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One Question Marks Ford Hearing

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 1—If one thing was made perfectly clear in this first slow, polite day of Senate committee hearings on the nomination of Representative Gerald R. Ford to be Vice President, it is that consulting a psychiatrist or psychotherapist is still an unforgivable sin for an American politician.

There were questions about many different things from the members of the Senate Rules Committee, meeting not in its own small quarters but in the largest chamber available. The wood-paneled room on the ground floor of the New Senate Office Building used for the hearing belongs to the Appropriations Committee.

The Senators asked Mr. Ford about executive privilege and campaign contributions and impeachment, questions all seeming a bit dulled by the overwhelming sense of history that was alluded to again and again.

They asked him what he thought his role ought to be, and how he got along with the press, among other things.

Voice Raised in Denial

But one question kept recurring, from members of both parties, for which no rationale was advanced, and none was immediately apparent. It was this question, too, that provoked the generally good-natured and level-voiced Mr. Ford to boom his denials. The question, phrased one way or another, concerned allegations that, five or six years ago, Mr. Ford was treated by a New York psy-

chotherapist, Dr. Arnold Hutschnecker.

These allegations, which he previously denied categorically and at length, were described by Mr. Ford again today as just "way-out unreliable." And he added, lending fresh luster to the feeling that seeking psychiatric help is tantamount to an admission of derangement, "I'm just disgustingly sane."

Then, just to make the point again, he said firmly, "Under no circumstances have I ever been treated by any person in the medical profession for psychiatry."

Smooth Day, on the Whole

The basis for these questions was allegations contained in a recent book by Robert N. Winter-Berger, "The Washington Pay-Off," that Mr. Ford was a patient of Dr. Hutschnecker "for at least a year" after the pressures of his post as House minority leader began to make him "irritable, nervous and depressed."

Still, these were minor ruffles on the smooth surface of the day's proceedings, which began with a statement by Senator Howard W. Cannon, the Nevada Democrat who heads the committee, pointing out that "there are no precedents; there is no history." In other words, the committee was doing something no committee ever did before.

Mr. Cannon also interjected a smooth condemnation of the Nixon Administration in the guise of outlining the committee's determination to proceed peaceably. He said that he did not think the

committee should challenge Mr. Ford on the grounds of "a virtually unbroken record of favoring big business during his 25 years in the House" or of a voting record described by some as "indicating an indifference to the needs of the disadvantaged."

Philosophies 'Identical'

To do so, Mr. Cannon said, would be "denying the right of the President to choose whom he wishes, for certainly the President has exercised his option to choose a man whose philosophy and politics are virtually identical to his own."

Mr. Ford, who absorbed this without visibly flinching, followed Mr. Cannon with a 30-minute statement, a sort of folksy civics lesson leavened with small jokes and such confessions as, "perhaps the worst misgivings I have about the Vice-Presidency are that my friends might stop calling me Jerry," and, "I'm not a saint, and I'm sure I have done better or differently or not things I might have done at all."

A Noncapacity Crowd

Dressed in a dark blue suit pinstriped with electric blue, Mr. Ford appeared at ease and well-prepared for the questions.

Sitting alone at the green-felt-covered witness table—his wife was sitting back among the noncapacity crowd of spectators—Mr. Ford had with him a thick loose-leaf binder, indexed with bright orange tabs, to whose plastic-covered sheets he referred in turn as the subject of questions changed.