

DON'T MESS WITH BILL (CLEMENTS)

BY SAM ATTLESEY

NO LESS A POLITICAL observer than Richard Nixon termed it the most significant gubernatorial election of this generation; Henry Kissinger attached similar importance to the victory of his former colleague, a man who had "fought like a tiger" when they served together in the Nixon administration.

William Perry Clements, Jr., a multimillionaire Dallas oilman, had just scored a surprise victory over his Democratic challenger, popular state attorney general John Hill. Texas political observers called it one of the biggest upsets in Texas history. Clements pulled off his coup by spending \$7 million (his campaign debt is still \$4 million), by putting together one of the most professional campaign teams ever, and by coming across as the non-politician who alone could save Texas from the liberals.

But even Nixon and Kissinger probably did not suspect just what was in store for Texas—much less the United States of America—when they made their postelection comments. If they had joined 1980 Presidential hopefuls John Connally and George Bush and the thousands of other Texans jammed on the lawn of the state capitol in January for the inauguration of the state's first Republican governor in 105 years, they would have quickly realized that their superlatives were understatements. Clements, who had served as deputy secretary of defense under Pres-

Texas Governor William Clements began running for President the day he took office. But serious conflict-of-interest charges may curb his ambitions.

idents Nixon and Ford from 1973 until 1977, now had a platform for putting into action his business-is-the-best conservatism. Replete with swash-buckling, shoot-from-the-hip, don't-mess-with-Bill manner, Clements the politician was unveiled.

It was an almost unparalleled display of arrogance and swagger. While squinting through what can only be described as beady eyes, and with his hand resting on the Bible, Clements laughed out loud as he took the oath of office. Then, at the end of his "we'll persist and prevail" inaugural address, he roared, "Now we have sunshine." Had the sun broken through at that moment, his comment might have been appropriate. As it happened, the offhand remark was, perhaps, an omen that Clements did not intend to keep his brand of rhetoric within the borders

of Texas. For someone as ambitious as Clements, that is too much to expect. There are no limits, national or international, for a man driven by what he believes is the will of the people.

After only two months in office, Clements, who has the tact of the oil-field roughneck he once was, already has stunned supporters and enemies with his antics on the national as well as the state level. He had been in office less than four weeks when he announced during a Washington press conference that he might be a favorite son candidate for the GOP Presidential nomination next year. Indeed, he wrote to state party leaders urging them to remain neutral in what is expected to be a free-for-all Presidential primary.

That only added fuel to the speculation following Clements's victory that the new governor would not complete his four-year term if offered a Vice-Presidential or top cabinet position in a Republican administration. Some polls even speculate that Clements really has in the back of his mind a shot at his party's nomination. "He hasn't sold his house in Virginia yet," says one exponent of that possibility. And, after all, no one gave Clements a chance of getting elected governor either.

No one is more willing or seems more to enjoy giving hell to President Carter than Clements. During the campaign Clements even acknowledged that if elected, one of his objectives would be to make sure Carter did not carry Texas in 1980. One of his many jabs at Carter almost backfired during a

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luncheon in Amarillo. Clements pulled out a rubber chicken, waved it around his head, and blurted that he intended to tie Jimmy Carter "like a rubber chicken" around the neck of his opponent John Hill. Then, witnesses said, Clements tossed the fowl at Hill. But it ended in the plate of the mayor's wife. Clements won the mayor's endorsement anyway.

After only a week in office Clements gallivanted off to Mexico, thereby upstaging Carter's visit south of the border only a couple of weeks later, and his VIP treatment in Mexico City raised a few eyebrows in the State Department. No matter that Clements had to delay presenting his budget proposal to the state legislature, but he did deliver his first state-of-the-state message to the Democratic-dominated legislature before he left, and bluntly requested more power for the governor. His speech came only hours before Carter's state-of-the-union message.

There are those who argue that Clements's visit to Mexico was much more successful than Carter's. At least Clements did not make any remarks about "Montezuma's revenge." Clements boasted that he and Mexican President José Lopez Portillo were able to reach accord on the questions of the disposition of Mexico's energy reserves, illegal aliens, and the drug traffic. Working with the governors of other border states and their counterparts in Mexico, Clements is trying to establish a program similar to the old bracero plan that would allow Mexican citizens to enter the United States with work permits for jobs in agriculture, industry, and service occupations. In Texas, at least, Clements's visit to Mexico received almost as many headlines as Carter's and the Pope's visits combined.

The anti-Carter crusade seems to consume Clements, but the governor is astute enough to realize it suits the majority of Texans. The President's popularity is lower than a snake's belly, primarily because of the administration's oil and gas policies.

Before he was elected, Clements vowed to be a "tough-as-nails governor who will not stand for Northeastern plundering of our energy assets." He repeatedly has called for the firing of his former boss at the Defense Department, James Schlesinger, who now heads the Department of Energy. Speaking of their days together in the Pentagon, Clements snaps, "Schlesinger couldn't direct me to go to the

bathroom. I didn't work for him. I worked for the President of the United States, and he fully understood that. And I would remind everyone that when the clutch came, he got fired. I didn't."

Clements also has called for the dismissal of Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland. That proposal came during one of Clements's increasingly frequent trips to Washington, after he had met with protesting farmers and promised to support their demands for full parity. He made the comments during a press conference at the same time Carter was meeting the media.

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The new governor bristles at any suggestions he is meddling in national affairs. "The only ones who might think I'm meddling are Carter and Schlesinger," he says. "The people of Texas didn't elect me to be quiet, but to articulate the state's position." Noting that Texas produces 30 percent of the nation's energy, he sees his role as being a governor who will "tell those people in Washington what we want them to do. I don't want them forevermore telling us what to do."

So far his open-mouth policy has proved popular with most Texans, even though he has upset a few special-interest groups by his stands on legislative matters. Texans had forgotten what it was like to have such an outspoken, even rude, chief executive. Dolph Briscoe, his predecessor, had lulled them to sleep during his six years of do-nothingness. "Clements is gutsy and full of spunk. He says what everyone who is sitting in their living rooms and watching the tv news wants to say. He's giving them an outlet," says a Dallas political activist.

Above all, Clements has told the people what they want to hear about taxes and government spending. Promising to operate Texas like a business, he rode into office on the same wave

that brought Howard Jarvis into the spotlight. To the dismay of some Democratic lawmakers, Clements is following through with that promise. He has talked of trimming 25,000 workers from the state payroll, and in the budget he submitted to the state legislature he proposed a \$1 billion cut in the state budget, on top of a \$1 billion cut passed during a special legislative session in 1978. He placed an emergency tag on his proposals to give Texans the right of initiative and referendum. "This budget is not a letter to Santa Claus," he says. "It's not even a carrot for the Easter bunny."

But tax cutting evidently wasn't all Clements had in mind when he spoke of running Texas like a business. Playing up to his pals in the powerful oil and gas lobby, Clements has proposed a Texas-sized energy program that would increase government "incentives" for oil, natural gas, and coal production, and require all "windfall" energy profits to be plowed back into energy research. Clements doesn't complain about government subsidies — only about "unreasonable" government regulations. That kind of attitude, however, has won him the endorsement of other state officials.

Clements has his detractors, however. State Democratic party chairman Billy Goldberg of Houston has accused Clements of grandstanding and becoming an absentee governor because of his forays into Mexico and Washington. Goldberg, obviously still smarting over how Clements beat Hill, said the only thing Clements accomplished during his trip to Mexico was to introduce himself as the principal owner of the world's largest oil drilling company, to the president of a country that soon will be a major oil and gas producing nation.

I T WAS A SUBTLE REFERENCE to what probably will haunt Clements throughout his tenure in the governor's mansion and may even prevent him from winning higher office: conflict of interest. It trailed him like an overweight shadow while he was working in the Defense Department. The conflict of interest allegations remained mostly subterranean during the campaign, but now they have appeared as a prickly thorn. As owner and founder of Sedco, Inc., which has grown from two rusty rigs into an enterprise operating in twenty-two countries, with eleven thousand employees and \$750

million in assets, Clements has tried to head off the predictable charges of conflict of interest. Shortly before he was sworn in, he resigned as chairman and chief executive officer of Sedco (his son now runs the show) and placed his 619,768 shares of Sedco stock into a "blind trust."

But according to officials of the Securities and Exchange Commission, there is nothing blind about Clements's blind trust. Because he owns so much stock in the company, it will be virtually impossible for his trustees to keep him in the dark. The law requires them to file a public report each time they buy or sell even one share in the company. Undaunted, Clements insists, "I will continue to say it's a blind trust . . . it was drawn up with that intent."

Forbes magazine noted in 1975 that Sedco was greatly benefiting from high oil prices. It noted that Clements's company "doesn't lose if it hits a dry hole" because Sedco clients in effect rent the drilling rigs to companies looking for oil. Somewhat ironically, Clements, whose worth was reported as \$30 million during the gubernatorial campaign, has suffered a \$13 million paper loss on his Sedco shares during the past year. It was not because of the revolt in Iran, Clements said, noting "those [Sedco] rigs are still running"—operated now by Iranian workers.

Clements's trip to Mexico, where he met privately with Minister Jorge Diaz Serrano, the director general of the Mexican national oil company, aroused some suspicion. But that was nothing compared to the reactions to the disclosure that Sedco and Hunt Oil Company, also based in Dallas, would make a joint application to China for offshore drilling rights. What made that proposal so suspicious was that it was revealed only a week after a cordial visit with Chinese trade-development representative Han Hsu in Clements's Dallas home. Clements also personally welcomed Chinese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping when he toured Houston.

Because of the governor's dislike of Carter, there was speculation that Clements might snub Deng in order to embarrass the President. But Clements explained, "Whether we agree with him [Deng] politically or philosophically or whether we like chop suey or not is beside the point. He is our guest." What was left unspoken was that it is not good business to insult the leader of a country in which you might soon

be seeking a healthy drilling contract.

While he admitted "some very preliminary discussions" of the China venture were initiated while he was still active in Sedco last November, Clements said he had not taken part in any of those discussions and didn't mention the business venture when he met with Han Hsu. As for speculation Clements would visit China as head of a delegation of Texas businessmen, the governor said he would not be visiting China until at least 1981. Certainly it will not be in the fall of 1980, he said, "because I've got something else in mind . . . I'm sure Mr. Carter would

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love to see me go to China at that time."

In fending off charges of conflict of interest, the governor revealed he will travel to Russia this fall, and he and Texas food producers and processors will meet with their Russian counterparts. There will be less room for scandal on the agricultural mission, although, he joked, "I do own some mother cows."

DURING THE ELECTION, Hill was so confident of victory that only during the final days of the campaign did he touch on the charges. Hill claimed that Clements had formed a partnership (SEDIRAN) with the then shah in order to boost Sedco's profits in Iran. Clements quickly denied the charge, just as he denied a published report in 1976, based on leaks from a Congressional investigation, that there was a conflict of interest in his role in the sale of U.S. fighter planes to Iran while he was deputy secretary of defense. Clements termed the report "pure baloney" and said he did not play "any role whatsoever" in a decision to sell eighty F-14 fighter planes to Iran for the same price that the United

States paid the Grumman Corporation for the planes under a navy contract. He denied allegations that he had favored the shah by helping to prevent Grumman from adding a standard marketing charge to its \$1.3 billion contract.

During the Republican primary last spring, Clements's opponent, Ray Hutchison—who now is working part-time for the governor as a legislative liaison—claimed that an affiliate of Sedco received millions of dollars in federally guaranteed credits while Clements was with the Defense Department. Clements said that he would not dignify the charge by replying.

He also was accused of flying to ski slopes in Colorado at government expense, while serving in Washington. He claimed the skiing was just a break from a tour of the Air Force Academy.

When investigators in Argentina alleged that Sedco paid commissions that were illicit and contrary to the public morals, to obtain drilling contracts, Clements denied the charges at a press conference and was promptly hit with a \$15 million slander suit.

When he wasn't saying "baloney" to conflict-of-interest claims, he was creating other controversies by his vocal opposition to amnesty for Vietnam War draft evaders and his admission to a Senate committee that he would not rule out the possibility of using nuclear weapons in Vietnam.

As deputy secretary of defense, Clements was one of four members of the National Command Authority, which determines who "pushes the button" in a state of emergency.

Nevertheless, Clements left Washington amid general praise. "There are certain people in Washington, very liberal senators such as [William] Proxmire, Adlai Stevenson, . . . [George] McGovern, sure, who were consistently trying to fault me or criticize my action or raise conflict of interest issues. But I met those head on," Clements says.

Bill Clements, with his wife Rita, a former Republican national committeewoman, at his side, is on a political mission. The man who had served as Texas cochairman of Nixon's reelection campaign in 1972 seems to be enjoying his new position of power. How long he will be content with his present status, and what means he might employ to elevate it, are questions that will keep a lot of political watchers guessing, and may also keep a lot of politicians on guard. □

GOOD AS GOLD, by Joseph Heller. Simon and Schuster, 447 pp., \$12.95.

Fathers and schlemiels

MARK SHECHNER

IN ALL OF HIS NOVELS, Joseph Heller reminds us of how central rage is to our fiction, and how necessary fiction is to our rage. For though he may not be the angriest novelist in America—and competition for *that* honor is fierce indeed—he has been the most successful in persuading us that his anger grows out of a valid assessment of contemporary life. Upon its appearance in 1961, *Catch-22* began to give instruction to the rebellion that was gathering in the universities. Its madcap vision of an absurd military world, with its depersonalized chain of arbitrary command, its casual unconcern about death, and its intimations of universal conspiracy, was all but canonical to the imagination of “the Movement,” eclipsing the more contemplative versions of the absurd that had held sway since the 1940s. Heller’s Yossarian, who takes to the trees, naked, in protest, replaced Camus’s Meursault and Beckett’s Vladimir and Estragon as a plausible image of modern man, just at the moment when the prevailing question changed from whether to commit suicide, to how to strike back. *Catch-22* was the 1960s’ most typical literary product, a book that not only captured the rebellious mood of the decade, but also, as a mixture of vaudeville and terror, helped define its style.

Though Heller’s second novel, *Something Happened*, with its grim and relentless realism, seemed at first glance a puzzling evasion of Heller’s genius for mordant slapstick, it now seems just the sort of sequel a *Catch-22* might pro-

duce: light years away in technique, perhaps, but loyal in its social point of view. Substitute a middle-management executive, Bob Slocum, for Yossarian, and the world of white-collar drudgery and ambition for that of wartime terror; then throttle the pace down to a bare crawl, and you have *Catch-22*’s claustrophobic vision of contemporary life, deepened and domesticated. *Something Happened* enunciates the same view once again: a war of each against all, in the context of a corporate world in which the chain of command is fundamentally a chain of humiliation.

That is certainly the perspective one gets after reading Heller’s new novel, *Good as Gold*, in which the same bleak determinism is still in evidence, but the stifling and conspiratorial hierarchy is transposed from the air force and the corporation to the family—where, after all, we tend to look for it in a proper Jewish novel, which is what *Good as Gold* attempts to be. Its hero, Bruce Gold, is, like Bob Slocum, another schlemiel with ambition, whose schemes come to nothing. At forty-eight, Gold is an English professor and a writer of some small accomplishment; he is esteemed largely by former college acquaintances who are after him to write for them. One, Maxwell Lieberman, is a reactionary editor of an obscure “little magazine”; he is a *Luftmensch* turned *Realpolitiker*, who sounds like a cross between Emmett Kelly and Irving Kristol, and who has been trying for years to accept tainted money if only he could find someone to offer it.

Another, Pomoroy, is executive editor of “a thriving, faintly disreputable, book-publishing house,” who has given Gold a sizable advance to write a study of “the contemporary Jewish experience in America,” a subject of al-

lure to Gold, whose experience has been quintessentially Jewish, but in precisely those vague and hybrid ways, common to the second generation, that elude his understanding. The third is Ralph Newsome, who has moved into the White House as a high-ranking but unspecified assistant to the President. He claims to have interested the President in Gold’s essays, and to be scheming to obtain for Gold a high governmental appointment. About all he comes up with, though, is a seat on a farcical Presidential Commission on Education and Political Welfare, which turns out to be dedicated entirely to the political welfare of the commissioners. As the reader may guess from even this sampling of Dickensian types, the action in the book is lively and intricate, and if it is not so extravagant as the hijinx of *Catch-22*, certainly it is far more spirited than the somber realism of *Something Happened*.

GOLD IS NOT JUST A writer and would-be Washington bureaucrat; he is also a family man, which is largely that side of his life where the “Jewish experience” comes into play. He is joylessly married to the passive Belle, a plump, matronly, and good-natured woman who says little and accedes to nearly everything. Bruce and Belle have three children: two grown-up sons and a daughter of twelve, Dina, who is wiser than her years, smarter than her failing grades would indicate, and tougher than her father. Gold doesn’t amount to anything of interest as either a husband or a father, but as a son and a brother he is a spectacular failure. He is the next-to-youngest in a noisy Jewish family of five sisters, four of them older than he; an older and more successful brother, Sid; an eighty-two-year-old, Kafkaesque father who despises him; a mad stepmother, who does little else but knit away at an endless and mysterious garment; and more in-laws, nieces, and nephews than he cares to keep track of. The trouble is that they can all keep track of him. He holds a special place as the perennial kid brother, the egghead and schlemiel par excellence who is destined to

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