

Johnson's 1037 Days as President

By Drew Pearson

This weekend President Lyndon B. Johnson will have served 1037 days—exactly the same time as John F. Kennedy.

And if a contemporary historian who records events as they happen today may venture a judgment, Lyndon Johnson has chalked up a record in these 1037 days which



would make him one of our greatest Presidents were it not for one thing. He has got us bogged down in one of the most unpopular wars in our 190 years as a nation.

Historians, of course, look beyond a man's TV image in gauging his record. They do not worry about whether he holds news conferences, or stages glamorized weddings for his daughter, or whether his voice has a Texas accent.

Historians, looking at the final results, will find that LBJ picked up the Kennedy program when it was hopelessly foundering, reinforced it, added some ideas of his own, and rammed it through Congress as no President, not even his friend Franklin Roosevelt, had ever been able to do before.

Achievement and Hatred

No President in history, cer-

tainly not since Lincoln, has done so much for the Negro and reaped so much hatred in return.

Johnson passed a school education bill generous to integrated schools but tough on those still segregated. This is what Gov. Wallace of Alabama is tearing his hair about. And it's what has the State of Georgia almost ready to elect a Republican Governor.

Johnson's aid-to-education bill has done more for public schools than has been done by anyone since the days of Horace Mann. On top of this he passed a higher education bill to bolster colleges and universities.

He picked up medicare, which other Presidents had been talking about for 20 years, and put it into law. Furthermore, its enforcement is integrating the hospitals of the South.

He has passed an auto safety law, a mine safety law, a cigarette safety law—which no President even thought of doing before. Most revolutionary of all, he has passed a rent subsidy bill, which some of his predecessors would have called pure socialism.

But Johnson recognized that slums must be cured if the big city is to survive. To that end he also passed a transportation act to help commuters, and has proposed—though not passed—an open housing bill to permit Negroes to move out of the slums.

Finally, Johnson saw that this country could not exist half in economic slavery and half free, so he passed an antipoverity bill. This has been ridiculed and criticized. It may have been too little, and it did come late. But it has begun to take hold. Franklin Roosevelt, with all his skill, all his charm, and all the desperate drive of the great depression behind him, never passed a program anywhere near approaching this.

Undermining by War

That program, however, may be jeopardized by the war in Vietnam and all that goes with it—inflation, high interest rates, and the drop in political popularity.

Johnson, of course, inherited the war. But he did not improve it by also inheriting and promoting the No. 1 hawk adviser of the Kennedy Administration.

In the fall of 1961 Kennedy sent Walt Rostow, his foreign affairs adviser, and Gen. Maxwell Taylor, his military adviser, to South Vietnam to recommend what he should do about the minor war he had inherited from Eisenhower. Rostow studied the situation, retreated to Baguio, the Philippine summer resort, and wrote a report recommending that Kennedy send one whole division to South Vietnam.

At that time we had between 1500 and 1800 troops in Vietnam, some of them disguised

as mountain technicians in order ostensibly to stay within the 1000-troops limitation of the Geneva Treaty.

Rostow wanted to increase this to around 18,000 men and disguise them as engineers to cope with floods on the Mekong River—again to subvert the Geneva Treaty.

Gen. Taylor signed the report—his first step as a hawk. Later Kennedy sent the 18,000 troops and more, though not disguised as engineers.

President Johnson now has the man who initially got Kennedy deeply involved in Vietnam—Walt Rostow—as his chief adviser. In fact, Johnson has promoted him from the State Department to the White House, where he makes more recommendations for more and deeper troop commitments.

All this hits at the weakest spot in Johnson's otherwise admirable qualifications as President, namely his lack of experience in foreign affairs. Here he is a prisoner of his State Department and men like Rostow, promoted from the State Department.

The State Department has the habit of looking not at the long-range problems of the Presidency but at day-to-day international bureaucracy.

Nevertheless, Lyndon Johnson knows that he must get peace in Vietnam or jeopardize all his great domestic accomplishments. And he has tried. He has tried much more than the American public realizes.

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