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Toward a New Presidential Leadership

In the wake of the Democratic sweep last week, good government now requires an uncelebrated—if not altogether unprecedented—style of presidential leadership. As luck would have it, President Ford seems temperamentally well-suited to play the conciliating role which circumstances now demand.

The real question is whether he can develop around him the right team for the changed conditions. For, independent of any personal merit, the new political conditions demand that most of the Nixon holdovers in the White House and the cabinet now get out.

By a tradition so strong as to exclude almost any other brand of leadership, the American presidency is supposed to feature active mastery over events and men by individual force and will. The high spots tell the whole story. There is Lincoln in the long watches of the night; Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson preaching a political gospel; Franklin Roosevelt rising from the wheelchair with his chin out; Harry Truman and "the buck stops here"; Lyndon Johnson twisting congressional arms with a vengeance.

But that kind of presidency is now impossible. Even if Mr. Nixon's example had not given it a bad name, President Ford, having come to office without the mandate of election, would

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have had trouble asserting powerful personal authority. Now the Democratic sweep provides the clincher.

The Democratic leaders believe they have a mandate to show the way in meeting the country's basic problems. Their belief is felt in spades by the younger Democrats coming into the House and the Senate. The new office-holders are not kidding. They mean to do something about inflation and recession and oil profits and politics-as-usual.

The Republicans also have an obvious role to play, particularly in the critical matter of formulating a new role between government and business. So what is required is give-and-take. Instead of constantly asserting the presidential prerogative, Mr. Ford will have to do most of his work in behind-the-scene sessions with the Democrats. If he wants them to be responsible, he will have to let them take some—and maybe even most—of the credit for what is achieved.

Mr. Ford himself seems tailor-made for that role. He is not the kind of ego freak who has to sit at the head of every table. He is not burning with some message to communicate to the world and the American people. Long years as House Minority Leader have accustomed him to working out compromises with Democrats. He has taken the Republican defeat in good part, and he made just the right moves in arranging, on the morrow of the election, a meeting with Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield.

But many of the men left over from the Nixon administration are going to make it hard for the President to play the game by the rules. Roy Ash, the holdover budget director, is suspected by Democrats in the Congress as being a Nixon tool who plays tricks with numbers.

William Timmons, who has been held over as White House liaison man with the Congress, brings bad memories to Democrats and Republican lib-

erals. Kenneth Cole, the head of the Domestic Council, and indeed the whole council are souvenirs of the time when the White House spied on other agencies and departments in the government.

The cabinet is in even worse shape. Attorney General William Saxbe, Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz and Labor Secretary Peter Brennan make many Democrats positively foam at the mouth. Treasury Secretary William Simon is suspect because of his hard line on the budget and his flair for personal publicity. Neither is there any great Democratic confidence in Secretary of Commerce Frederick Dent and Secretary of Transportation Claude Brinegar. All of these men ought to pull stakes quickly, and they can do it without any feeling of hurt vanity.

Filling their jobs is not going to be easy. The need is for highly competent persons, familiar enough with government to hit the ground running, but sufficiently nonpartisan and negotiable to live with the Democrats and Congress. Still the trick can be turned.

In fact, there is a model. What is coming up now is a period not unlike the Eisenhower presidency of 1953-60, when the President and his men worked behind the scenes and allowed the country to believe that Lyndon Johnson and Sam Rayburn had most of the big ideas.