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# Under President Ford: A Return to 'Normalcy'?

Except for the fringe that now seems determined to devote the rest of its life to castigating the press for "destroying" Richard Nixon, Americans are now breathing the biggest collective sigh of relief since the end of World War II. Integrity has been restored to the White House. Gerald Ford's first days in office, especially his inaugural remarks and his first address to Congress, have heralded a total reversal of the secrecy, criminality and introversion of the Nixon years.

This had been the fundamental necessity, the sine qua non of restoring the presidency as an institution. The openness and directness, the lack of vindictiveness that has always been Jerry Ford's trademark, all have served him and the nation well in these opening days of the Ford administration.

But of course more must be asked, and will be asked, of a chief executive. When Mr. Ford's name came before Congress for confirmation as Vice President, his long string of conservative positions produced some negative votes. But others who disagreed with his past positions voted for him because they saw in him, as a potential President, that sense of integrity they found so sorely missing in Mr. Nixon. To many in and out of Congress there was at least the hope that Mr. Ford would be moving as President to a new constituency, national in scope, instead of local and small town.

The doubts about Mr. Ford have to do with his brains: Is he smart enough for the job? It is to this question that Americans soon will begin to get some answers.

A beginning will have to do with his staff: Who has he brought with him? Will he get rid of the lightweights who may have been good enough for a minority leader but who are too narrow for the White House? Who will he bring in from the outside? A second

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question to which we soon will have an answer is who he will pick for his Vice President. Will he pick the man so obviously the best qualified, Nelson Rockefeller, or will he bow to the right wing of his party which insists on rekindling old antagonisms of past presidential campaigns?

In short, will the new administration represent a return to normalcy—or just to normalcy?

In 1920 Americans, tired of war and of Woodrow Wilson's preachments about world peace, turned to Warren Harding who made "normalcy" into a historian's term of opprobrium. In 1952 Americans, tired of war and the consequences of war, turned to Dwight Eisenhower who was both hero and a man of integrity to them. The Harding years were a disaster; the Eisenhower years today look pretty good.

The agenda for Gerald Ford today is horrendous, beginning with the economic situation which he has wisely made his number one priority. Mr. Nixon made a botch of the inflation problem; the professional economists are today wildly divided on what should be done. Mr. Ford's virtue is that, despite his past record of conservatism, he is no dogmatist. The country's future, as well as his own politi-

cal fate, probably depends more on how he handles the economic problem than on anything else. And, in turn, that is likely to depend on the kind of advice he gets and how he acts on it. He is beginning well by trying to find a consensus—a prospect unlikely but not totally impossible.

In foreign affairs, President Ford has begun by leaning heavily on Secretary Kissinger. In these opening weeks of his administration the new President has a very good chance to resolve

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the Nixon impasse with Senator Henry Jackson (D-Wash.) over the short-term problem of how to deal with the Soviet Union in the matter of trade and credits. It would be surprising, indeed, if a compromise bill for a year or two does not now emerge from Congress. With Kissinger's help Mr. Ford has the skill to bring that about, given the mood of Congress today.

But the larger issue of long-term American attitudes toward Russia and China, toward detente as a principle, will have to be resolved. President Ford has called himself a "reformed isolationist." True enough, but how will that apply to the problems of national defense, the Pentagon budget, negotiations over strategic weapon — and cutting the national budget to bring inflation under control? Answers to these questions are likely to be some time in coming. Here there will be some exceedingly hard choices for the new President because both his hold-over Cabinet and leaders in Congress are seriously divided.

It is a vast gain to get rid of the poison of the past years, to start afresh. That Mr. Ford is determined to do this is beyond question. But it is not enough. The American public, in the post-Vietnam era, is badly confused as to what course it wants the federal government to follow. How far should the United States continue its slow retreat from the role of the world's policeman? How far should Washington go in turning back power — and money — to the states and localities? How much should the government do to meet the ever changing social and economic needs of the nation?

The presidency, Theodore Roosevelt said, is a "bully pulpit" for leading the nation. Mr. Nixon did lead the nation in a historic change in our attitude toward China and he altered significantly the approach to the Soviet Union. But as he left office both policies seem to have come to a dead end, perhaps only temporarily awaiting a clarification of our national interest. In domestic affairs Mr. Nixon exacerbated divisions in the body politic. Can President Ford succeed in a holding operation in foreign affairs, pending the creation of a new consensus, while bringing some order out of the chaos of domestic problems?

In short Gerald Ford has created the underpinnings of a successful presidency in establishing a mood of "communication, conciliation, compromise and cooperation." That is the necessary, the vital beginning. But time already is pressing for him to show leadership on policy matters. Whether he has that capability now is the prime question to which Americans, indeed all the world, awaits the answer.