

## OUR NEXT PRESIDENT *(Originally published July 1976)*

Even though a number of important media pundits continue to circle warily around Jimmy Carter's flying coattails, cautiously nipping at some of his more vulnerable spots, their antagonism has lessened considerably now that the Plains peanut dealer seems to have pocketed the Democratic nomination. Now, in early June, it becomes more and more evident that Carter will also be our next president. In a relatively brief period since the primary campaigning began, he has accomplished what no other Democratic hopeful candidate has been able to achieve since the time of Franklin Roosevelt—reuniting nearly all factions of a horribly divided party behind him in support.

For the first time in years there are no bitter, major factions ready to bolt the party, no States Righters, no unhappy Wallace-ites, no wild-eyed McGovern-ites on the horizon to divide and dilute the Democratic vote. It has been a remarkable feat, this bringing back of order and unity into the chaos that existed just a few years ago.

Not all of the factions, of course, are entirely satisfied with Carter as the nominee, mainly because of his unusual provincial origin and because of all those unknown qualities in Carter which defy pigeon holing. The media people can't quite accept him, the labor leaders are not entirely sure of his intentions and the old-time party politicians are uncomfortable about trusting him; the liberals are worried that he may be too conservative, and the conservatives are just as uneasy about his liberalism. But all of them now see the prospect of a sweeping Democratic victory, and none of them should be willing to break away and upset the applecart.

Unless Carter stumbles badly over some unforeseen issue, the nomination should be his in a breeze. His only problem now will be to come up with a vice presidential choice who won't antagonize any of the factions and recreate discord in the newly found harmony. Actually, the old pros and liberals have no place else to go; labor probably also will have to stick with him, and only the conservative element could still present a problem. Undoubtedly Carter will be under pressure to accept a strong Eastern or Mid-Western liberal "to balance the ticket." But since he cannot possibly lose any liberal votes to the Republicans, if he is smart (and he seems to have been extremely so thus far), he should seriously consider picking someone who can nail down firmly his conservative support, otherwise he may run the risk of a significant defection and crossover of conservative votes in the general election.

If Carter is able to come up with a strong, noncontroversial vice-presidential candidate, the Republicans will be in deep trouble. In spite of all the so-called divisive

quarrelling between Ford and Reagan, they both talk the same language, and, no matter who wins the nomination, no great division or diversion of the Republican vote will follow; as with the old Democrats and liberals, there is no place else to go. The final nominee will undoubtedly get the other's full support. But in a contest against united Democrats, the Republicans will have little chance of winning a general election.

The situation for the Republican Party is almost, but not entirely, hopeless. If the economy remains stable and continues to improve, and if Carter goofs, the Republican ticket might just be strong enough to squeeze by, but only if it can develop some telling issue and can out-campaign the Democrats in the final run. This will be extremely difficult to do since, no matter their nominee, the influential media will be lined up against him. Reagan, especially, would be subject to an attack every bit as virulent as that on Goldwater in 1964, and, chances are, it would be just as effective.

The Republicans can only hope that Carter will have a softening of the brain and choose some extreme liberal (they could pray for Bella Abzug or Ronnie Dellums) as a running mate. But even without such a happening, the Republicans would be wise to consider as their vice-presidential nominee the wheeling dealing, articulate old pro John Connelly, who might be able to lure some of the Southern and Western conservative Democrats back to the Republican side.

At this point, however, it looks as if Jimmy Carter from Plains will be our next chief executive. Even though we don't plan to vote for him because of his liberal leanings in health, education, welfare and government spending, Carter as president may not be such a disaster. He is a strong-willed man, not deeply indebted to any of his Johnny-come-lately support, and apparently a man of decency and sincerity who believes in a militarily strong nation. The voters are in better luck this year than ever before. In fact, all of the probable candidates seem to be decent and honest men (or, at least, in the words of one of our intelligent, local confreres, their honesty has yet to be disproved), and also, at least, we won't be faced with a Kennedy, a Johnson, a Nixon or a McGovern on the ballot.