White House. Here is where the depoliticizing of the Presidency has its beginning.

Unlike the journalism of the past, the media are the enemy of politics. The media make their appeal to a popular audience which is counted only by its numbers. But the business -- and the genius -- of politics is that it does not just count votes, it weighs them. It sifts through the mass to find what is individual and significant, and election campaigns used to reflect this. The politician on the stump in those days always seemed to be searching out one face in the crowd. That was the importance of the heckler. Separating himself from the crowd as an individual, he dissolved it into a gathering of individuals. The politician had to answer him. But there are no hecklers now. There is only the camera, the glazed eye of the crowd, an undifferentiated mass among whom the politician cannot sift.

The crowd has no support to give a politician when he tries to govern from Washington. The public in the opinion polls cannot vote for his bills. The interests and personalities amongst whom he must maneuver are not represented or reflected in the media. The campaign staff with its eye on the media is of little use to a President once he is in office. Yet such are the prestige and influence of the media that Presidents will forfeit their abilities as politicians in order to follow what are imagined to be the media's insights. The main reason the Presidency is being depoliticized is that Presidents have been persuaded to depoliticize themselves.

The most important fact about what politicians do is that they do not know what they are doing. Their task is not to make a profit, like a businessman; to fight a battle, like a general; to win a case, like a lawyer; to ready us for salvation, like a priest; to write a book, like an author; to make a boot, like a shoemaker. There is no real test or measure of what a politician does. A politician must deal from day to day with what Bismarck called *imponderabilia*. He cannot even choose his materials -- it is one of the faults of the nonpolitician to believe that he may -- for these are in the end only two -- people and events - - and for the most part they are givens in any situation. Human nature in the raw, and great events in the making: willy-nilly these force themselves on his attention, and he must respond to them in the arena he has chosen, where the spotlight of publicity shines on everything he does.

Dean Rusk once said that the foreign policy of the United States had to be conducted in a world in which there are perhaps fifty changes of government every year. This is not very different from the past. Richard III has not enjoyed a high reputation since his death, yet he acted wisely and justly when he seized the throne, giving his divided realm an unusual measure of peace. When he turned abroad to try to make peace with the countries which still threatened his country's security, he was baffled at every turn by the sudden changes of government. He sent two learned envoys to treat with the pope, but Sixtus IV died during their journey across Europe and months of patient diplomatic preparation were wasted. This is not much different from an unexpected change of government in Israel as the result of a parliamentary election, and it is with such *imponderabilia* that politicians must live.

This is no less true in domestic policy. The support that a politician needs is always shifting, never reliable, will change under his feet from day to day, even hour to hour. The politician who says that he is taking a stand on some issue will, if he is wise, cross his fingers, and mutter under his breath that it is only shifting sand on which he has a

footing. Richard Nixon could not live with this uncertainty in political life. In fact, he did not really like politics at all, so he tried to circumvent its processes. But if this was true of Nixon, it was no less true of Kennedy, although he responded in a different way. He also tried to get around politics, either by dazzling appeals to the public, before whom he appeared like a Byzantine emperor, clad in gold and suspended between heaven and earth, or by guerrilla actions that were designed to circumvent the political processes.

President Carter has also believed that he may make appeals to the public, even though in his case they are undazzling, only to find that between elections the public does not have any vote that is useful to him. There are instead many publics, interests, and individuals, with many votes which shift this way and that. Even if he could arouse the public to believe with him that there is an energy crisis, which is highly improbably in any case, its support would only marginally increase the chances of his energy program in Congress. The public is not political except as represented by politicians in political institutions.

We may go further. If the most important fact about what politicians do is that they do not know what they are doing, it is no less true that they must try to exercise power in conditions in which there is no ready-made power to exercise. "You claw and clamber for power," Harold Macmillan said to me one evening, "and what do you find when you get it?" He slowly opened his empty hand: "A Dead Sea fruit." At about the same time his main rival, Hugh Gaitskell, said to me: "You should write a book about power some time, because when one gets to the top one finds there is no such thing." Yet these two men were the leaders of highly organized and disciplined parties which can be held in line in Commons even when their majorities are as small as they are today.

One of the dangers to a new President in America is that his triumph in the election, the ballyhoo of the transition, the extent of the changeover in the White House and the rest of the Executive Branch,

give the impression that he has more power than he in fact possesses, and distract attention from the unchanged character of many of the political relationships in Washington which will determine what he can do. All Presidents have echoed Roosevelt's cry that people thought, because he was President, when he ordered a thing to be done, it would therefore be done. But the reason lies less in the nature of the Presidency than in the nature of politics. There is no greater misconception in politics than that there are levers of power, which have only to be seized in order to do what one wishes; and the phrase "levers of power" should be banished from political commentary and from political science.

There are few things more haunting or illuminating in this respect than the complaint of Woodrow Wilson after he became President: "Everything is persistently impersonal. I am administering a great office . . . but I do not seem to be identified with it; it is not me, and I am not it. I am only a commissioner, in charge of its apparatus, living in its office, and taking upon myself its functions." The complaint echoes down the years. "My God," exclaimed Garfield, "what is there in this place that a man should ever want to get into it?"; and, during his last year in office, Hoover perhaps understandably exploded, "This office is a compound hell." Well, they usually try to get back, as even Hoover did, but we must take their comments seriously.

Winston Churchill used to talk of his "black dog," the bouts of melancholy which dogged his footsteps, as they do those of many politicians. One may find psychological or even physical explanations, but what really dogs them is the feeling of how little they have been able to accomplish. To have climbed to the top, apparently to have held so much power, but then always to find that they are standing on shifting ground, always to depend on support that is never reliable, always to be at the mercy of events that they are unable to control and people they cannot command, and always in the end to accomplish so little of what they set out to do -- this must make the black dog hairier than ever. When he was told that Napoleon had died, Talleyrand merely observed: "That is only news

now, it is no longer an event." To have stood where great power is supposed to be, but to find at the end that one holds only a Dead Sea fruit in one's hand, and that one's death is no longer an event: it is no wonder that politicians are an unusual breed.

Politicians are not managers or administrators, even though some of them, including Jimmy Carter, are tempted to present themselves as such. They are at the mercy of the very forces that they usually perceive more intuitively and acutely than others. Few politicians have understood and pondered those forces more deeply and at last with more foreboding than Caesar. He could claim to have saved Rome from its sickness, but he also knew the price and knew even that he might have to pay it. There is every reason for believing that he was aware that he would be assassinated when he left home on the Ides of March, and that he refused to save himself; the cost must be seen, the example must be set, the lesson must be learned, and it was as a man brooding on the nature of power, and the unpredictability and fierceness of its occasions, that he at last went out to meet the assassins' knives.

Politicians are unusual in their origins as well as their ends. That they are ambitious may seem obvious, but their ambition has an edge to it. A one-term governor of Georgia, barely known on the national scene, decides that he will be President, and in less than four years he manages it. This may be remarkable, but it is remarkable as an example of a more general fact about politicians, which helps to illustrate the nature of politics. Given that the way to the top in politics is so uncertain, what is surprising is how many politicians, who in the end reached the top, set out to climb the greasy pole in their youth, and even in their boyhood. This is a kind of ambition, not only because it is for the highest place, which is *sui generis*.

One can understand the young Caesar swearing to avenge his beloved uncle, the great and injured Marius; most young men of his class in Rome, anyhow, were groomed for politics from childhood. One can also understand Charles James Fox, brought up in the

atmosphere of Holland house, using his school holidays to scamper off to Parliament as soon as possible, to follow closely the protracted debates. "Charles," his father wrote to his mother, "will hardly come from the House of Commons before I am in bed." These were born to politics. But what of Disraeli, a Jew in a country in which the disqualifications against Jews were still many, determining very early what his destiny would be, and accomplishing it with no advantage but that which he supplied? What even of Grover Cleveland, educating himself in a law office in Buffalo by reading Blackstone's *Commentaries*, finding himself locked in the office library one day when everyone else had left, and vowing then and there, "Some day I will be better remembered," then choosing a political career and advancing in it with amazing rapidity?

What of David Lloyd George who, as a country boy from Wales, peered down at the Commons for the first time, and decided at once, when he was not yet in his teens, that one day he would conquer that assembly? What of Woodrow Wilson telling us, "The profession I chose was politics; the profession I entered was law. I entered the one because I thought it would lead to the other." What of Harold Macmillan, who tells us, "If I remember aright, by the time I started to go to a little day-school in London I had already made up my mind that the most probable and attractive arena for my efforts in the world would be in the world of politics. . . . At any rate, by the time I had a year or two at my preparatory school, my mind was made up. I would go into the House of Commons"? This young ambition soon expanded: "If Dizzy had made himself leader of a party and Prime Minister by his own unaided efforts, could not I have a go?" Such quotations can be multiplied.

The quality of this ambition must be understood. The politician is not ambitious simply for advancement; he is not setting out to climb the executive ladder to the head of a corporation. Neither is he -- at least, he should not be -- ambitious for money; nor is he really ambitious for power, for the very reason that we have given, that he seems to know already that it is not power that will be his reward,

even if he reaches the top. He is ambitious to act in the arena of politics, and if he is truly ambitious it must be the national arena. What interests him most in the arena is not the efficient running of a large organization, not the administering of policy, but the day-to-day combat, the rushes and rallies, the routs and discomfitures, in which the whole pulsing life of the nation is brought to a focus, under his eyes and within his touch. From this combat there will be no rest, and he wants none.

We must be careful neither to seek nor to adulate politicians who do not enjoy this combat. The overzealous way in which his nonpolitical centurions shield a President today is the greatest disservice to him. It isolates him from the very activity in which he should most lustily be engaged, and for which he presumably entered politics in the first place. What is worse is that Presidents themselves seem now to try to conceal that they are engaged in daily hand-to-hand combat. They must not appear before us with any sign that blood has been spilled, and that they have done much of the spilling, but must instead present themselves as men who are loftily above the strife. Jimmy Carter is seldom the politician when he appears at his press conference or addresses us more directly, a man who won his way to the top by bloodshed, and by bloodshed must sustain himself there. He comes before us as if each time he had been immaculately conceived, or perhaps found among the bulrushes.

Since there is no ready-made power for the politician to exercise, he must remake his power day by day. The coalitions that he must form will be of the moment, for the moment, a succession of alliances whose composition will vary from occasion to occasion, and issue to issue. This is what Harry McPherson, the brilliant assistant to Lyndon Johnson in both the Senate and the White House, calls the art of making a majority, even if it is only for one bill, and will dissolve the next day on another bill. It is the essential work of a politician in any circumstances in any country, yet it is exactly at this point that all the popular prejudices against him come into play, as he is criticized for maneuvering, for wheeling and dealing, for *compromising*.

Yet the alliances, and the methods by which they are made, are honorable; and they could not, in fact, be made or maintained, except by honor. When Cicero created his formidable alliance against Caesar, he wrote to his two new allies that he regarded their agreement as a *foedus*, and it is the binding force of a treaty which must infuse even the day-to-day alliances that politicians make, for the only sanction behind them is the spoken word of each of them. Hubert Humphrey finds it hard to say anything harsh about anyone, but in his remarkable volume of memoirs, *The Education of a Public Man*, he writes of an election party in California in 1968: "Jesse Unruh isn't here, and I'm glad. . . . He proved so often that he can't be trusted." This is the ultimate condemnation of a politician; the essential code of trust between politicians has been betrayed, because the only thing to be trusted is the politician's word; and it is worth emphasizing that this code can be broken by Presidents and their assistants as well as by members of Congress.

No one has described the code better than Humphrey: "You work as openly and honestly with your opponents as you do with your own political colleagues, particularly when you have votes to win. Everyone must know what the rules are, what the game plan is. You don't lie, cheat, or cut corners." He tells of his association with Willis Robertson of Virginia, a stalwart opponent of the civil-rights bill that Humphrey was trying to push through. "When a liberal colleague had slipped the traces and we were shy a body for a quorum call, I'd find Willis and he would come down to the Senate floor, never letting me down when I needed him." Other cooperations are numerous and well-known -- that between Herman Talmadge and Joseph Clark, for example -- and their point is to ensure that the Senate is a "legislative body and not a debating club," based on what McPherson calls "the mutual acceptance of responsibility and concentration on the tasks in hand," one helping hand by a member to be returned in kind when he needs it.

Humphrey and McPherson are both severely critical of some of the doctrinaire liberals in the Senate, who sometimes seem to prefer being righteous to helping a bill pass. Their words for them are harsh: that they act in isolation, and therefore are not as effective as they might be; that they are quixotic and often abrasive; that they do not trouble to learn the rules of the Senate, so that the conservatives (who are always masters of the rules) run rings round them, even when they are bringing forward bills which they profess are closest to their hearts. The strictures are deserved. Whether or not there is a place for philosopher kings, there is no place for philosopher politicians; and one can sympathize with Disraeli, who, whenever John Stuart Mill rose to speak in the Commons, tipped his hat forward and exclaimed, "Ah! the governess!"

In the circumstances in which he must act, the politician's most important art is that of retaining his flexibility and his capacity for maneuver, and exploiting them to the full. Talleyrand would never have served his country (or his succession of masters) so well if he had not been what his enemies called "the master spider." Franklin Roosevelt would never have accomplished so much if a gleam had not entered his eyes when he heard the hint of a strategem. It is inflexible men who lead their countries to failure or calamity, and themselves to disgrace, and one of the most destructive characteristics of Richard Nixon was that, although he may have been an unprincipled man, he could nevertheless be an inflexible one, a dangerous combination.

Humphrey at one point criticizes Johnson because, in his wish to be unpolitical as President, "he took great pleasure in talking about how many civil servants he had promoted, as though they would make him nonpolitical." Just as a part of Johnson's skill and enjoyment in the Senate was his flexibility, so it increasingly seemed that, while he was in the White House, he was not so much inflexible on the war as that he had lost the ability to retain and enjoy the opportunity for maneuver at all. This flexibility of movement was what Roosevelt meant when he described himself as a quarterback, and without it a

politician is useless. There is clearly not a good quarterback in the White House now, at any level.

The disappointment which one senses among those who would like Jimmy Carter to do well is not, though they may think that it is, that he is more "conservative" and less "liberal" than they expected, but that he does not seem to be a politician who has politicians around him. If he were a politician, his "liberalism" or "conservatism" would at least move effectively in intelligible directions, which would allow one to see that politics matters and deserves our highest forms of allegiance and participation. Even those who would simply like the country to be governed felt much the same about him. He seems to have the wrong set of antennae in the White House, ears wrongly tuned to the wrong forked tongues; for it must be remembered that nonpoliticians as well as politicians have forked tongues, and their sycophancy is often carried to the point of undutifulness.

I am trying here to set against the nonpolitical Presidency of Jimmy Carter a model of what a politician should be. I am about to expand both the model and my criticisms. But it is first necessary to repeat that in many respects he is well equipped to be a politician, but that he is subject to countless pressures that entice him, as they have persuaded others before him, to prove or at least pretend that he is not first and last a politician. In our democracies for most of this century, the activity of politics has been under attack by the whole of our "culture" in the broadest sense, and the political realm has been persistently disdained by the other realms. It is not only a cynicism about the life of politics, but a failure and even an unwillingness to try to understand what its purposes are, that is paralyzing our free societies for any great endeavor, and breeding instead only populations of sullen and whiffling activity.

Let us begin with points already made, and proceed from there: 1. We suffer from a false conception of the public. The public is not by itself a political body. It has no political voice, no political institution of its own through which to act. It does not even have a political

existence unless and until a politician welds part of it into a political force. 2. The idea of the public is destructive of democratic and free government. This may seem to be a liberal or left-wing idea; it is in fact a reactionary idea. It is the right wing that always summons the phantom of the public to resist any political or social change. 3. The media are the child of the public; the public then becomes the child of the media. The media are in this the opposite of the newspapers of the past, which differentiated between different publics, each appealing to its own; now the concentration of newspaper ownership and the television networks has reduced these separate publics to an undifferentiated mass. The exact symbol of this media public is the CBS-*New York Times* survey of public opinion. 4. The undifferentiated public, the media which feed it, and the public-opinion polls which mainly serve commercial masters -- all reflect the dominance of an economic realm that is bent on the suffocation of the political realm, the only opponent it really has cause to fear. 5. The economic realm subdued the cultural realm with little more than a flick of its fingers. It bought it. The disappearance of the avant-garde is not a cultural phenomenon, but a political one. Art sold out to the economic realm, and has proceeded to do its bidding, and condemn the political realm. 6. So, in the absence of religion, we have only our politicians to defend us against the economic realm, whose predominance has always been understood to be a source of disorder in any society. This is not a question of being a "socialist" or a "conservative," for capitalism or against it, but of recognizing that when the economic realm rules a society unchallenged it subjects all other realms, and so leaves us without their support and the whole society in a state of disorder and discontent, if only for the obvious reason that we are all (not least our artists and writers) easy prey to any incitement of our natural greed.

What we must require of any politician, "liberal" or "conservative," "left-wing" or "right-wing," is that he understand that he represents a realm which is, so to speak, our last court of appeal against the other realms in our societies that threaten to subject us. The objection to having big business represented so strongly in the high places of an

administration is not so much that the interests of big business as such will be too easily given an advantage, although that also may be true, but that the economic realm is so menacing that the political realm cannot afford to invite it in as a Trojan horse. When Dwight Eisenhower criticized the military-industrial complex -- a phrase which did not spring unpremeditated to his lips; he had been working his way toward it for some time -- he was defending the political realm against two other realms, both of which had grown too powerful. He was in fact more of a politician than is usually realized, and he specifically said that what ought to be political decisions were being taken increasingly by the military and by big business. He is the last President to have been so bold; but then he was leaving office.

The nonpoliticians by whom Jimmy Carter is surrounded -- the Jody Powells and the Hamilton Jordans, to say nothing of the Pat Caddells -- have not the slightest notion of the realm they ought to be defending. Carter himself may have an inkling, but he does not really ask to be reminded. Those who served Roosevelt in his administration bore him messages, at any time of the day or night, of the carnage that they had seen, in which they usually had taken part. He lapped it up. Brought news of conciliation, he thought at once that something must be wrong, and he stirred the pot again. This is one reason the political realm need not be feared as others must be. As we have already seen, it is never at one with itself; it is always too divided to govern us too harshly; it seldom has a single objective to which to subject us; someone is always ready to defect, and so come to our rescue.

We know that we have an unpolitical politician if he does not enjoy the game: enjoy being in office, of course enjoy such power as he imagines he may have, enjoy even the winning, but above all enjoy the game when it is played to the hilt. When Disraeli saw that he was about to be fiercely attacked from the opposite benches, he just tipped his top hat over his eyes and pretended to slumber; any attack will be blunted if it has to be addressed to the rim of a top hat. When he was about to produce one of his "good things" in a speech, he

reached for his handkerchief in the tail pocket of his frock coat, and elaborately mopped his face with it; even the strongest men on the opposition benches quailed at the sight of that handkerchief, and his attack was thus reinforced before it had begun. On the floor of the Senate before a crucial vote which he seemed likely to lose, Lyndon Johnson would bring out his inhaler and sniff it, roll his eyes to heaven in supplication, lounge and loll and seem to be distracted, until he bounded from his seat, to "reason together" with some Senator whose vote he had suddenly decided he might win, and on the Senator's shoulder he rested his huge head, as into the Senator's eye he whispered his seductions.

Franklin Roosevelt was of course the master of this contrived imperturbability. The stories of him are endless, but I risk one that is less well known. After the outbreak of the war in Europe in 1939, the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, Marriner Eccles, had a luncheon appointment with him to discuss its possible effects on the American economy. He found FDR in the company of William McAdoo, pol talking to pol, as as they ate their lunch, Roosevelt made no attempt to tell McAdoo he should leave. Then as McAdoo at last left, in scampered Fala, and the President took a ball from his desk, threw it to Fala who brought it back to be thrown again, and so it continued for several minutes. At last he invited Eccles to begin his statement, but at once the President's attention was lost as FDR stared across the room and bellowed: "Well, I'll be goddamned, Marriner, do you see what I do?" Eccles saw all too clearly: Fala had defecated on the rug. A guard was summoned and ordered to rub Fala's nose in the mess, and there followed a lengthy postmortem of the vent. Eccles was again invited to begin, but "Pa" Watson entered at that moment to say that Roosevelt had another visitor waiting for him by appointment. "The hour set aside for a luncheon discussion with the President had expired," Eccles glumly added.

He said it was ludicrous. But was it? Perhaps FDR thought that, so early after the outbreak of war, Eccles would have nothing valuable to report, but that he had better see him. Perhaps he himself had no

questions to put. Perhaps he merely had other things on his mind. Perhaps he simply needed to relax from great events. Perhaps he was simply engaged in the continual process of sizing up those with whom he worked. But what is certain is that a politician who is not capable of such imperturbability under the strain of great events will not be a good politician. It is what Harold Wilson means when he says that "a statesman who can't sleep is no good."

For a politician not to enjoy the game -- and to have the stamina for it -- is for him not to understand the game he is in. Nixon did not enjoy it; neither did Hoover, who could not suffer "its silly indignities," and was a worrier. As Churchill once said to Macmillan, "Politics are a steeplechase, not a flat race. One never knows what will happen." One may always fall, and the man who in these circumstances does not remain content, as the English politician and journalist Leopold Amery put it, "to believe that the game itself is good, and that one plays one's best for one's chosen goals," will be nervous and oversensitive; and these in turn will make him too suspicious, until he imagines that his opponents are really his enemies, tries to circumvent the game itself, and meets an imagined conspiracy with a real one of his own.

But one must notice more about the enjoyment, the playing of the game for its own sake. It is the politician's acknowledgment that he does not know what he is doing, that he cannot tell what may be most important on his agenda, or set any inflexible priorities except the broadest. It is the besetting sin of the nonpolitician that he must order and determine priorities, and in this Jimmy Carter seems to be the compleat nonpolitician. His energy program has suffered from two primitive faults. He chose to make it a priority when there was no possible chance that the American people would agree with him; and he put in charge of it a nonpolitician who is about as sensitive to political considerations as a bulldozer would be to an anemone in its path. James Schlesinger bids fair to be the Robert McNamara of the 1970s, pulling Presidents down about his ears. A program which has been announced as a priority, run by a man who does not understand

even the primers of politics: the combination can result only in a "package" program, and the most likely thing to happen to a "package" bill is that it will be torn apart, bit by bit, until there is not even one clause of it that can be easily saved. This is not how a politician would have done it. He would have done what Roosevelt did when faced with the Great Depression: sent to Congress a score - - a hundred -- measures all of which were claimed to be for the emergency only, and when all of them were separately passed -- lo and behold! -- there was a federal program, and forty years later there it still is.

The enjoyment of the game is a way of retaining the flexibility that the politician needs, and the inflexibility of the nonpolitician or even the poor politician can take many forms. Henry VIII was in many ways a consummate politician, but he had to behead many more people than he need have done, because he often became inflexible in his purpose. As Wolsey said of him: "Be well advised and assured what you put in his head, for ye shall never pull it out again." (That reminds one of George McGovern.) Or the politician may simply become too inflexibly absorbed in a subject which might be better left alone. It was said of George Grenville, when he imposed the various measures that stirred the American colonies to rebellion, that he had read the American dispatches, when his predecessors had not bothered. Earnest and hardworking, he formed a reasonable opinion, and inflexibly he pursued it, as earnest and hardworking people are likely to do. (That reminds one of what one knows of Jimmy Carter.) One of Walter Lippmann's most devastating criticisms of Wilson's handling of the peace talks in 1919 was that Wilson should not have gone to Paris at all, that by doing so he made every agreement his own, and so catastrophically diminished his room for maneuver with the Senate when he got back home. (That reminds one of almost all recent Presidents, including now Jimmy Carter.)

So one could go on. But what perhaps matters most is that the flexibility of a politician, the very quality in him which is most despised by the other realms, is what enables him to retain one of the

rarest of his talents. The best of politicians have a capacity to see to the heart of things of which few others can boast. They will often be found ahead of all others in understanding the spirit of the age, the times they live in, and what those times require: ahead of the philosophers, the theologians, the theorizers, the scribblers, and certainly ahead of the political scientists. We may often see this only in hindsight, but then it is usually only in hindsight that we can see what they foresaw.

Robert Walpole is generally acknowledged to have been one of the greatest of modern statesmen, perhaps even the first, and it has been said that he seemed to possess a sixth sense in his grasp of essentials. He never had any doubt that what England needed after the turmoil of the seventeenth century was a period of calm and stability to establish a new order; in what was still an aristocratic England he was the first leading minister who understood that he must lead from the Commons; and when he was urged to tax the American colonies, he retorted: "I have old England set against me, and do you think I will have New England likewise?" -- a question that Lyndon Johnson might usefully have addressed to himself. From none of these insights was he ever deflected, not because they came from depth and rigidity of principle, but because they arose from his consistently flexible response to needs and occasions of the ever passing scene.

Across the Atlantic half a century later, many of the Founding Fathers revealed the same capacity to see to the heart of things; but in none perhaps was it so preeminent, both as a lawyer and a politician, in action and in theory, as in John Marshall. A contemporary said of him: "He possesses one original and almost supernatural faculty, . . . detecting at once the very point on which every controversy depends"; and again and again, as we read, we may agree. But he was able to pounce on the real point, not because of any remarkable depth of intelligence, but because in every situation he responded with what can only be called a political instinct. It is easy to say that this sixth sense for seeing to the heart of things belongs only to the exceptional statesman and not to the jobbing

politician, but the statesman comes out of the political world and its jobbing. Although he may add one last quality -- of insight, of courage, of command -- it is the political world and no other that supplies him with the information which he then transforms. Politicians talk incessantly about politics among themselves, because they need to listen to everything in order to learn what they need to know. If they listen too much to "experts" in other fields, they will not hear what they need to hear.

It is not merely a question of information -- of knowing before anyone else where the ground is shifting -- but of something more important. The workaday politicians are themselves at the heart of things -- as no one else in the country is -- even if it is then only the exceptional politician who can sift the chaff from the grain. There is no such knowledge to be had elsewhere, and one of the faults of American politics now is the increasing reliance of Presidents on nonpolitical intelligence, just as another fault is the disdain of seniority in Congress, a wasteful dismissal of the intuitive knowledge which "the whales," as Lyndon Johnson called them, have gathered over the years.

It needs to be said emphatically that the two greatest catastrophes that the United States has endured in this century -- Vietnam and Watergate -- were caused primarily by nonpoliticians acting in the political arena with little or no political leadership from their Presidents. It was no less a tragedy for Johnson than it was for the country that, in the circumstances in which he came to power, he thought it necessary or desirable to retain so many of those appointed by Kennedy, men not of his breed, as he was not of theirs, who did not know how to talk to him any more than he knew how to talk to them. Just as he needed around him the kind of men who could have said, on neither moral nor strategic grounds, "You're not going to get away with this one, Lyndon -- I won't be able to carry even my Seventh District on this," so did the nonpoliticians who were for the most part running the war, giving him ill advice, need him to say to them, "How many Seventh Districts do you think we can carry on

this, Bob? It's part of your responsibility as well as mine to consider what the war will do to the Democratic Party."

But there was no such exchange, because one of the greatest politicians of them all had abandoned his political instincts. It is this that makes the essentially nonpolitical character of Jimmy Carter's administration so threatening. Once again the nonpoliticians have been handed the administration, under a President who seems disinclined to devote himself to politics, and who is surrounded by personal advisers who are themselves nonpoliticians. America has traveled this road too often in the past two decades, and it is partly because of our deep prejudice against politics that we do not see where the danger lies.

If we are to exhort our politicians to be politicians, for our own safety, then we must allow that they face unusual occasions and that, even as they play the game, they are bound to obey moral imperatives from which most of us are exempt. They need not be as morally obtuse as Catherine II of Russia, who tried to rouse the monarchs of Europe to a crusade against regicide France, when she had had her husband, Peter II, murdered, and so was herself a regicide. But the moral imperatives which the politician must confront are not those of personal life. As J. E. Neale says admiringly of Elizabeth I, she "lied like a trooper" for her country.

No politician in a democracy in this country can go to war without his own anguish. When he returned from presenting his war message to Congress, Woodrow Wilson remarked, as its cheers and those of the crowds rang in his ears: "My message today was a message of death for our young men. How strange it seemed to applaud that." When his advisers told Roosevelt in 1940 that he must promise that no American boy would die on foreign soil, he returned to his compartment on the campaign train to be sick. No one who was ever present as the pressures of the Vietnam war began to mount, and when Johnson unburdened himself to a captive audience, can doubt that he was exploring, largely by anecdotes about politics, the nature

of the moral choices available to a politician. To discount all this is to misunderstand the meaning of the game, and the burdens for its players.

But it is not only on the great occasions that one is aware of these choices. Every politician has always complained about the business of making appointments. Louis XIV once remarked that, when he bestowed an office, he made one ingrate and a hundred malcontents. Even at the height of the Civil War, Lincoln was pursued by a train of office-seekers. Cleveland described himself as "pitching about half asleep and half awake, trying to make postmasters." The whole of Garfield's Presidency, from March to July, was occupied exclusively with patronage questions. Behind the claims to office through which the politician must thread his way, there are again some of the moral imperatives that a politician must obey, appointing for political reasons those whom he knows not to be best suited.

In this as in everything else that they do, politicians are dealing with *imponderabilia*. As in no other occupation, there is little by which they can judge, except their own intuitions. They cannot afford to miss the boat when it is time to board it -- as did Margaret of Anjou, when, by sailing for England on the tide, she might have won the throne for her son -- but neither can they afford to board the boat just as the rats are leaving it. For in politics the chances never come a second time -- its imperatives must be allowed -- and the politicians must look for the task that really defines his role and justifies it.

As I have said, there is no public until the politician makes one, and then remakes it when necessary to his purposes. The making and remaking of a genuine public, as distinct from the phantom public of the media, is the highest task of the politician, whether his constituency is a district or a state or the country. Every other realm in which we live divides us into atoms of self-interest, even within our own selves -- businessmen, wage earners, unionists, consumers, blacks, ethnics, Catholics, Protestants -- and, so divided, we are never treated as a whole, neither in our selves nor in our social

relationships, and so are made vulnerable. Politics is not satisfied to add these atoms together, and extract a false public from their mere sum. It searches for the point where a public that has not yet emerged may be found, and then made into a political force that strengthens even as it changes the whole society.

Jimmy Carter should know this as well as anyone. The few Southern liberals in the 1940s -- such as Claude Pepper and Lester Hill -- who set out to discover a new public in the South, patiently to form it however long it took, paved the way for him. They were not satisfied with the public of the South that was found in the media, or supposed to be represented in the opinion polls. They imagined a public in the South that was there to be made, and, more rapidly than might have been expected, it became a political force which helped change not only the South but the country.

If one were to make a close study of, say, Richard Russell, one would find him leaning this way and that in response to the interests and opinions of his constituents, which he could not ignore, but one would also find him feeling a deeper pull, the growth of a new public even in his own South, his own constituency, which was not that to which he had been accustomed, and which it was too late for him to lead. He could always win in his constituency; he could usually win in his committee; but he could no longer always win on his own issues in the Senate as a whole, and even the South itself was passing beyond him. In these circumstances, he still gave his token resistance, with all the graciousness for which he was renowned, but he knew how token it was. Other politicians had formed a public which he did not know.

The question that is usually put -- how far a politician should lead the public, how far he must follow it -- is therefore false. Since he is both its creator and its creature, it is not a question of leading or following it, but of knowing it, knowing what chord he touched, what public view he enlivened, beyond the mere calculation of self-interest. The politician is here moving nearer to the boundaries of change than

most of us. The whole of Roosevelt's first administration was, in one of its aspects, an attempt on his part to understand the public that he had helped to call into being. It is too facile to say that he and Jim Farley were merely adding up votes and potential votes (although they were skilled at that), because beyond that was Roosevelt himself, the true politician in a way that Farley was not, searching for the twin inspirations -- that of the public to him, and that of himself to it -- which alone create a true public that can then be governed, and helped to govern.

It is this above all that one so far misses in Jimmy Carter, as if he has not yet decided whether he is a Roosevelt or merely a Farley, and certainly not yet decided whether he would be able to get rid of a Farley -- a very different decision from that of getting rid of a Bert Lance -- when the man had become a millstone round his neck. Until he decides that the nonpoliticians whose assistance he may need should be limited in number and in influence, and subject to the most direct pressures from himself as the only politician among them, his administration will continue to lack any political inspiration, and he will have forfeited such skills of political leadership as he may possess, whose only justification is to be found in the life of politics, where alone they are exercised.