

Law and order politics

The other day, House Speaker John McCormack, a Democrat, came down to the White House, and Richard Nixon got to talking about the campaign. "Now," said Nixon, "I expect you to give it to us . . . that's part of the game. We are going to give it to you. If you don't give it to us, I won't have any respect for you. But when it is all over, come on down to the White House and let's have breakfast."

That explains much about this autumn ritual. It is as old as politics itself and Nixon with his eye on that average voter—middle-aged and presumably rather tolerant of political hokum—practices it with a special zeal. There is more than a little truth to the observation made some years ago by Lyndon Johnson that Nixon is "a chronic campaigner." In any case Nixon's administration has not been so animated since taking office. His aides now rush joyfully about the country hiring bands and mapping motorcades, drumming up crowds and headlines. They are very good at it. One sometimes is assailed by the thought that if they were as good at running the country as they are at campaigning, we would be well off, indeed. But of course a President must maintain a political majority so he has the power to govern. This should not be overlooked either.

Nixon is star, scriptwriter and director on this vast stage. His speeches, which begin with a burst of statesmanship, are carefully calibrated to crescendo into a mild form of law and order demagoguery. Those "spontaneous" crowd outpourings are plotted weeks ahead and the "unsched-

uled" stops are thought out with an eye for camera positions. Nixon has the finely honed skill of an old vaudevillian. Events and people encountered along the way are swept into his act. The old joke that says any successful President must bring along his own contingent of hippies and shaggy-haired protesters if he wants to win the sympathy of the majority is only a half-gag now. Nixon's advance men this fall have carefully arranged with local police to allow enough dissenters in the staging areas so the President will have his theme well illustrated as he warms to his job.

Out in Columbus, Ohio last week, standing on the steps of the capitol, Nixon, as mellow-warm as the autumn, shouted, "Let me tell you this is a year to think of what is best for America. . . . A real peace for the next generation. . . . We are bringing Americans home, rather than sending them out there [Vietnam]. . . . I say let's cut spending in Washington, D.C., so you can have more to spend right here at home. . . ."

His voice hardened and the pace quickened. He talked of the bombing in Minneapolis, the Canadian terror. "All over this country today we see a rising tide of terrorism, of crime, and on the campuses of our universities we have seen those who instead of engaging, which is their right, in peaceful dissent, engage in violence." Nixon's fists clenched, he rocked back on his heels, his sunshine dimmed. "My friends, it is time to draw the line and to say we are not going to stand for that." A great roar

came from the crowd. Candidates Robert Taft Jr. and Roger Cloud leaped to their feet to bask in the approval. Eyes down, Nixon waited for the emotion to subside. Then he cemented his argument with the props furnished by the hecklers lost in their own season of idiocy, calmly referring to the rock-throwers, the obscenity-mongers. "I say don't answer in kind. . . . On Nov. 3 in the quiet of the polling booth consider the candidates. . . . And if that candidate has given encouragement to, has condoned lawlessness and violence and permissiveness, then, you know what to do."

Nixon's campaign is the final legitimization of what Spiro Agnew has been saying since midsummer. It makes public the charter under which the Administration itself has moved into the hardened trenches on the right. The FBI's J. Edgar Hoover has made more public pilgrimages to the White House in the past weeks than he has in years. Attorney General John Mitchell has warned of rising public anger that could result in vigilante tactics against disturbers of the peace. Nixon in his ceremonial capacity dropped in on the Washington Police Department to praise its record in reducing crime. He has singled out National Guardsmen with whom to stand and talk as the cameras whirred. He has phoned his congratulations to brave law officers and visited their wounded in the hospital.

Events have given Nixon's own campaign efforts a dimension that probably not even he envisioned. The Canadian kidnapping and murder sent a lot of White House people back to have another look at the flood of threatening mail that now arrives every morning. Many were reminded that even men like national security aide Henry Kissinger cannot wander across Lafayette Park on these golden autumn days without a bodyguard at heel. The Harvard bombing, the new California mass murder—item by item they make up a backdrop of terror that sets off Nixon's warnings.

The President has implied that he and the men he is backing have an answer to this fearful national trouble. His words have found sympathetic listeners. Yet there is doubt that he has really located the causes of American unrest or dealt with it in a way that is honestly constructive.

