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If Nixon Quit

Agnew Would Face Most Trying Task

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Notwithstanding President Nixon's bold assertion that he will not resign under the pressures of the Watergate scandal, it is vital to weigh what would happen if he did.

On the assumption that Vice President Spiro Agnew would not feel compromised despite his oft-renewed professions of loyalty to the President, he would be expected to succeed to the office as the Constitution provides. But he would do so under the most trying conditions ever faced by such a successor.

Agnew's most formidable task, pressing upon him with crushing immediacy, would be to assemble his own top level White House staff, put together a full Cabinet and fill at least half a hundred major agency posts already standing empty under a beleaguered President Nixon.

No vice-president succeeding to the presidency in mid-term has ever had to undertake so massive a recruitment, knowing that the alternative would be a dangerously immobile government.

It is a fair presumption there could be a few holdovers from the Nixon regime, since the conditions which might lead the President to resign would be of such magnitude as to compromise if not openly taint many of the high officials working for him.

A newly elected president always has the luxury of a November-January cushion of time in selecting the key people for his administration. Even that span can seem inadequate, as desired candidates for appointive posts hold out or refuse to serve.

Of the eight U.S. vice-presidents elevated to the presidency, only Calvin Coolidge moved into office against an impending period of high-level scandal. But the disgraceful criminal activities which occurred in President Warren Harding's regime still were six months from general disclosure.

With Interior Secretary Albert Fall of Teapot Dome fame already out of the Cabinet though not yet exposed as a taker of bribes, Coolidge's biographer, Donald R. McCoy, described the new president's Cabinet as "stable."

It contained such men of accepted integrity as Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes and Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover (but also Attorney General Harry Daugherty, later twice indicted though never convicted for bribe-taking, perjury and other offenses).

Coolidge not only had this largely stable base as a starter, but actually relied on trusted Cabinet men for recommendations which he followed closely in making policy.

Plainly, should Agnew move up, he would have neither the newly elected president's time cushion or the advantage of a secure, in-place establishment such as the other elevated vice-presidents enjoyed.

Moreover, he would be the first compelled by the Constitution's 25th amendment to nominate a new vice-president. With majority-vote confirmation required from both House and Senate, this could mean a hard fight.

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