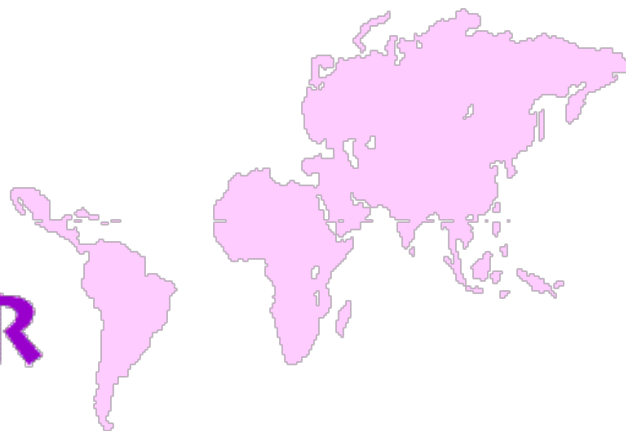


THIRD WORLD TRAVELER



Jimmy Carter and the Trilateralists: Presidential Roots

by Laurence H. Shoup

excerpted from the book

Trilateralism

edited by Holly Sklar

South End Press, 1980



Introduction

There are two levels of political process which need to be considered in any analysis of U.S. election campaigns. The first, which gets greater attention in the news media and academic writings is best labeled the party politics level. This is the familiar world of political bosses and their machines, party elites, advertising agencies merchandising a candidate to the voters, and the often carnival-like atmosphere of grass roots campaigning. The second level, much less reported — at least partly because it takes place behind the scenes — is

actually more important than the first. It is best called the ruling class level of U.S. politics. This term refers to the ways in which an upper class can control the political process. This level includes the world of large-scale fund raising from wealthy upper class individuals, the networks of influential people developed by exclusive private clubs and policy-planning groups, and the media's merchandising of favored candidates through manipulation of the definition of news...

Major party presidential nominations are the critical stage of the process of the presidential choice, because it is at this stage that alternatives are excluded and the voters' choices narrowed to only two individuals. The several years before the primaries begin and, in some cases, the primaries themselves, are crucial to this nominating process. During this early period, the mass communications media, political financiers, polls, pollsters, and party leaders produce an unofficial nominee or, at most, several viable, serious candidates... By late March 1976, Jimmy Carter ranked so high in the public opinion polls and was gathering support so rapidly that he had virtually clinched the nomination.

During this early period two things were essential to the success of candidate Carter. First, adequate financing was needed to hire a staff, to travel, to disseminate campaign literature, to buy advertisements-in short, to supply all the necessities of a modern political campaign. Second, favorable coverage from the mass communications media-both print and broadcast-was absolutely vital.

As two authorities in this field put it: **"if the mass communications media do not pay attention to a person, he has no chance of becoming president."** Media coverage, or the lack of it, also plays a major role in raising money, since journalists and media commentators label a candidate a winner or loser, serious or not, viable or not, and political financiers, like voters, take note of these appraisals. Favorable media coverage was especially crucial to Carter since he was one of the least known candidates in the field.

In 1973, leaders of the Establishment were looking for a southern representative and invited Carter to join the Trilateral Commission. This gave Carter access to individuals who could aid his campaign with financial support, advice on strategy and policy positions, and favorable coverage in the mass communications media.

Carter, the Atlanta Establishment, and the National Power Structure

Jimmy Carter was a wealthy landowner and agribusiness-man when he launched his political career in the early 1960s. By the time of his 1970 campaign for governor, Carter was personally close to, and supported by, central figures of the Atlanta Establishment-the upper class leadership group which runs that city and which has great influence throughout Georgia and the entire southeastern United States...

These and similar connections led, by 1971, to meetings between Carter and both **David Rockefeller and Hedley Donovan**, then editor-in-chief of Time magazine and now Carter's senior adviser on domestic affairs and media relations. [Donovan was also former head of OSS. - ef]

Carter was consequently no stranger to these national leaders when they decided to form the Trilateral Commission in the spring of 1973. At that time, David Rockefeller, with George S. Franklin Jr., a Rockefeller in-law, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Henry Owen, Robert Bowie, and Gerard C. Smith-the last four, now members of the Carter Administration- selected members for the Commission. To advise them on the best Southerners to include they consulted contacts in that part of the United States. Franklin, Brzezinski, Owen, Bowie, and Smith were all leading members of a premier organization of the Eastern Establishment: the Council on Foreign Relations.

The Council has a number of affiliated organizations, called the Committees on Foreign Relations, made up of local leaders in thirty-seven cities around the nation. Franklin called upon one of the leaders of the Council's Atlanta Committee-a group reflecting that city's power structure-to set up an advisory group to recommend possible members for the Commission. This was done and, on 13 April 1973, this body of prominent Atlantans recommended Carter for membership.

Jimmy Carter was a very active member of the Trilateral Commission, attending all the regional sessions and the first plenary meeting in Japan in May 1976. For this last session, Carter paid his air fare and other expenses from campaign funds and then was reimbursed by the Commission. In other words, Carter saw his journey to Japan as a campaign trip and the Commission's reimbursement represented a campaign contribution of \$1,323.44.7 For a period of several years Carter personally phoned the Commission's headquarters to keep up with the latest reports, and even

passed out trilateral pamphlets when he worked with the Democratic National Committee in 1974.

Carter and his leading advisers recognized the Commission's importance to his candidacy. Carter said in his autobiography that "service on the Trilateral Commission gave me an excellent opportunity to know national and international leaders in many fields of study concerning foreign affairs." He added that "membership on this Commission has provided me with a splendid learning opportunity..."^o

Gerald Rafshoon, Carter's media and advertising specialist, told one reporter that Carter's early trilateral tie was "most fortunate" for Carter and "critical to his building support where it counted." In addition, Carter's entire foreign policy, much of his election strategy, and some of his domestic policy has come directly from the Commission and its leading members.

The architect of Carter's foreign policy from 1975 to the present has been **Zbigniew Brzezinski**, first Commission director. Brzezinski wrote Carter's major speeches during the campaign, and, as the president's national security adviser, heads foreign policy-with assists from fellow CFR leaders and Trilateral Commissioners like Vance, Brown, Blumenthal, and a few others. The watchword for Carter's foreign policy from 1975 on was "clear it with Brzezinski." Carter would always ask when given a memorandum on foreign policy, "has Brzezinski seen this...?"

Less well known than his reliance on the Commission for his foreign policy is the fact that Carter used Commission sources for much of his campaign strategy. Brzezinski stressed as early as 1973 that the 1976 Democratic candidate "will have to emphasize work, the family, religion, and, increasingly, patriotism, if he has any desire to be elected." Samuel P. Huntington's 1975 Commission report on U.S. democracy seems to have been even more important in setting Carter's campaign strategy.

Huntington, a longtime friend of Brzezinski and a Carter adviser during the campaign became coordinator of security planning for the National Security Council in the Carter Administration until resigning in August 1978. 14 To become president, Huntington argued, a candidate should cultivate "the appearance of certain general characteristics-honesty, energy, practicality, decisiveness, sincerity, and experience." His next piece of analysis was even more striking. After reviewing the political history of the 1960s and 1970s, Huntington summed up the experience by saying:

the "outsider" in politics, or the candidate who could make himself or herself appear to be an outsider, had the inside road to political office. In New York in 1974, for instance, four out of five candidates for statewide office endorsed by the state Democratic convention were defeated by the voters in the Democratic primary; the party leaders, it has been aptly said, did not endorse Hugh Carey for governor because he could not win, and he won because they did not endorse him. The lesson of the 1960s was that American political parties were extraordinarily open and extraordinarily vulnerable organizations, in the sense that they could be easily penetrated, and even captured, by highly motivated and well-organized groups with a cause and a candidate.

Needless to say, Carter was an "insider" who campaigned as an "outsider." As Carter himself expressed it, his campaign did best "whenever we'd project ourselves as the underdog fighting the establishment...fighting a valiant battle..." ~ 7 And as president, Carter has followed several of Huntington's suggestions on domestic policy, such as tightening control over the Democratic Party and lowering expectations about what government can and should do.

One of the Commission's main initial objectives, as stated in its own publications, was to gain governmental influence in each of the three industrial capitalist sectors of the world: the U.S., Western Europe, and Japan. Only then could plans and policies be put into effect. As a 15 March 1973 memorandum put it, one of the objectives of the Commission's work would be "to foster understanding and support of Commission recommendations both in governmental and private sectors in the three regions."

In choosing members, Rockefeller and other leaders of the Commission stressed the need to find and recruit "men and women of sufficient standing to influence opinion leaders both public and private in favor of the Commission's recommendations." Carter was thus only one of many who Commission leaders felt could be influential in the future.

Commission founders also chose other politicians for membership such as Senators Walter Mondale and Robert Taft Jr.; Governor Daniel J. Evans; former Governor William W. Scranton; and Elliot Richardson. They were clearly trying to cover as many future possibilities as they could by involving a spectrum of politicians-both Democrats and Republicans-in their work.

Carter's Trilateral/Eastern Establishment connection helped him win both campaign funding and media attention. New York campaign contributions became an important supplement to Georgia funds during the second half of 1975 and throughout 1976. The main group of Carter backers, individuals who hosted gatherings or served on the Wall Street Committee for Carter, collectively made up an impressive list of socially and financially prominent people. They were connected to each other and interacted socially through common membership in various institutions of the Eastern Establishment-elite social clubs, the Council on Foreign Relations (which had thirty-six members and ten directors on the Trilateral Commission in 1976), corporate boards of directors, etc.

These members and their positions as of 1976 included: Roger C. Altman, a partner in Lehman Brothers investment banking firm (the firm's chairman, Peter G. Peterson, is a member of the Commission and a director of the CFR); John Bowles, a banker and member of the Metropolitan Club, which has Trilateral Commissioners and numerous CFR leaders as members (Bowles first met Carter through Mike Troter, a close friend who was a lawyer with the Alston, Miller and Gaines law firm in Atlanta); C. Douglas Dillon, of Dillon Read investment banking firm, a director of the CFR, trustee of the Committee for Economic Development, the Brookings Institute and the Business Council and a member of Chase Manhattan Bank's international advisory board, and the Links and Century Clubs; Henry Luce III, a director of Time magazine (along with Hedley Donovan) and a member of the Yale and University Clubs (which have other Commissioners as members); Howard Samuels, "Baggies" tycoon and Democratic party official; Theodore C. Sorenson, a corporate lawyer and active member of the CFR; and Cyrus Vance, a director of several leading corporations, early Trilateral Commissioner, and vice-chairman and a director of the CFR.

However, in all likelihood, an even more important result of Carter's trilateral tie was the inside track for favorable media coverage it gave him. As one journalist put it, this connection gave Carter "an opportunity to convince the corporate and media leaders that he was not a rustic yahoo, but a man to be taken seriously." The media establishment did indeed take the Carter candidacy seriously...

Conclusion

Jimmy Carter, using a combination of charm, hard work, middle-of-the-road policy positions, and a keen sense of where power lies in the U.S., built his political career by gaining support, first from the Establishment of his local

area, and then from the dominant sector of the national ruling class. Traditional democratic constituencies like labor, intellectuals, minorities, ethnics, and big city machines provided support as time went on but the key to Carter's victory was the early support given by upper class groups centered in Atlanta and New York, especially the latter's large financial and media corporations.

The makeup and locus of power in Carter's administration supplies strong additional evidence of the validity of this perspective. The individuals Carter chose to fill the central policy making positions in his administration were overwhelmingly from Eastern Establishment organizations: the Trilateral Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Committee for Economic Development. In addition, at least six assistant secretaries of State and Treasury are also either Commissioners or CFR members, as are numerous ambassadors, advisers, and government negotiators. These men make the most important foreign, economic, and domestic policy decisions of the U.S. government today; they set the goals and direction for the administration.

The Eastern Establishment—through the Trilateral commission, the Council on Foreign Relations, and key media corporations—helped elect Jimmy Carter president. What does this mean for the future? It means increased ruling class control over U.S. politics, leaving minorities, the women's movement, the Left and even traditional Democratic Party constituencies like unions and liberals with less and less influence. This increased control is deemed necessary by Eastern Establishment leaders in order to give them freer reign to address the domestic and international crises facing the capitalist system during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s.

The shape of their plans to deal with these problems add up to an increased appetite for authority, discipline, and control. The U.S. ideological climate has shifted to the right over the past few years, providing the basis for a forced decline in the living standards of the working class. This trend bears close watching and appropriate — action by all those who desire a more, rather than less, democratic world.