

Gerald Ford: The Politics Of Loyalty

What he really wanted, Michigan's Gerald R. Ford often confided, was to become Speaker of the House. Back in 1968, with visions of an emerging Republican majority pirouetting in his mind, Minority Leader Ford scornfully ejected the notion of a bid to run as No. 2 on the GOP national ticket. But the electoral tide never turned, and a Democratic majority in the House seems more likely than ever now in the wake of Watergate. Accordingly, Ford had few regrets last week in agreeing to quit the House after 25 years and serve out Spiro Agnew's term as Veep.

It was a popular choice in the Congress. Ford's Democratic opposition has developed a broad respect for his leadership, and GOP National Committee counsel Harry Dent says of him: "Ford fits the Republican party like a glove." Yet for a man who has spent a quarter of a century in the public eye, Ford, at 60, remains an oddly elusive personality—a low-profile team player of little color, less humor and no pronounced eccentricities. He has been an effective leader of the House Republican squad, but any convictions he may hold on his own have been swallowed in his almost total loyalty to President Nixon's policies—particularly on defense and foreign affairs.

A former star player from the University of Michigan football squad, Ford has never lost his Boy Scout image; he has come unscathed through recent charges of minor fund-raising irregularities. Still, not everyone would be happy to see him move into the Oval Office. Ford is still dogged by former Detroit Mayor Jerome Cavanagh's crack (picked up by LBJ) that Ford had "played football too long without a helmet." Even a close Nixon associate concedes that the Vice President-designate is "not real bright," although he argues that Ford is still "a lot better than many who have been in that spot in the last 200 years."

What he may lack in luminous intellect, Ford has made up with savvy and hard work. Born in Omaha and raised in Grand Rapids, young Ford starred on the gridiron in high school and college (he turned down offers from the Detroit Lions and the Green Bay Packers) and coached football at Yale to put himself through law school. After 47 months in the Navy during World War II, his appetite was whetted for political battles back home; with the help of the late Sen. Arthur Vandenberg, Ford displaced right-wing Republican Rep. Bartel Jonkman in 1948 and moved to Washington with his bride of three months,



Out of the huddle: 'Ford fits the Republican Party like a glove'

former model Elizabeth Bloomer.

For the next fifteen years, Ford was a quiet plodder on the Hill: learning the ropes, doing his homework, achieving a measure of expertise and influence on the Appropriations subcommittee that passed on the Pentagon budget. He stayed in touch with the home folks, regularly touring the rural areas in his district in a specially equipped "mobile office" trailer. The plodding paid off, making the solid, conservative Ford an ideal front man for an effort by younger House Republicans to shake up their party leadership in the mid-'60s.

Building a Base

The brains behind the first skirmish were Michigan's Robert Griffin and New York's Charles Goodell. They persuaded Ford to challenge Iowa's Charles Hovey, 67, as chairman of the House Republican Conference, then went about lining up votes for him. Their strategy worked, and with that base, two years later, Goodell and then Wisconsin Rep. Melvin Laird plotted to move Ford up to the Minority Leader's post, replacing crusty Charles Halleck of Indiana.

It wasn't hard. The House Republicans were depleted and dispirited after the 1964 Goldwater debacle, and many had been chafing for years under Halleck's autocratic ways. Moreover, Halleck's double chin and bright red nose didn't help him as party spokesman—

along with Sen. Everett Dirksen—in the television age. Ford seemed an infinitely better idea—and he got the job.

Ford hoped to raise Republican spirits by increasing rank-and-file participation (every GOP congressman would be a "60-minute player" on the Republican team, he promised) and by getting off the purely negative, anti-Johnson note that the GOP leadership then seemed stuck on. It didn't work out quite that way. In July 1965, four of Laird's "positive" alternatives—including a GOP civil-rights bill—were killed, and the Minority Leader found himself taking flak from both the left and right wings of his party. He was also under fire from Democrats for his proposal to bomb North Vietnamese missile sites.

Vietnam was Ford's primary focus in those years, and he tried to make up in rhetoric what he lacked in votes on the House floor. His attacks on Johnson were so strong—for "shocking mismanagement" of the war—that Senate Minority Leader Dirksen split away from him on the issue in April 1966. Two months later, however, they were back together again, accusing LBJ of not being "candid" enough. And their televised carping—in "Ev and Jerry" appearances—became a torment to Johnson after the 1966 elections in which the Republicans gained 47 freshman seats in the House.

The 1966 victory also owed something to Ford's energetic fund-raising and

campaign efforts. And in 1968, he was out early again for Richard Nixon, whom he had first met in Congress some twenty years earlier. In the years since, he has been a faithful advocate of the Presidential will. For all his attacks on Johnson, he defended Mr. Nixon's war policy at every turn and lobbied mightily for all the anti-ballistic-missile program. "I believe we have to be prepared," he said. "We also have to have the conviction to use our strength."

Domestic programs took second place to the international power struggle—"If we lose, we don't have the opportunity to do any of these things at home," he said—although Ford did line up behind Mr. Nixon's controversial Family Assistance

ner, leader of the conservative Southern Democrats in the House and one of Ford's chief tactical allies. "Jerry just puts his arm around a colleague or looks him in the eye, says, 'I need your vote,' and gets it." Ford's attendance record (90 per cent) is also one of the best in Congress and on virtually every bill he comes to the well of the House, leans his 6-foot frame against the lectern and argues the Republican case in forceful terms from hastily scribbled notes.

Off the floor, Ford has consistently collected IOU's through his unstinting assistance to colleagues. He averages nearly 200 out-of-town speeches a year, and one year logged 138,436 miles in the air on such forays—a figure, his office proud-

dent; John, 21, at the University of Utah; and high-school students Steven, 17, and Susan, 16. "He leaves early and comes home late at night with great stacks of paper," reported a next-door neighbor.

About the only cloud on Ford's horizon last week was a mutter of questions about his financial probity. They seemed trivial enough, but in the Age of Watergate it took only twelve hours from the time his nomination was announced for the latest story to hit the papers: a report in *The Washington Star-News* that nearly half of Ford's last campaign kitty—\$38,216 worth—came from a "secret [though legal] fund-raising setup" that concealed the names of donors. Back in 1971, similarly, it was revealed that Ford had received \$11,500 from various special-interest groups—bankers, security dealers, an oil concern—and passed it along to the Republican Congressional Committee, which later returned an equivalent sum to Ford's campaign with no names attached.

Ford had had one precious brush with impropriety. During his service on the Warren Commission, Ford contracted with *Life* magazine to do an "inside story" for a handsome fee. It was timed to appear with the official report, but nearly broke the release date when the commission's own publication schedule was held up. Later, Ford apparently disobeyed Warren's orders by shipping commission transcripts to his ghostwriter for a book entitled "Portrait of an Assassin." Last week, Ford shrugged off all suggestions of impropriety and said he would gladly open his financial records to Congressional investigators.

Birth of a Salesman

Even before confirmation hearings could get under way, the Vice President-designate was pledging that he had no higher ambitions and "no intention of being a candidate for any office in 1976." Three years in the Veep's office could change his mind and his political prospects, of course, but Ford told *Newsweek's* Chief Congressional correspondent Samuel Shaffer that he saw his role mostly in terms of "helping the President in his relation with Congress . . . [as] a salesman for the Administration."

The Minority Leader has long been one of President Nixon's few all-out defenders in Congress when it comes to Watergate, but Ford has also advised the President that it might be politically wise for him to obey Federal-court orders and turn over his White House tapes for judicial inspection rather than provoke impeachment. And an impeachable offense, he has noted in the past, is simply whatever "a majority of the House" considers it to be "at a given moment in history." There are those, of course, who believe Mr. Nixon has cleverly removed the subject of his own impeachment from consideration already—by nominating loyal and limited Jerry Ford as his new Vice President.

WHEN WILL THE TRUST AND CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE BE RESTORED?



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After the stinging rejection of two conservative Nixon nominees for the Supreme Court—Clement Haynsworth and G. Harrold Carswell—Ford also launched an apparently vindictive effort to impeach liberal Justice William O. Douglas. It was a dimly conceived, moralizing campaign, based largely on the fact that some of Douglas's articles had been printed in a magazine that also ran erotic pictures. The drive was sidetracked to Rep. Emanuel Celler's Judiciary Committee, where it died unmourned.

Ford's effectiveness as a leader was always less dependent on traditional sticks and carrots than on his closeness to the President (several phone calls and visits each week) and his knack for personal persuasion. "It's the damndest thing," says Louisiana Rep. Joe Waggon-

ly noted, equivalent to five and a half times around the world at the Equator. Ford's political speeches are about as blah as the rubber-chicken dinners he has packed away by the ton, but his presence—still broad-shouldered and hard—impresses the party faithful. So does his attention to the minutiae of GOP politics. "I ran into him once after we had won four seats in the state legislature," recalls Mississippi state Republican chairman Clark Reed, "and Jerry knew all about it."

The Vice President-designate enjoys a private life fully as conservative as his public record. The only "indulgence" he admits is a brisk swim each morning in the heated, outdoor pool behind his Colonial-style brick and frame home in Alexandria, Va. Ford also takes an occasional skiing trip with his wife and four children: Michael, 23, a seminary stu-

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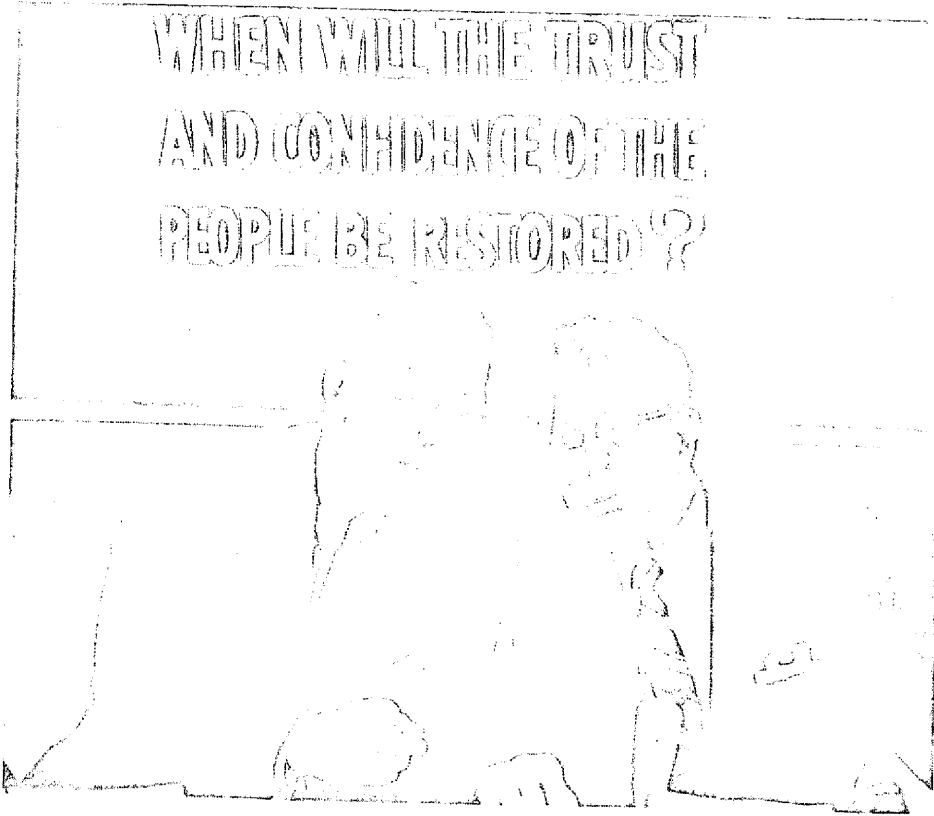
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* Here is a true re-arranger. He re-arrs classified data. Newsweek, October 22, 1973

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