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Induction Of Ford Ended Agnew Affair, May End

By NEA/London Economist News Service

With the induction of Gerald Ford as Vice President, the American system of government has repaired the lesser disaster of this calamitous political year, the disaster of Spiro Agnew. The greater disaster, the Nixon one, awaits repair still, but the system has now put itself in a position to deal with that one, too.

The framers of the Constitution can hardly be blamed for having failed to anticipate anything so far-fetched as a Vice President being removed for bribe-taking just when the legitimacy of the President himself was being authoritatively questioned. So it was left to today's politicians to cope. They have coped thoroughly — the investigation of Ford has been minute — and promptly, and in the end the new Vice President has had more impressive support than he can have expected back in mid-October. Ford now is also a decidedly more important man than Mr. Nixon can have expected.

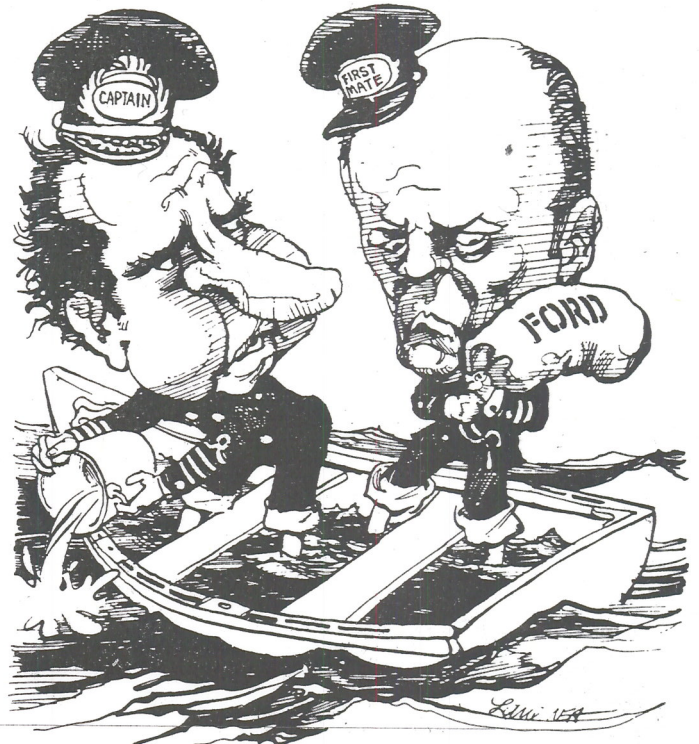
What nobody knew when Mr. Nixon picked Ford was that the President was preparing his stroke against the Watergate special prosecu-

tor. Archibald Cox, eight days later. The dismissal of Cox backfired, and from that moment Mr. Nixon faced a threat of impeachment incomparably more substantial than it had been.

As the politicians took in the implications of what had happened, a consensus emerged between the two parties in Congress that a Republican Vice President must quickly be interposed in the line of succession between the President and the Democratic Speaker of the House, Carl Albert. Only so, with the threat of a struggle between the parties for control of the executive branch removed, could Congress consider coolly what to do about Mr. Nixon.

In each house the representative figures of the Democratic majority were pretty frank about it. They were considering Ford as a possible, even likely, future President. Almost to a man they disliked his opinions, but they had been sounding the country and the country thought it fair that if Mr. Nixon had to be replaced his replacement should be a Republican.

None of this supports any notion that the political institutions of the United States



"Welcome aboard — grab a bucket!"

have suffered irreparable damage from Mr. Nixon's abuse of them. As is natural,

of course, a lot of Americans do feel disillusioned.

The Louis Harris polling

Nixon Administration

organization, which did an opinion sampling for a Senate subcommittee starting in August, found a marked decline in respect for public institutions. The numbers declaring themselves worried about integrity in government rose from 5 per cent in May, 1972, to 43 per cent. Questions designed to elicit disenchantment got a response of 55 per cent, compared with 29 per cent in 1966.

Three out of four, asked what subject they would bring up if they had a private chat with President Nixon, answered: "Watergate."

Just now there are plentiful sources of economic apprehension and political disillusionment to explain the onset of the winter of discontents. More to the point is, how is it all going to look in the spring? President Nixon is in a corner and is behaving like a man in a corner. The rest of the establishment, however, appears to be alive, kicking, conscious of — and very likely equal to — its responsibilities, and if those responsibilities include making provision for the proper conduct of the executive branch between now and the

election of 1976, as they seem to do, that too will be attended to.

How the executive issue will indeed be settled is a question with much fascination but still no sure answer. Christmas is coming; the goose is getting fat in the distant states and districts; the senators and congressmen will go home conscious of their territorial roots and they will return to Washington in January aware of their mandates.

The subsequent possibilities include a negotiated departure of Mr. Nixon on the Agnew model, a sudden presidential illness, and the two most unlikely of all: Mr. Nixon's exculpation, or a full-scale impeachment carried through to the final, formal verdict. Gerald Ford's term as Vice President could even be one of the shortest ever.

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