

ERIC MARGOLIS



Tuesday drama

One must feel a certain sympathy for Walter Mondale. He is an able politician, former vice-president, a man of knowledge, experience and integrity. Just the sort of man to become president — except that American voters don't seem to think so.

Instead, if the polls are correct, they will give Ronald Reagan a smashing victory in tomorrow's elections. No matter that Reagan is fuzzy about foreign affairs, the oldest of U.S. presidents and, as we saw in the debates, running in low gear. Americans love Reagan the folksy man and tough leader.

Beyond these one-dimensional TV images, Americans seem to have been moved by other important considerations. As the murder of Indira Gandhi and the attempted assassinations of Presidents Reagan and Ford showed, the chief of state is frighteningly vulnerable. Geraldine Ferraro may have stimulated the juices of feminists and given little girls a new life's ambition, but deep down most Americans, women and men, just don't think she is competent enough to be vice-president.

The outpouring of youthful support for Reagan has shown clearly that Americans are feeling their oats and looking for strong leadership. They are fed up with the arcane complexities of foreign affairs and economic mumbo-jumbo. Americans want action, not the type of excuses and hand-wringing they got from Jimmy Carter.

Mondale simply cannot escape the legacy of being Carter's vice-president and the crown prince of discredited liberalism. Weak, vacillating, "concerned" Jimmy Carter was, as one wit said, "America's first female president." The Democrats, moaning endlessly about inequalities, the poor and the need for "dialogue," sound very much like a nagging housewife. Americans want a man at the wheel.

Reagan does it right

Last week, Mondale showed untypical fire by telling some hecklers to "shut up!" Then, revealingly, he shyly added, "oops, did I say that?" Is this the man who is going to stare down the Kremlin table thumpers? Reagan does it right. Sweet on the surface; inside, we suspect, lurks John Wayne, just waiting to get out.

Image is not Mondale's only problem. Democrats are fast losing the regional and blue-collar support that gave them the appearance of a broad-based party. Having lost traditional support from southerners, Catholics, Jews and many blue-collar workers, the core of Democratic support is now unions, blacks, teachers, bureaucrats and the welfare establishment.

Politics means paying off IOUs. Americans realize that the Democrats will pay off their supporters by more federal spending and this means higher taxes and rising inflation. After the Carter years, most Americans simply do not trust the Democrats to manage the economy or defend the U.S.

Mondale can't escape this problem. Over 75% of voters rate the economy as their prime concern. Reagan has pulled America out of deep recession and produced a powerful resurgence. No one can argue with such obvious success.

Unemployment is down, inflation has been crushed, taxes reduced and the march of big government halted. The administration's only major domestic failure has been its inability to halt the rising deficit. But here, Reagan can clearly pin the blame on the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives.

Tomorrow, the most decisive element of election will focus on this issue. If the Republicans retain their thin majority in the Senate and capture 35 to 50 seats in the House, Reagan's second term may prove a stunning economic success. Not since Eisenhower have the Republicans held the presidency and House, the latter of which controls the federal purse strings.

Strength to cut programs

Reagan's efforts to cut social spending, and thus the deficit, have been foiled by liberal House Democrats. An alliance of Republicans and conservative Democrats, backed by a last-term president, will have the political strength to cut popular but ruinous social programs. If the Democrats retain the House, we can expect more inflation, higher taxes and a good amount of political paralysis.

Should the Democrats lose their fiefdoms of patronage in the House, they may not recover them for a generation. Failure to produce handouts for "disadvantaged" voters and goodies for unions will inevitably cause a long-term loss of votes for the Democrats.

These thoughts enthrall Republican strategists. Perhaps normally cantankerous American voters, who traditionally split power in Washington between the two parties, will finally give the Republicans a sweeping mandate. Then again, second presidential terms usually see an increase in the House for the opposition party. Tomorrow will produce some real drama.

America, we should not forget, is a nation in constant revolution. Not the bloody upheavals of many benighted lands, but a process of sustained, forceful change within the bounds of law and decency. From rock and roll, to feminism, to Reaganomics, revolutionary America keeps producing great waves of social and economic change that sweep across the entire world.

Tomorrow, we may see another stage in the great conservative revolution that began four years ago and which has brought America unrivalled prosperity and strength. Or, if the Democrats retain the House, four more years of painful political infighting.

It's too bad Canadians can't vote tomorrow. Washington affects our economy and defence just as much as Ottawa. A big Republican win will mean very good news for Canada and the Western world.

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