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from
Washington

Look What We've Got

★ More than 7,000 actual and potential threats against the President are received every month. The "trip file" of those who need to be watched when Mr. Johnson travels has upwards of 1,800 names (compared with 400 before John F. Kennedy was assassinated). There are more than 250,000 persons and organizations in a larger file of those considered dangerous.

Well, it's a violent age; in five years a President, a senator and a civil rights leader have been murdered—even Ev Dirksen has been threatened. Estimates of the number of guns in private hands range up to 200 million and the National Rifle Association has blocked a proposal to register them and license their owners. Dogs, cats, and cars are licensed, not lethal weapons.

Meanwhile, the President grows more and more important in the scheme of things. He has to try to negotiate a freeze on nuclear missiles with the Russians, get us out of an Asian land war, realistically define America's role in the world if another one is to be prevented, cope with riots and malaise at home, come to grips with the problem of inequitable distribution of income (Bobby Kennedy was trying to; it was one of the things that made him hated), encourage reform of the archaic institutions that are under attack by impatient youth.

And in the face of this, Nixon offers us Spiro Agnew as the man a heartbeat away from the Presidency. It's not a joke any more; Kennedy wanted Texas' big bloc of electoral votes in 1960, so he chose Lyndon Johnson. Kennedy was ignorant about Texas politics, didn't know Johnson's string

had run out in his home state. Johnson knew it; we think that's why he accepted second place on the ticket.

Five years of Johnson, a Vice President who became President. You know the rest. Two wise men, Walter Lippmann and Arthur Krock (of the *NY Times*) agree that the Johnson Administration has been a failure; Lippmann calls its mistakes disastrous.

We take Nixon at his word (naïve as that may sound) when he says if elected he will be an activist President. He will do a lot of traveling, will let the voters—and the lunatics—see him. We remember asking Lester Pearson when he was running against Diefenbaker why he had no guards. "When Canada has 200 million people," he replied, "we'll have as many nuts as you have; then I'll need protection."

Not Recommended for Adults

★ A few weeks ago we pointed out Agnew's lack of national experience and the fact that he was elected in Maryland (not a bastion of enlightenment anyway) chiefly because the Democrats put up a blatherskite. Since then, more grave questions about his fitness have arisen. At a press conference in Chicago, Agnew referred to citizens of Polish descent as "Polacks," then said he did not know that was an opprobrium. More recently, seeing a Japanese-American reporter dozing on his plane, he inquired, "What's the matter with the fat Jap?"

Unintentional? Maybe. But what do such remarks say about Agnew's political savvy? Enough brains to be President? We'd like to dismiss the slurs as insignificant, were it not for Lee Harvey Oswald. These days, you have to consider both men on the ticket; it's a depressing but inescapable responsibility.

Agnew's casual imputation of inferiority to ethnic groups probably will give secret pleasure to some people, but his candidacy is not recommended for adults. Humphrey offers a much better running mate in serious-minded Ed Muskie.

We don't think it is stretching the point to say that Agnew, like Dick Daley and Lyndon Johnson on the Democratic side, exemplifies the old politics that the young people are so

incensed about: the political Podsnaps with their irrelevant rhetoric, fundamentally satisfied with themselves and with things the way they are. The younger generation is attacking this menopausal leadership in many of our institutions—the political and social establishments, the colleges, the Church. A very healthy thing; Thomas Jefferson would be pleased.

Plenty of Money

★ Consumers are still on a buying spree. The 10 percent tax surcharge hasn't yet dampened that rugged spirit of acquisitiveness. The surtax extracted \$2.2 billion from paychecks and profits in the third quarter of this year, but retail sales jumped \$779 million in July, \$88 million in August.

Where are they getting the money? From savings, apparently. Since mid-1967, Americans have been putting more than 7 percent of their disposable income into savings, but the Administration expects this to drop to about 6.2 percent in the third quarter and the Bank of America estimates an even bigger drop—to 5.8 percent. So the fastbacks and color TV's are coming out of savings, and to heck with the tax increase, at least for the time being.

Meanwhile, the June and July consumer price index rose at an annual rate of 6 percent, truly inflationary. Figures are boring, but not for Presidents. It will be one of the new man's first big headaches—he will have to decide whether an overheated economy requires another year of surtax.

We keep hoping Nixon learned something from Ike's chamber-of-horrors fiscal policy (two recessions in three years, the largest peacetime deficit in history) and won't go all the way back to GOP fiscal orthodoxy. It may be wishful thinking.

★ *Note:* We guess the nomination of Abe Fortas as Chief Justice will be defeated by a Senate filibuster. But we wonder what the Republicans and Dixiecrats will have gained by their exercise in obstructionism? Chief Justice Warren—their long-time target—will remain on the Court; so probably will Fortas. The Court's majority will go on defending the constitutional rights of individuals.