

# Kennedy: Profile of a Technician . . . Ted Lewis

Washington, D C

For two years now, President Kennedy has been an activist, displaying his managerial and manipulation techniques in almost every facet of government. As a result, the public knows a lot about the President's techniques of leadership and yet paradoxically little about the direction in which he is moving or how he will act when obstacles confront him.

Normally our Presidents, after two years in office, become more or less stereotyped in the public mind, it has always been fairly clear how they would act in any given situation. It is uniquely different today as Kennedy enters his third year in office. It should be possible, but it isn't, to say that he is a strong President, or that he is developing into one, or, perhaps, that he is an energetic President who applies his energies unpredictably. With Kennedy, all such estimates are hazardous, at best. His record shows that he displays power, sometimes ruthlessly, in facing up to one problem, and then meets another with caution and uncertainty.

Any examination of his operations to date suggests the basic reason for the fog over the Kennedy image. His methods and style vary, and the unfortunate impression is left that they vary with the economic, political and global climate. This flexibility suggests to some the lack of deep-rooted political ideals and purposefulness in connection with domestic policy. More serious is the effect of his apparent opportunism in the foreign-affairs arena. Even the simplest pronouncement by the President on a cold-war policy problem raises doubts abroad whether it carries the conviction of real intentions.

This is the price that Kennedy is paying for his manipulation techniques—some of them devious.

The Cuba crisis operation certainly showed that the President could move with power and daring. But the real significance of this grave crisis has never been properly emphasized. This centers on one fact—that in twenty-one previous months of dealing with Nikita

Khrushchev, the President had failed to convince Moscow that he would stand firm when the issue of a nuclear war was posed starkly.

Could it be that Kennedy's flexible style in handling his Presidential responsibilities both on the home front and in dealings with our own allies contributed to Khrushchev's need to try to solve the Kennedy enigma? Why else were the Soviet missiles and bombers placed in full view in Cuba? By forcing the issue, Khrushchev was finding out what he wanted to know about Kennedy—and, incidentally, what the American people were even more desirous of knowing.

Cuba provided solid evidence, then, as to how the President would act in a grave international emergency. There are few sound clues to be found in his record as to how he will respond in any particular domestic home crisis, big or minor. His rhetoric—inspirational as it often is—is of scant help, for too often he has followed tough talk by accepting compromise. At various times, and under varying conditions, he has displayed great impetuosity, an excess of caution and both impatience and admirable perseverance.

One of the keenest inquirers into the Kennedy *modus operandi* is probably James MacGregor Burns of Williams College. In his friendly but penetrating 1960 political biography, *John Kennedy: A Political Profile*, Burns predicted that Kennedy, if elected, would

*mobilize traditional tools of Presidential power and use them with force, astuteness and tenacity. He would show a flair for personal influence and manipulation, perhaps some of the flair Roosevelt had. He would drive hard bargains, forming alliances with Republicans when necessary, but compromising too, when he lacked the votes.*

This was perspicacious forecasting. Yet it is not so much the President's personalized methods of operating as it is the complex nature of his personality and the uncertainty as to his goals that disturb the American people, even those—and they are in the majority—who admire and support him. His motives, in any given situation, are becoming more and more suspect.

This is already developing as a political problem, although it is clearly one the Democratic Party is going to have to live with as long as Kennedy is in office.

Consider, for example, the questions being raised around the country. Why is the President unwilling to take on Congress and go to the people for support of the social-reform and other "forward looking" domestic measures he once considered vitally needed? Is there still something about the Cuba crisis we haven't been told about? Have we been playing British politics with the Skybolt missile? Will Kennedy really make a fight to get the new Congress to act on medicare and education aid? Or will he go all out only to get passage of his tax-cut—tax-reform program?

This questioning state of mind often breeds ugly suspicions. Hence, for example, the whispers that the President and his brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, are pursuing a personal vendetta against Jimmy Hoffa, the Teamster boss. Hence the suspicion that the President, while appearing the essence of frankness, is actually quite a conniver, *vide* the Adlai Stevenson affair. Hence the Republican-fed report that Kennedy timed the Cuban missile crisis for just before the November elections.

The examples could be multiplied many times. The President, however, appears impervious to these widely aired suspicions. He obviously remains supremely confident of his standing with the American public.

In the view of some liberals, the fairly widespread wonder as to what really goes on in Washington is founded on loss of faith in the President's political philosophy. Kennedy won the election in 1960 as a liberal. He has since performed as a middle-of-the-road progressive. The view of the Democratic Party expressed by White House aide and historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., probably comes closest to revealing what the party is up to as it functions here under Kennedy. The party, wrote Schlesinger in *The Politics of Hope*, is "humane, skeptical and pragmatic . . . has no dogma, no sense of Messianic mission, no belief that mortal man can attain

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Utopia, no faith that fundamental problems have final solutions."

A President subscribing generally to that belief would operate about as Kennedy has. He has Republicans high in his Administration like Treasury Secretary Dillon and Defense Secretary McNamara, on whom he counts for advice. He keeps on friendly terms with those in Congress, like Senator Harry F. Byrd (D, Va.), who oppose virtually all bills embodying the party's national economic and social philosophy as espoused by Kennedy in the 1960 campaign.

The liberal disillusionment with Kennedy of 1963 is, of course, one factor responsible for the questions constantly raised as to the President's motivations. In this connection, there is an interesting off-beat estimate which suggests that, under Kennedy, a vacuum on Democratic Party issues exists in Washington. It comes from Maurice Rosenblatt, chairman of the Board of Advisers of the National Committee for an Effective Congress. Rosenblatt had this to say about the President:

*One of the accepted generalities or clichés of our time is that he [Kennedy] is a master politician. He certainly is a master at election politics, at getting elected. But what we say is that he needs to use more of the arts of persuasion and more of the arts of politics to get his program through [Congress].*

Rosenblatt said that while historically the Democratic Party was able to create issues very well, it

has been a long time since it did so. He credited Eisenhower with making the last two big issues—that of the balanced budget and inflation. And he did so by carrying his cause to the people; as a result, his "message" got through to Congress.

Kennedy's refusal to use his popular leadership to put national pressures on Congress rankles with the reformist element in his party. But in true pragmatist fashion, Kennedy says he is convinced he can fare better working with Congress than by fighting it. This wheeling and dealing with the legislators is one of Kennedy's most intricate techniques. His wheel horse in this operation is his legislative lieutenant, Lawrence O'Brien, but the Chief Executive is always battle-available, making personal phone calls to Capitol Hill as he practices the soft art of persuasion.

The dealing is occasionally of precinct-politics character: a suggestion that defense contracts may be at stake, or that patronage may be frozen, or a reminder that the President is most likely to find time to campaign in behalf of a Senator or Representative who votes "right."

Not all of the pressures come from the White House, they can come from the Administration's leaders in Congress. But with the President and the White House staff in the thick of the operations, one assumes that the pressures originate with the Chief Executive.

This manipulating method of dealing with Congress is the basis

for the suspicion that the President moves in similar devious ways in all other affairs of state. The reasoning is unfortunate. Dealing with a recalcitrant Congress, particularly one dominated by one's own party, presents a problem wholly different from that posed by world and domestic issues not subject to the legislative mill.

When a critical decision must be reached at his own official family level, the President's technique is something else again, although the technique may vary from issue to issue. On cold-war problems, he is an inveterate brain-picker, using those whose grasp of the situation, and willingness to propose and defend effectively the solution they favor, he has learned to respect. It would be almost axiomatic, therefore, should a crisis of the order of Cuba develop again, that he would move toward his own decision by listening to men like Dean Acheson, Secretary McNamara, Secretary Dillon, Chief of Staff General Maxwell Taylor, his brother Robert and, of course, his own national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy. Secretary of State Dean Rusk's absence from this list should be noted. What Rusk thinks, he would keep to himself, as he wants to be in a position to carry out loyally whatever decision Kennedy makes.

Sometimes, of course, a major issue involves the jurisdiction of both the Executive Branch and of Congress. This, in the past, has called for a different managerial technique. Kennedy has shown himself at his most skillful in this type of operation. In the last Congress, Kennedy succeeded in bringing about passage of the important tariff-reduction act aimed at fitting the United States into the trade pattern of the developing European Community. Name Republicans like former Secretary of State Christian Herter were called in as high-level lobbyists. Key public-relations men from private industry were "loaned" to the White House to make the build-up effective.

The same sort of elaborate selling job will be done on the new Congress to get the tax-cut program through, with Republican talent carefully brought into the act along with respected business leaders.

Where the White House technique has fumbled—and is likely to do so again—will be generally in ac-



"We'll rock around the clock!"

tions taken on the domestic scene in which the President and the Attorney General find themselves involved together. This has been particularly true in the Administration's attempt to "manage" the news. It is natural, of course, for the Administration to be open and above-board with the communications media when it has nothing to hide, i.e., when the White House considers that it has handled a problem adroitly and successfully. But when there has been a failure, the trap door on "authoritative" information is slammed shut, as after the Cuban invasion fiasco of April, 1961. Or, as in the University of Mississippi story, the media are used to cover mistakes.

In Mississippi, there had been pre-crisis negotiations by telephone with Governor Ross Barnett of a nature suggesting that Attorney General Kennedy actually thought that he could persuade the arch-segregationist to fall in line—and stay there. There was also the highly questionable final decision to send federal marshals into Oxford first, not troops.

Except in the South, the whole nasty episode receded in public interest with the Cuban crisis of late October. But last month it was revived in an "authoritative" *Look* magazine article that carried the imprint of helping Administration hands. Why? News management again: to convince the public that the Barnett-Bobby Kennedy phone talks made sense—which they never did and never will.

The Administration's manage-

ment of the news after the Cuban crisis was more disturbing to many people than the controls exercised during the crisis itself. This involved "authoritative" revelations of what supposedly went on in the secret sessions of the National Security Council. And more recently there has been the questionable news management of the Cuban prisoner-ransom deal. Once the prisoners had been returned and American reaction was highly favorable, it suddenly developed that the deal had been masterminded by Robert F. Kennedy, not lawyer James B. Donovan, though that certainly had not been the impression given the public earlier.

Undeniably, the President's overall handling of his office has been unusually controversial. On the other hand, few Presidents in our history have been subjected to so close a day-in, day-out scrutiny. This was in part because of Kennedy's comparative youth and the great national interest in how he would sail the ship of state. But there was something more. Kennedy followed Eisenhower and whipped Nixon to gain office. The man he succeeded in the White House had occupied the Presidency for eight years. Eisenhower was a most undeviating character; his every move was easily comprehended, almost predictable. Those who know him say that he had neither the capacity nor the inclination for intrigue. Then, in 1960, Kennedy campaigned against Nixon, who had already established a reputation for devious-

ness—"Tricky Dick," many people called him. By comparison Kennedy, despite his admitted mental ability, seemed simple and disarming—ironically, more in the mold of Eisenhower than was Nixon.

So, once elected, Kennedy's frequent use of intricate, usually skillful but occasionally devious, techniques came as a surprise to his supporters and was disconcerting to many of them. James MacGregor Burns, in his new book, *The Deadlock of Democracy*, cautiously implies a little disillusionment on his own part. Referring to the trouble met by the Administration's proposals in the 1962 Congress, he said the difficulties "aroused complaints by some liberals that the Administration lacked a central purpose of vision or grand design, that it had bent before every gust of public opinion instead of coming to grips with its enemies, that the Augustan age of poetry and power forecast by Robert Frost had become a managerial age of empty rhetoric and manipulation." Burns somewhat softly gives it as his opinion that these critics underestimate the "centrifugal forces operating on the President and the sheer intractability of the operational problems." But he still thinks there is something to their point of view.

An estimate of the Kennedy operation in the future based on the past still must be highly tenuous. About all that can be guaranteed is that life in these United States, as long as Kennedy is in the White House, is likely to be exciting—and somewhat insecure.

## Does the 'Profit Squeeze' Hurt? . . . Peter L. Bernstein

Even though 1962 set an all-time record for corporate profits—about \$26 billion after taxes—businessmen were clearly dissatisfied with the results. Complaints about the hard sell, price competition and rising costs were just as frequent and audible as in years when earnings were lower. A typical comment came from one chemical company

executive who summed it all up by saying, "Sure, they're new highs, but they're not the kind of highs to reflect the full effort thrown into them."

Complaints about the profit squeeze have been coming along in such profusion and regularity as to give the appearance of a chronic ailment of American business. If so, this is serious. But how valid is the evidence of deteriorating corporate earning power? Even more important, to what extent is the lagging trend in profits causing a similarly sluggish performance by

the economy in general and business capital investment in particular?

An impressive array of statistics can be gathered to show that the profit squeeze is a matter of genuine concern. For example, although Gross National Product — that is, the nation's total output of goods and services — has increased by 120 per cent since the early post-war years of 1947-49, corporate profits before taxes are up only 67 per cent. This lag has become increasingly noticeable in recent years: profits have risen only 11

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