



Walter F. Mondale: "I said right off I wasn't interested in being a ceremonial Vice President, and Jimmy agreed."

THE REMAKING OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

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By Brock Brower

WASHINGTON. The first clue should have been when Jimmy Carter allowed Fritz Mondale not just White House-room but his pick of any office that was n't oval.

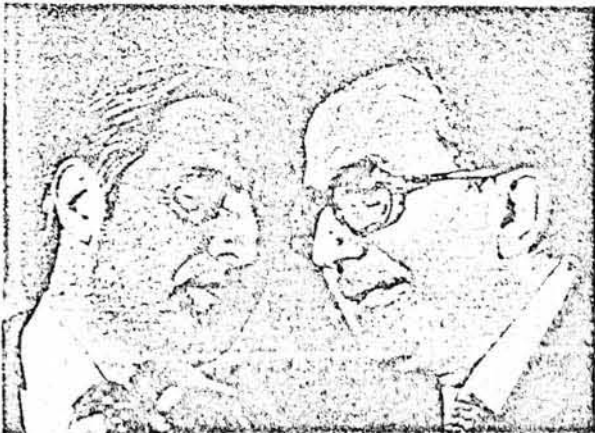
"It was the President's suggestion," Mondale is quick to say. "I was afraid of Haldeman's ghost down in that corner one, so I picked this one."

This one is a little more tucked away, but still right off that first-floor corridor that leads to the President's Office, putting him between his old friend Zbigniew Brzezinski and his new friend Ham Jordan. From its high-paned windows the view is westerly.

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but what Mondale mostly overlooks is the gray-walled Executive Office Building, where every other modern Vice President has been sent for live entombment. He doesn't really like going over there too often himself. One day he happened to wander across with Senator Alan Cranston, who asked him if he ever took the tunnel to the E.O.B. Mondale said he didn't know anything about any tunnel, what tunnel? Cranston said there had to be a tunnel somewhere; Nixon kept using it to avoid the press. "Oh, he just always looked like he came out of a tunnel," Mondale insisted. Occasionally he will host a lunch over in the Vice Presidential suite of offices that is still maintained in the E.O.B., or maybe, late in the day, step across to pay a mercy call on a few lonely staffers, but basically his attitude is that "over there, you might as well be in Baltimore."

"Matter of fact," he was saying the other day,



In Rome with Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti.

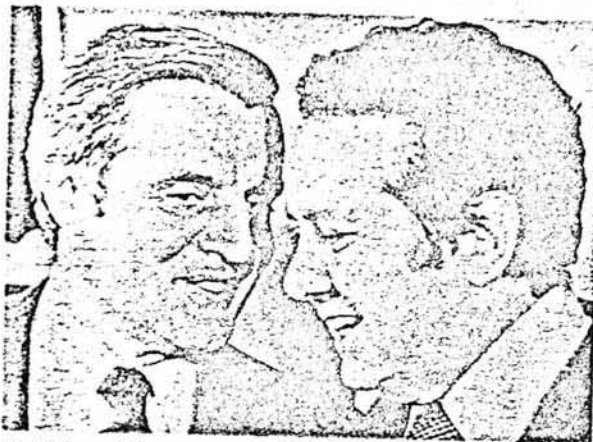


In Bonn with West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt.

after a hard look out his White House windows, "it is Baltimore." Several in attendance felt called upon to disabuse him. "All right, it's lovely, but it just isn't propinque."

That turns out to be an adjectival form of "propinquity," which Webster's defines as a "state of being near. . . nearness of blood; kinship. . . nearness of place; neighborhood. . . nearness of nature, disposition, interests, etc." Since the Carter people, more than most, represent a whole hydra of such nearnesses, what Walter F. Mondale has determined to do — as something of an outlander — is make himself ubiquitously propinque.

Breaking with history and political usage, Carter has positioned Mondale within his Presidency — as general adviser, trouble-shooter and mover-and-shaker without portfolio — so that even Presidential Assistant Hamilton Jordan says, "I consider I work



In Lisbon with Portuguese Prime Minister Mario Soares.

for Mondale. He's my second boss, the way Carter is my first boss."

"I said right off that I wasn't interested in being a ceremonial Vice President, that I'd have to be in the loop," Mondale emphasized, "and he agreed." In fact, by putting Mondale directly "in the loop," Carter may have instigated what could turn out to be his first major governmental reform. Roughly speaking, these are the new powers and perquisites the Vice President suddenly enjoys:

Direct access to the President. "I go into that office any time I want," Mondale says, still properly awed. By his own estimate, he is with the President, off and on, about an hour of every day. "I don't mean I'm stomping in and out of there," he makes clear, but he comes and goes on a regular and valued basis — to report, to advise, to go fetch — far more often than most of the President's men.

Right of presence during the conduct of all White House business. As Jordan puts it, "He can self-invite himself to anything he wants." He sees the President's schedule of meetings — which often already include him — the day before, and picks and chooses among events elsewhere in the West Wing. During a single day he may be in the Oval Office for an hour with some head of state — he is often the third man at a private meeting with the President — then upstairs with Frank Moore's Congressional liaison people, then around the corner next door with Brzezinski and the National Security Council staff. "No Vice President — and I've talked to [Hubert] Humphrey about this since — has had the N.S.C. briefings I'm getting." So he is sure he is really in the know, not just being wheeled around from window to window.

Real surrogacy. Presidents have always used their Vice Presidents ceremonially as stand-in dummies, but Carter is actually asking Mondale to substitute for him on substantive matters. He will have Mondale chair the first 50 minutes of a White House meeting, then come in himself for the last 10 minutes to be brought up to speed. Mondale's postinaugural trip was no mere junket but a politic round of calls upon world leaders, arranged so that Mondale could later introduce them to the then unknown Jimmy Carter. On his latest trip, he enunciated a bold change of policy toward Africa, placing strong pressure on the whites in Rho-

desia and South Africa to yield to eventual black majority rule. South African Prime Minister John Vorster, who couldn't have been pleased, had to argue with him as an equal. One sign of Mondale's surrogate status is a change in Washington's prandial diplomacy. Now, at the White House, Carter dines only once with a visiting foreign dignitary. Mondale goes to the return dinner: "I give him the night off."

His own initiative. There are matters that Carter specifically asks Mondale to handle — such as the policy review on Africa — and then there are matters that Mondale pursues entirely on his own hook. "I don't have to go and report to him, like, here are 18 problems I solved last week, do I get an A-plus or a C-minus? He's told me he'd rather never even hear about those problems."

Once already, Mondale has personally begun and led a major White House push, bringing the President in only when it finally came to shove — the campaign on Capitol Hill in support of Paul C. Warnke's nomination as director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. "I'm going to get into this," Mondale one day told his staff, and quickly pulled together a small group of stalwarts in his Vice Presidential offices on the Hill. They drew up a call list, decided whom Senator Cranston, the majority whip, would call, whom Doug Bennett of the State Department's Congressional-relations office would call, whom Mondale would call, whom Humphrey might later contact, even which Senate heavies and fellow Southerners the President would call.

Cranston, on the floor, kept the tally, and it is a pretty strong indication of Mondale's influence, how well his own calls turned out. He phoned Senators Hollings, Magnuson, Melcher, Morgan, Pearson and Stafford. Four Democrats, two Republicans. They all voted for Warnke's nomination except Warren G. Magnuson — "Scoop" Jackson's sometime fellow hard-liner — and Mondale managed to neutralize his nay vote with Senator Birch Bayh's aye.

Especially deft was the way in which he handled Bob Morgan of North Carolina. Morgan told Mondale he had his concerns about Warnke, so Mondale had Warnke pay him a visit "to see if his concerns were resolvable." "I hate any crush-and-pressure stuff," Mondale says. "I think it's a

process." So by this more sensitive, accommodating approach — "I've always admired the way Mike Mansfield did his job" — he got Morgan's vote.

Mondale's adroitness here stands out in particular contrast to the crude attempt made by Vice President Spiro T. Agnew — just about this many months along in the Nixon Administration — to buttonhole votes for the ABM. Agnew was told to stay out of the Senate's business, while Mondale, as one Senator says, is just "not the kind of guy people worry about." On one very bad day, he had to go up to the Hill and take real heat from the Democratic Caucus for Jimmy Carter's dam busting. After nearly two hours of abuse, he stood up and said, "This is no caucus, this is an ambush." Then, typically, he started joshing himself. Nobody would talk to them at the White House? "If you want to talk to somebody who's not busy, call the Vice President. I got plenty of time to talk to anybody about anything." They ended up giving him a standing ovation. Then again, Agnew lasted only three days at the White House before they sent him down the tunnel to the E.O.B.

Nonentrapment in some meaningless public role. One of the subtlest choices Mondale has made so far is not to take on any grandiose, overstated public responsibility as Vice President. Lyndon Johnson was put in charge of racial equality, Hubert Humphrey was sent out to sell the Vietnam War, Spiro Agnew was going to put us on Mars and solve school desegregation, Nelson Rockefeller was given domestic affairs along with one-hundred-billion-dollar ideas about energy, and where did all these puffed-up assignments take them? "Mondale wants to stay unencumbered by any institutional responsibilities that would tie him down to a particular space and time," says Dick Moe, his chief aide. "He wants to be left free to float to the problems."

And another thing, Mondale himself says: "In the past, the Vice President has been given functions that automatically collided with some mainline agency, and produced hostility." Followed by the total rout of the Vice President.

For a moment there, it looked as if Carter might have put him into that very bind, by handing him South Africa as abruptly as Agnew got Mars. Mondale was suddenly being cast as U.N. delegate Andrew

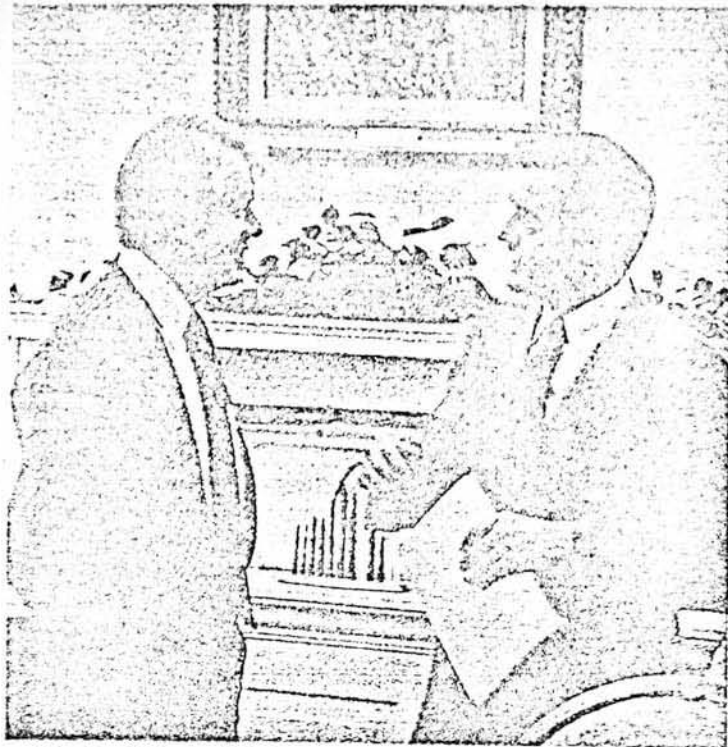
partment...qual. But he managed, first, to focus that assignment inside the White House as a matter for internal review with all parties, including Young and State. And when he stepped outside the White House to confront Vorster, he did so, coevally with Young, as strictly the President's man.

That is how he has been operating right along, on an unstructured, ad hoc, problem-solving basis. One of the problems he has floated to, for example, is "the collision between openness and secrecy" as it affects the Presidency. "In theory, it's insoluble," he admits, but he wants to try, with Attorney General Griffin Bell, C.I.A. director Stansfield Turner and others on that level, "to shape a result that is a little more realistic," to see if Jimmy Carter can defend his office and still, as he promised, never lie to us.

He is also working on how "to keep the President's time freed-up enough so that he can stay on the fundamental strategic problems facing the country." It is the old frustrating tendency of the urgent to overwhelm the important. "You maybe don't feel it, but the pressure around here is about 200 pounds per square inch," Mondale says. "He could spend 24 hours a day just reacting to problems, and never get anything done."

So Mondale is coordinating another White House team—Jordan, Moore, Jack Watson, Jody Powell, Stuart Eizenstat and others—that draws up a long-term-issues calendar, blocking out "what the President wants to do (and what others want him to do), trying to anticipate the decisions from a timing point of view." Mondale has been keeper of this calendar on a three-month cycle ever since he presented it to that first Cabinet gathering on St. Simons Island. "Jimmy asked for it," says a staffer, "but Fritz invented it."

Obviously enough, Mondale has floated to these problems because he is the one experienced Washington hand the Carter people happen to have. He knows the folkways of the town that Jimmy Carter once declared the enemy. What's more, he knows all the town fathers, understands how, up on the Hill, they will balk at too high-handed a White House and write in their own dates on any President's calendar. But even here, Mondale is chary of being put into any too nameable a role. "I don't intend to become the Administration's



The President with his "trouble-shooter without portfolio."

chief lobbyist," he says flatly. "Remember, I'm in a very tender posture." He is, after all—however constitutionally dim the office may be—still the duly elected Vice President of the United States.

Lunch every Monday with Jimmy Carter. "When either of us can bring up whatever is on his mind."

That is as close to overriding influence as any man can come in Washington without being President, and Mondale has very pronounced ideas about the role he wants to play. Namely, that of the bad-news-bearer.

During his own frustrating precampaign for the Presidency in 1974, Mondale did a lot of reflecting on "where the country had gone wrong, where I'd gone wrong" during the Vietnam and Watergate years. On Vietnam, in particular, he feels he put too much trust in the nation's leaders knowing best, when "too many leaders lately have sold themselves on illusion." And the source of too much illusion, he decided, has been "this incredible insane thing, a suicidal attachment to ego."

"I've always tried to fight that. It's the most persistent fatal disease for any politician. Now I've got an ego, sure, but what I'm talking about is childish, the sort of thing you spank your kids for. So I told him [Carter] I'd like to be the bearer of bad news—in a confidential way—to head off the illusion before it harms the country."

So far, he says he has been able to go to Jimmy Carter and tell the man when "he is about to buy a real bag of dishwater." "If I've felt he's making a mistake, I've gone in there and said so. That doesn't mean he always agrees with me." In fact, Mondale lost out on the tax-rebate proposal at the very moment he was readying a push for it in Congress, similar to the one he had mounted on the Warnke nomination. "But he tells me, 'I want to hear from you. If you're mad about something, let me know.'"

The whole arrangement—Fritz Mondale playing a kind of Cassandra to a lend-an-ear Jimmy Carter—does have an air of political unreality about it. And there are some around Washington who plain won't credit it. In early May, while Carter was in Europe, Joe Rauh, of the Americans for Democratic Action, and Senator George McGovern had liberal words with Mondale. They complained about the cutback in food stamps (Rauh called it "obscene") and about Carter's failure to trim the defense budget by his promised \$5 billion to \$7 billion. According to Rauh, Mondale would "neither confirm nor deny" that he was upholding his liberal beliefs within White House councils on this issue. Finally, he told Rauh and McGovern to remember that Jimmy Carter hadn't run as a liberal, "and I don't think he would've won if he had."

Did the complaint ever get through to Carter? "Fritz is a gentleman," says Rauh. "My hunch is that he passed it on, but in such a nice way that it

lost most of its effect." Still, Rauh added, there is "so great a reservoir of good will for Fritz" among the liberals that it will take a lot more fears that Mondale is "losing his convictions" before he is seen as "Humphreyized."

Mondale himself admits to the risky nature of his dependency. "The beginning and end is the whole personal relationship with the President." But that, seen from another angle, is because Mondale has managed to exclude a far more troublesome middle: the rivalry of the White House staff. Always in the past, more pain and suffering for the Vice President has been caused by staffers than by the President himself, to the extent that a Donald Rumsfeld could even move around a Nelson Rockefeller. But in Mondale's case, there are pretty fair indications this won't happen, mainly because, while some people work for Mondale and some others work for Carter, there is no sense of parallel staffs.

"Our staff," says Mondale, taking in everybody up and down the corridor, and even across there in the E.O.B. "That's what the President calls it."

And that's the way it's been ever since Mondale was picked as Carter's running mate—and the Mondale people moved lock, stock and barrel to Atlanta. That, says Dick Moe, was "the best thing we ever did." The separation that can develop during a campaign, when the two candidates are sometimes at opposite ends of the country or of an issue, never got started. Also, during the transition, a lot of Mondale choices came into the Government — Charles Schultze, Joe Califano, Bob Bergland — and even onto the White House staff.

David Aaron and his peregrinations form a wry instance. When Mondale was thinking of seeking the Presidency, he asked Brzezinski, then at Columbia, to find him a foreign-policy adviser. Brzezinski suggested Aaron, late of Kissinger's N.S.C. staff. Aaron lasted out the abortive 1974 Mondale "protocampaign," lay low on his senatorial staff, got back into action when Mondale was nominated for Vice President, and ended up on the transition team in charge of the N.S.C. choices. After Brzezinski was chosen to head the N.S.C., he turned around and chose Aaron as his deputy director. At present, Aaron is sitting cozily in the office right between Mondale and Brzezinski, sometimes helping

the latter employ Mondale as an instrument of foreign policy.

So there is, to say the least, compatibility; but, more than that, there is respect for Mondale's expertise, wide political acquaintance, operational savvy and easygoing style throughout the West Wing.

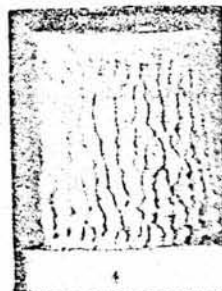
"I know a lot of cynics in this town are saying he's just off to a fast start; give him four or five months, he'll sink out of sight," says Jordan, who, by any calculation of prior political science, comes out his natural enemy. "But it ain't going to be that way. It's inconceivable to me how guys in this office, historically, could jerk this other guy around."

Aaron, a more urban soul and an ex-Foreign Service officer with the taint of the town full upon him, still puzzles over how immediately his old boss just fit right in. "It's as if," Aaron shrugs, "he might have been from Georgia."

But he is not. Walter F. Mondale is decidedly from Minnesota, a product of that state's Nordic, citizen-based progressivism that for so long had its most forceful embodiment in Hubert H. Humphrey. "You can't underestimate the influence of Humphrey on my generation," Mondale says. "Along came this hurricane. He was tireless, the perfect example for young people, go into the night talking with them about social justice. He just fit bang."

In 1964, when Humphrey was elected Vice President, Mondale, then the state's young Attorney General, was appointed to his Senate seat and, by extension, to the defense of his political principles. With less loquacity but an even greater emphasis on compassion, Fritz Mondale built a liberal Senate record over the next 12 years that out-A.D.A.'d Humphrey's own by the time Humphrey returned to the Senate in 1970. As chairman of an education subcommittee, Mondale stayed with his position in favor of busing ("as one constitutional tool") right through the worst of the antibusing furor. (Humphrey, on the other hand, voted for the 1972 antibusing amendment.) When last seen in Senate action, Mondale was the floor leader in the successful 1976 fight to amend Rule 22, which pretty much ended any further chance of an obstructionist Southern filibuster. Such upfront liberalism seems a far remove from Carter's fishfry-populism, the whole difference between a Farm-Labor-Progressive and a real farmer.

The two had met only twice



before in their lives, and then only to not much more than shake hands, so what on earth happened interpersonally between Jimmy and Fritz (and Rosalynn and Joan) on that one-day visit to Plains, Ga., in July?

Whatever it was, Joan seems to have been the first to know. "She told me flying back in the plane, 'You're going to be picked.' I said, how can you tell that? 'You two got along so well.'"

"I didn't have much doubt after that first meeting," Jordan says. "And I can tell you that after the Ohio primary, Mondale would've been about seventh or eighth on the list. So that visit was critical."

One thing that may have helped, Jordan suspects, is that Mondale didn't just read "Why Not the Best?" but laid it alongside his own book, "The Accountability of Power," and compared. "It was almost like he'd briefed himself. 'I know you said this, and I differ from you here,' and so on. It was the way Jimmy would've done it himself."

What he found out, Mondale says, is that "we weren't that far apart on things." But that hardly explains their "instant rapport" — Rosalynn's phrase — which no amount of swapping bromides out of their self-serving books could have sustained. What seems closer to the truth is that they felt an immediate and surprising empathy, right out of their having been raised in much-alike small country towns. They got straight onto a down-home footing. "If you're from a small town," Mondale describes the case, "you don't have an ego that needs a lot of stroking."

Mondale actually grew up in a series of small towns, but if the last one, Elmore, Minn. (pop. 910), is the pick, it offers about the same life experiences as Plains, Ga. Farming is the only gainful labor — Mondale once spent a summer as a pea lice inspector — and God fearing is the only peace of mind.

In fact, Mondale's father — Theodore Sigvaard Mundal, originally — was a Methodist preacher, who had his own "born-again" experience one day out plowing. During the farm depression of the 1920's he went broke on his land speculations but kept up his ministry in the teeth of every adversity. He once got lockjaw from a primitive tonsillectomy and had to feed himself by screwing a wooden cone between his clenched jaws to fend off starvation. When a fellow townsman committed suicide by swallowing carbolic acid and other clergy refused last rites, Theodore Mondale not only performed the funeral service but adopted the man's daughter into his large, eventually two-family brood, in which Fritz grew up the middle child of the second marriage. "Going to Sunday school every Sunday," as Joan puts it, "and singing at all the weddings."

So Mondale is nearer by background to Jimmy Carter's tenets than his limousine-liberal reputation (wholly undeserved) might suggest. As a Senate aide points out, he was "never a sit-around-the-Cloakroom, clubby type at all," but chose as his one best friend a man from an even smaller town, Senator Gaylord Nelson of Clear Lake, Wis.

(pop. circa 500). Nelson is a lot more maverick than Mondale, but they share the same lack of side, and Nelson gives Mondale very high marks for his "marvelous, self-deprecating sense of humor" and other plain traits.

Actually, Nelson goes a lot farther than that. "Early on, it was my perception that Fritz had the talent, everything that was desirable, to be President." He believes that Mondale, despite leaving no dent in the polls during 1974, was really making inroads "by his character." "Character is very important. I kept running into thoughtful people in the opinion leadership of the country who'd tell me, 'Gee, I'm for Fritz.'" Nelson thinks that is what makes Mondale "a great ear for the country" right now inside the White House. "Fritz," he emphasizes, "is a very valuable grass root."

Perhaps that is partly why Carter picked him, having found after a day's visit, as he told Jordan, that "he liked Mondale a lot more than he expected." But there is a more Machiavellian theory about that choice. Jimmy Carter is very much the self-made politician, with shrewd ways of protecting and extending his personal hold over a national constituency. As much as he may have liked Mondale, he also must have spotted a heaven-sent opportunity: Here was a liberal without a constituency to call his own. Through Mondale, Carter could reach that whole Humphrey wing of the Democratic Party, yet avoid falling into political debt or obligation. Because the people Fritz would bring in didn't really think of themselves as Fritz's people.

That has been the paradox of Mondale's political career, right up through his gone-gleaming 1974 try for the country's attention. It is significant that Mondale has been first appointed — and only later elected — to every major office he has held, including, in a strict sense, the Vice Presidency. He was elected and re-elected to the Senate with large majorities, but these majorities never translated nationally into an independent following of his own. In 1974, he came back from six months of campaigning lower in the polls than "undecided," with Mark Russell joking that most people thought Mondale was a suburb of Los Angeles.

"Deep down, I knew it wasn't right for me," he admits. "I was going to pull out in July, instead of going all the way through November, but I stayed in to help some friends get re-elected. Before my trip to Russia, Dick Moe told me I wasn't making the right calls, doing the touching-up stuff. I knew I wasn't. But I wasn't doing it for my own reasons."

This lack of a political demiurge, the argument goes, makes Mondale the ideal foil for Jimmy Carter. As Carter's Vice President, he has been spared an Executive Office Building exile only to gain a White House captivity. Carter may swap lists with him on Cabinet choices, seek his advice on every issue, bring him right into the Oval Office, but he is still Carter's creature — and satisfied to be such. As Eugene McCarthy once quipped, "Mondale has the soul of a Vice President."

This theory even touches on Joan and Rosalynn. In his book "Convention," Richard Reeves tells how Joan was asked at a press conference after Fritz's nomination what interest she would take up as Second Lady. Joan had hardly whispered "Child care" when Rosalynn stepped forward, took over the microphone and announced how pleased she would be to have Mrs. Mondale help her in her work on child-care programs nationwide.

This incident is viewed by Reeves as a fade-out for Joan and a clue to how the Carters would be handling the Mondales. But that is not exactly the reading Joan herself has on the incident, which she retells with that same pluck that often enough has kept Fritz Mondale from going under.

"Here it was — what? — 8:30 in the morning when Fritz was chosen, and at 3 o'clock we're to meet with the press. I'd never been before the national press. I didn't know I'd be asked anything. It was packed, so much tension. I wasn't prepared. You've got to understand, I'd come straight from the kitchen and the laundry. I'd come straight from the vacuum cleaner.

"So it was a very polite thing for her to do. To pick up where I was dangling . . ."

Besides, even if Joan didn't get child care, look what she's been doing, from SoHo to pottery, for the arts.

I broached this subject with the Vice President via David Broder's Theory of the Big Kennedy Oaks. According to this theory, the Kennedys spread their branches too far, blocked out the sun and cast a chill shade in which Democrats like Mondale never attained their full growth, were stunted politically. Not that long ago, the big oak was Ted Kennedy. "Yeah, remember up in that little village in Alaska?" Mondale nodded, referring to a frozen one-icicle town very far north on a 1969 junket. "I got in this Eskimo's dog sled, and the driver said, 'Get out. You're not Kennedy.'" So how did he feel, being put that far in the shade all those years?

"Like an acorn," he smiled, "looking for soil."

But has he now really found a spot to grow, in what looks like mostly red Georgia clay, under a lone-standing scrub Carter pine?

He has to guess so, from the way

crowds react to him these days. "I like to get off completely alone in the wilderness and fish. It's my alternative to psychiatry. The same way the President gets real strength out of just roaming around those fields down in Plains. But when I went out ice-fishing this winter in Minnesota, a big long caravan came along to watch." He still can't quite figure why so many bothered. "There's nothing goofier than a guy just looking down an icehole."

He admits to some sense of loss. "I miss my independence. I don't object, but after 16 years I do miss it." And he admits to some worry about how propinque he has actually become. "It's sort of unnatural to have another person always underfoot."

But from what a close Carter aide has to say, it's not to worry. "Fritz is careful not to be underfoot, not to accelerate the relationship beyond its natural growth." It's an "evolving thing," says Mondale, helped along considerably by their having talked the relationship out before they ever got started.

"Half the trouble has been that the President has always seen the Vice President as some kind of 'threat' to

him. 'I don't see it that way,' he told me. 'You can't hurt me. I've got my power, and I'm going to keep it, no matter what you do.'

"But you don't purchase good will from him by being a sycophant, either. He spots that right away." In fact, Carter has twice lectured Mondale for not speaking up. "It's probably pretty obvious I don't like controversy much. At first I was probably too deferential." But they are now at a point where, Mondale says, he would risk complete candor in any tight spot. "If it came down to a fundamental division on an issue, I think we could weather that."

Not that Fritz Mondale is the sort to head deliberately into such weather. "Everything he's gotten, he's been given," Joan points out, "so he is very much a team player, not a loner." His White House work has really been as a superstaffer, cutting across Cabinet and other Washington lines by virtue of his own familiarity with the problems, or going on mission at Jimmy Carter's personal dispatch. In an odd way, Mondale's relationship to Carter brings to mind that of Colonel House to Woodrow Wilson, or that of Harry Hopkins to

Franklin D. Roosevelt. If Mondale continues to perform in his crisscross, meliorating, highly personalized way, he will gain immense sway throughout the Government that will seem undifferentiable from Carter's own. Already his contributions—such as instant, universal voter registration—have been assimilated beyond any attribution to himself.

There are, of course, the anchors. "That decision," Mondale jokes, "was mine alone." The anchors are two, paired at the foot of the driveway off Massachusetts Avenue, marking the entrance to the Vice Presidential residence. They were once white, from the time that the residence belonged to the Chief of Naval Operations, but Nelson Rockefeller, when he took over the place, had them, for some unfathomable reason, painted black. This shocked all of Washington, being tantamount to the obliteration of a landmark. "It made me mad," says Mondale, "every morning I drove by there."

So when he moved into the residence himself, he immediately ordered the anchors repainted. There were complaining calls all during the green undercoating, but a universal huzzah when the final bright coat of white went back on.

"I should go sign them," Mondale says. "Didn't like that black. It was the wrong signal."

Which touches, in a way, on what Fritz Mondale, with Jimmy Carter's go-ahead, is attempting to do with the Vice Presidency itself: to change it from a wrong signal into the right signal. Too long it has been weakly blinking Throttle-bottom instead of beaming potential strength. There is, of course, no scope or power that any Vice President can have beyond what the President allows him. But if Mondale can continue to assume some real share of Jimmy Carter's "splendid agony" and not just an isolated, small misery of his own — if the increase of Mondale's reach, and his right to act in the President's stead, become a norm at the White House — then it will be a clear signal that the country at last has not only a President but another man who is really prepared to be one.

"More than that," says Mondale, "he's put it that way: 'I don't want you to take six weeks. I want you to be ready.'"



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