

McCormack Left a Power Vacuum

By Jack Anderson

It has now been 14 months since 81-year-old John McCormack finally retired as Speaker of the House. He was a relic of another era, too old to lead, too feeble to grasp the issues of the times.

Yet McCormack's retreat to Boston, under the shame of the scandal surrounding his top assistant, Dr. Martin Sweig, did little to revitalize the House. McCormack at least understood the use of power. And he was personally an honorable man.

Unhappily, the House is not a better place without him. The men who have filled the power vacuum show even less leadership ability, and they lack McCormack's strong ethics.

Carl Albert, the Oklahoma politician who moved up to the Speaker's chair, has demonstrated on almost every possible occasion that the gavel is too heavy for him.

He does most of his swinging away from the chamber. He has startled more than one hostess by showing up at a party, not with his wife, but with his lovely Eurasian assistant on his arm. And he used to spend too much time around the punch bowl.

Now the Speaker, second in line for the presidency, tells friends he is staying away from the bottle. But the Eur-

sian girl is still on the payroll.

Majority Leader Hale Boggs is second in command of the House. Friends suspect John Barleycorn was the ghost writer for Boggs's poorly researched attack on J. Edgar Hoover.

Battler Boggs

The Democratic leader also has a reputation as a bar fighter. He slugged it out with a former congressman at the prestigious Gridiron Club dinner.

He had to be locked in a room when he went to Florida to speak at a fund raiser for another congressman. The guests were on their way out when Boggs broke free, mounted the rostrum and boggled the minds of his listeners with a free wheeling discourse.

Another night, he defended his heavyweight title in a Baton Rouge, La., restaurant. He topped it off with an incredible exhibition at a party for the House leadership at the home of Clark MacGregor, the White House lobbyist.

Albert is so wary of Boggs's behavior that he is afraid to step down from the chair and turn control of the House over to the man who is supposed to be his prime assistant. Albert has even cancelled trips to avoid leaving Boggs as boss.

The kindly Boggs has sought medical help. He knows he has a problem. So do the other 431 members of the House.

The crisis of leadership may not seem too important to citizens who just pay their taxes and expect the men they elect to do a job. But the sad fact is that, without leadership, the job doesn't get done.

Footnote: Perhaps the most competent leader in the House is Wilbur Mills, the crafty Ways and Means chairman. He probably could have beaten Albert in a showdown in January, 1971. He chose not to contest the Speakership then. Within three months, however, he began to mount his strange little campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. People who know him think he really wants to be Speaker.

Out In Thé Cold

The professionals who are supposed to chart U.S. foreign policy, increasingly, are being shut off from the information they need to do their job.

The experts who keep a sharp diplomatic eye on China and Russia, for example, learned about President Nixon's preparations to visit Peking and Moscow indirectly from American Communist leader Gus Hall.

A routine FBI report, passing on information that an informant had picked up from Gus Hall, gave the State Department's experts more information than they had been able to get out of the White House.

The China specialists, still in the dark about many details of the President's Peking visit, have warned that they must be given more information if they are to produce sound analyses.

Their access to information has also been limited by the security crackdown that followed our publication of the secret India-Pakistan papers. The Xerox machines are tightly restricted by day and locked by night. To make a copy of a secret document now just about requires a presidential waiver.

Footnote: There has been a frantic flurry of secret telegrams between Washington and Bangkok over our report that some of Thailand's top officials are operating a fleet of 11 trawlers, which move dozens of tons of opium a year to Hong Kong for shipment to American addicts. The 11 ships ply their trade year round, with no hindrance from Thai authorities. The State Department is anxiously trying to get its ducks in a row in case of a congressional inquiry.