Carter and Congress
Can't they coexist?

By William Lasser
Why Not the Boss?

The national press has been seized by a compulsion to analyze the President's competence in office, and has been led by all the leading political commentators in the conclusion that Jimmy Carter, though he might have been adept as a peanut farmer in Plains, is inept as President in Washington.

The nation's political seers also seem to have decided, though this point is more than the debatable one, that Carter will be a one-term President and that, all the same, he may be able to do some good in the top spot, he had best begin looking for a job for 1981.

There can be no question that Carter is not succeeding at all that he once set out to do. His energy package, which survived the House by the grace of God and Tip O'Neill, is being ripped to shreds by the oil companies and the Senate. A New York poll shows that despite the President's media blitzes on the subject, he has convinced only 42 percent of the American people that the energy crisis is "very serious," hardly a view consistent with Carter's moral declaration of war.

Its success in economic areas is equally non-apparent. Although he attempted to reassure big business that he really is not against them, the stock market has dropped to a two-year low. Inflation continues unabated, and unemployment remains a major concern for working-class Americans.

Several weeks after the Lance affair, Carter is still in the on the offensive. He was forced to bow down on introducing a tax reform plan proposed during the campaign until Congress finishes up with his other programs. Although he may push the Panama Canal treaty through the Senate, it will not be done without cost to his other proposals.

Looking at Carter's bold legislative attempts and at their utter ruin at the hands of Congressional power brokers, the press has concluded that the President lacks the ability needed to effectively govern the country. Surely with better tactics his proposals or at least his image will be in better shape, but such a conclusion does not imply that the problem lies altogether with the President.

Carter's main difficulty is that he promised too much, more than any man could possibly deliver. He told the American people that jobs would be his first priority, that he would balance the budget, institute a clean-up the welfare mess, and put morality back into foreign policy. His energy program, while far from perfect, is an attempt to solve a difficult problem. Congress, playing up to the wishes of its constituents, is balking at higher taxes and other sacrifices. Carter admits that he really is not against them, the stock market has dropped to a two-year low. Inflation continues unabated, and unemployment remains a major concern for working-class Americans.

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