

## The 25th Amendment and Mr. Ford

REP. GERALD R. FORD is now only one roll call away from confirmation as Vice President of the United States. His nomination has been approved by large majorities of the Senate and the House Judiciary Committee, and is scheduled for full House action soon. The confirmation which thus seems imminent will be a genuine historic first: the first time that a mid-term vice presidential vacancy has been filled pursuant to the 25th Amendment.

So far, the experience has produced much which is reassuring, both about the process and about the nominee. Congress has recognized the need to consider the nomination with particular care, both because the nominee is one of its own and because, as Sen. Howard Cannon put it, there is a "very strong likelihood" that the legislators are actually passing judgment on the next President of the United States. Accordingly, the hearings and investigations of both the Senate Rules Committee and the House Judiciary panel have been notably thorough and serious. Mr. Ford has been subjected to far greater and more systematic scrutiny than any vice presidential nominee chosen in the hurly-burly of a party convention.

The process has thus enabled the country to find out a great deal about the congressman who, barring some last-minute hitch, will soon be in line to become chief executive. When Mr. Ford was nominated, we observed that his public service has been characterized by modest ambition and modest achievement, and a certain pedestrian doggedness. His voting record over the years has been uninspired and uninspiring and includes a lack of sensitivity to wrenching social problems and the great issues of civil rights and liberties. The most conspicuous chapter in Mr. Ford's career, his effort to impeach Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas in 1970, was also his worst performance, marked as it was by reckless

statements, innuendo, and great carelessness with facts.

The hearings have not erased these and other points of concern. But the hearings *have* underscored some countervailing strengths: a record of personal and financial integrity, an open and forthcoming attitude, a real appreciation of congressional and public anxieties about the misuse of presidential power. Under lengthy public interrogation, Mr. Ford has shown qualities of decency and sturdiness which make one hope and think that the Douglas affair was a sorry aberration. In short, Mr. Ford has come across as an experienced politician in the classic American sense, a man who understands the democratic system's workings and constraints, who respects public opinion, and who values comity among the branches of government. It is a real commentary on the troubles of the time that such fundamental qualities—prerequisites of office really—should assume such prominence, and that Mr. Ford's allegiance to the ordinary norms of politics should be a source of so much reassurance.

The question, then, is whether Mr. Ford would bring to the presidency—if it should come to that—the continuity and competence which the 25th Amendment contemplates. In regard to continuity, there is no doubt of his adherence to the main lines of the Nixon administration's foreign and domestic policies. Respecting competence, one must at minimum agree with the carefully couched conclusion of the Senate Rules Committee that Mr. Ford has "fully met reasonable tests" regarding his philosophy, character and integrity. His confirmation will thus restore order and legitimacy to the line of presidential succession, and make extremely remote the troublesome possibility that a Republican president could be succeeded in mid-term by a Democratic Speaker of the House.