

THE RENUNCIATION of the Democratic Party by Secretary of the Treasury John Connally is now an odds-on bet. The scene, the stage-setting, the lines spoken are all in the future. But the decision to become a Republican after the Democratic convention may well have been taken already, with no looking back.

To see why this is so, you have to begin with the situation and the man. The situation is simple. As of now, the Democrats in convention at Miami Beach are just about dead certain to give John Connally a dozen solid reasons for changing parties.

As to the man, Connally is quite clearly one of the half dozen ablest members of the

Cabinet of the last fifty years. He is also a politician to his marrow—albeit a truly national-minded politician, which is rare nowadays. As a brilliantly able, toughly ambitious professional, he is also shrewd enough to see that the Democratic Party has ceased to offer any real future for Texans of his stripe.

There is more evidence to be cited than the situation and the man, however. There is the simple fact that the departing Secretary of the Treasury has talked sadly of how painful it would be for him to leave his own political party. He has also voiced the mournful hope that nothing would happen at Miami Beach to drive him into the Republican wilderness. The thought, in short, has crossed his mind.

THERE IS another simple fact, too. When it was announced that he would soon leave the Treasury, John Connally gave a resounding public endorsement to President Nixon's domestic and foreign policies. But at the preceding Cabinet meeting, he quietly told his astonished colleagues that he had already made up his mind to vote for President Nixon next November.

That was going pretty far. Yet it was the opposite of surprising in view of the remarkable relationship that has grown up between the President and his Secretary of the Treasury in the last year and a half.

On the working level, this relationship is as intimate as that between the Presi-

dent and Dr. Henry A. Kissinger. But there is the great difference that the Secretary of the Treasury is neither a member of the President's personal staff, nor even a member of the President's political party. The talk about disagreements is garbage, in fact.

Agreements are what to look for, if you are wise. It would be extremely surprising, to begin with, if President Nixon did not pretty well expect his friend Connally to change parties, if and when the Democrats have indulged in all the horrors that only Democrats can invent at Miami Beach. It would again be far from surprising—although many will be vastly surprised—if the President then chose this splendid new Republican recruit as his vice presidential running mate.

It must be noted, finally, that these probably and possible future developments can add up to something like a political earthquake. Since Richard M. Nixon was President Eisenhower's Vice President, one of his grandest ambitions has been to contrive a basic political realignment in the United States.

ANY SUCH realignment, in present circumstances, would require making the formerly Democratic South into genuinely two party territory. Here, the deeply shocking attack on Gov. George Wallace also has its role. Gov. Wallace is not that these probable and possible Democratic convention. But it is now really impossible to imagine Gov. Wallace once again leading a third party ticket after the convention.

That will leave the people in the South, and indeed, the people of the whole country, faced with a stark choice between President Nixon and (on present prospects) either Sen. George McGovern or Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey.

In those circumstances, even without John Connally to help him, President Nixon ought to come out of the South with no less than 147 electoral votes. The border states' Democratic governors, if consulted, will tell you their people regard the President as "much the least worst"—as one of these governors has put it.

Add to these general outlines of the situation such an important political development as a change of party by John Connally. Consider the example this will set, and the impact it will have. You have the beginning of a wholly new pattern of U.S. politics. That leaves the universal question, "Why did Connally leave just now?"

The answer is simple. This was the time he and the President had agreed upon. And if you are probably going to change your party, it is better not to be holding an office with the party which you mean to join.

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The Connally Scenario