

Mondale for President

We're for Walter Mondale, even though Ronald Reagan has in some ways done a good job. America, the President says with permissible hyperbole, is back and he deserves credit because the country feels so much better than it did four years ago. Mr. Reagan has a gift for symbolism and salesmanship; when he salutes the flag and the troops, he embodies a wide renewal of pride in country.

And there's more to it than just the persuasions of a patriotic pitchman. People feel better off because many people are better off. The oil shocks and hyper-inflation of the 1970's have been calmed. Unemployment, after soaring for months, has fallen back to the 1980 level. Real income is up.

So why not re-elect the President? For three reasons. First, because of the way he has paid for our recovery, and his popularity: with the pain of millions of people thrown out of work in the last four years and with the hundreds of billions of dollars Government must borrow in the next four.

Second, because much of the rest of his domestic program is repugnant. Mr. Reagan has punished the poor and retreated from civil rights. He has, laudably, continued the deregulation begun by Jimmy Carter. But the same President who vows to get Government off people's backs has recklessly pushed its nose into the most private realms of religion and family life.

Finally, and most important, because Mr. Reagan's diplomacy, mostly ineffective, has also been dangerous. Not only has he failed to stabilize the nuclear arms race but he has propelled it to new heights and lacks any plausible strategy for regaining control.

Walter Mondale has flaws. Until recent days, he so lacked fire as a campaigner that people called him "Norwegian wood." He has lacked a theme; at times, it seemed to be merely that he's Not Reagan. He is heavily indebted to labor and interest groups.

His running mate is not as ready to be President as is George Bush. Choosing Geraldine Ferraro as the first woman on a national ticket unleashed a welcome wave of energy. But it has also brought a backwash of troubling questions about her husband's dealings and associates.

Now consider Mr. Mondale's strengths. His election would mean franker, fairer decisions on the hard economic choices that the President has concealed during the campaign. Mr. Mondale would offer an enlightened and humane conception of what Government should, and should not, do. Most of all, he would bring to the White House the will to control nuclear weapons.

So give Ronald Reagan due credit for what he has done, 1981 to 1984. The decision now should turn on who offers brighter promise for 1985 to 1988. In all three Presidential categories, our choice is Walter Mondale.

More Arms, Less Control

What President Reagan has pursued abroad is not a strategy but an unattainable slogan — "superiority." He has thrown dollars at Defense without curbing military appetites for fancy, fragile technology. He has failed to harness either diplomacy or economic power to the quest for security.

Recall how much energy was wasted just to undo the damage of his first year's quarrels with China, Israel and the European allies. In the Middle East, he remains mostly at the mercy of events. In Central America, he awaits at best the diplomacy of others to shape his "no-lose" military exertions.

By pressing ahead with a "Star Wars" missile defense, Mr. Reagan is forcing the arms race into outer space. Yet most scientists think it can't possibly be practical till far into the 21st century. Committing to more than modest research is incredibly wasteful, as if President Wilson had vowed in 1919 to put a man in space.

Because of his lifelong opposition to arms control, Mr. Reagan might have driven good bargains with the Russians. Yet unlike every other President of the nuclear era, he lacks the conviction and dedicated personnel to achieve agreement, or even a good plan for achieving it.

True, it takes two to negotiate and the Kremlin has had three leaders in four years. But Mr. Reagan, balking at past agreements, offered none of them any plausible new approach. Though he may finally be ready, as he says, to pursue accord, he has, perhaps even unwittingly, ordered up weapons and appointed officials that obstruct the way.

Walter Mondale believes in a sturdy defense. He also stands in the middle of the bipartisan community that long ago learned to abandon the fruitless quest for nuclear superiority. In this election, he represents all those Republicans and Democrats determined to tame the nuclear threat.

Lawyer Mondale offers pragmatic skill at making the best of reality. Ideologue Reagan offers the same tenacity that has brought him out diplomatically empty-handed. Who is likely to do better in arms negotiations in the next term, Walter Mondale or the President who tickles the religious right by reviling the Soviet Union as an Evil Empire?

Off People's Backs, Into Their Beliefs

To Henry Steele Commager, the historian, the 1983 speech in which Mr. Reagan described the Russians in that way was "the worst Presidential speech in American history, and I've read them all" — not because it was undiplomatic but because "No

other Presidential speech has ever so flagrantly allied the government with religion. There was a gross appeal to religious prejudice."

In such ways, Mr. Reagan readily turns himself from a conservative libertarian into a statist. He perversely condemns as "intolerant" anyone who opposes organized school prayers. He continues to flog at abortion though it is barely a Federal, let alone a Presidential, concern.

Lately, Reagan Republicans have called this a matter of civil rights — of the unborn fetus. Would that their President were so attentive to the minority millions whom the civil rights laws were designed to protect. Not until the Congressional momentum was unstoppable could Mr. Reagan finally bring himself to support even the 1982 bill renewing voting rights.

There is every reason, therefore, to worry about potential Reagan appointments to the Supreme Court. Since five of its Justices are 75 or older, the President elected this year is likely to leave a deep imprint. The last Roosevelt appointee to leave the Court, William O. Douglas, did so in 1975, 30 years after F.D.R.'s death.

President Reagan deserves credit for fastening the nation's attention on the need to restrain social spending. That fostered bipartisan collaboration on Social Security costs and commendable innovation in containing Medicare. But where has the Administration concentrated its budget cutting? Not on swollen middle-class entitlements but on the famous social safety net for the poor. For example, one Federal judge after another has had to order the Administration to restore disability benefits to thousands of helpless people thrown out of the safety net.

As for the environment, Mr. Reagan was too long content to let his record be written by James Watt and Anne Burford and other zealots who sabotaged or flouted the laws to protect air, water and human health.

Walter Mondale, son of a stern Minnesota minister, knows it is important for both church and state to maintain a respectful distance. He has stood for civil rights and liberties from his earliest days in politics. He has championed individual and human rights, the right to a lawyer or the right to be left alone by government. His interest in family addresses the public policy issue of day care, not the personal torment of abortion.

Feeling Fine, On Borrowed Money

In a 1981 impression of the President, Rich Little, the comedian, explained Reaganomics. "Let's suppose your mom baked a big blueberry pie," he said. The top half is for defense spending, the bottom half is for domestic programs — "and the other half is for the national debt."

At the time, it sounded merely comic. The President was denouncing deficit spending at every turn. Why, he said, the national debt was equivalent to "a stack of \$1,000 bills 67 miles high." But since then, even while calling for a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution, he's raised the stack another 40 miles.

The huge Reagan deficits weigh heavily on the economies of other nations. They divert capital away from poor countries, making development that much harder, and they put the United States in hock to the world. There's no reason to expect that in the next four years Mr. Reagan will keep the budget-balancing promise he's broken so dramatically in the last four.

Walter Mondale comes from the party that invented deficit spending but there is reason to think he would do better. It may have been a bravely candid act, or perhaps politically foolhardy, but he began his campaign in San Francisco in July by declaring that he would, among other things, raise taxes to reduce the deficit.

Unless most economists are crazy, the country can't keep borrowing \$200 billion a year. Everyone knows that spending cuts can't suffice. Everyone knows a tax increase is well-nigh inevitable. For all his feigned horror, Mr. Reagan knows it, too. The question is not whether there'll be a tax increase but whether the burden will be distributed fairly. On the evidence of his first term, Mr. Reagan will soak the poor, favor the rich and throw more money at the Pentagon.

There's another, less tangible standard for judging candidates for President: theatrical skill, the capacity to inspire. The hecklers who chant, "Reagan, Reagan, he's no good / Send him back to Hollywood" are missing a crucial point. Salesmanship is a precious Presidential asset and Mr. Reagan has it. He's the master salesman, the Music Man, of American politics.

Walter Mondale has all the dramatic flair of a trigonometry teacher. His Nordic upbringing makes it hard for him to brag. The first debate may have been the high point of his political personality. But there's power in his plainness.

Precisely by not dramatizing issues, he has consistently produced consensus and agreement, as a Senator and as Jimmy Carter's Vice President. And for all the talk about his vacillation, Mr. Mondale has grit. When knocked down, he does not blame his staff or his opponent's makeup. He gets up and starts swinging again.

Chances are that come Nov. 6, he'll keep on doing the same, win or lose. As the man most likely to reduce the deficit, to spread burdens fairly and to control nuclear weapons, Walter Mondale deserves to win.