

Carter vs. Reagan: I am compelled to speak out

We vote tomorrow. Today is the day for summing up, for reflecting on what this flawed, shambling campaign has been all about.

By now we have had heard all the speeches, seen all the ads on TV, tested all the charges and counter-charges, evaluated the debate.

The result? Much confusion, little clear result. Most Democrats feel President Carter deserves another term; most Republicans believe Gov. Reagan can straighten this country out. Most partisans of John B. Anderson have concluded their man has no chance at all.

That leaves a remarkably large number of persons who are undecided, genuinely torn between a troubled administration and a flawed challenger. This group tends not to be partisan in its politics; it tends to vote for the man, not the party. It will decide this election.

FOR THIS GROUP the core issue is which of these two men — Carter or Reagan — is the better equipped as a person to lead this country in times of trouble in a way that is thoughtful, sensible and wise.

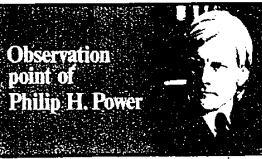
I believe that President Carter is so equipped. By contrast, I believe that Gov. Reagan's human resources are so inadequate to meet the demands of being president that I am compelled to speak out in this personal column, on this particular day, after a silence of more than two years.

My reasons:

● The vast bulk of Reagan's training and experience is as an actor and public speaker. Certainly the means by which a president leads are often theatrical. But how can we be certain that Reagan as president will be little more than a performer mouthing his lines without understanding the play? This question is made all the sharper by the system devised by Reagan's campaign to keep him in a tightly-controlled cocoon, isolated from any real-life contact with the people or the press for fear he might say something to embarrass himself.

● Reagan himself admits he has little depth of substance on the issues. He goes on to argue, however, that as president he would depend on knowledgeable advisers. This, however, raises the kinds of questions we learned to fear in the days of Nixon: What kind of advisers? How selected? How honorable? These questions were brought to focus

Observation point of Philip H. Power



last Friday when Richard V. Allen, Reagan's senior foreign policy adviser, was forced to resign from the campaign by reports that called into question his personal integrity.

● With direct political experience limited entirely to being governor of California, Reagan is almost totally untested and inexperienced in national and international affairs. How can we be sure that as president he would have the knowledge and guts to tell a delegation of four-star generals to get lost when they recommend the U.S. move a division in tomorrow? Reagan's historic tendency to shoot from the hip, especially in foreign policy matters, makes this question all the more pointed.

THE INQUIRY at the heart of these concerns — I regret having to put it so bluntly, but there is no other way — was best set out a few weeks ago by Time Magazine's senior correspondent, Laurence J. Barrett:

"Put starkly, that question is whether he is smart enough to be president... The evidence about Reagan is at best mixed."

Certainly the record of the Carter administration is also mixed, to put it mildly. But the president is a highly intelligent man, very decently instigated, with his judgment and savvy very much improved by four years on the job. My judgment is that President Carter has laid down the foundation for a successful second term — in energy, economic revitalization, defense, in foreign policy.

I may well carp and complain about another Carter presidency, but I will sleep well at night. With Reagan in the White House, I'm not all that sure.



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Staff photo by Art Emanuele



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