

Nixon Cracks the Whip

By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

MIAMI BEACH—When President Nixon learned last Friday that Sen. John Tower of Texas was mobilizing to add a "right-to-work" anti-labor union plank to the platform, he cracked his whip for the first and perhaps the last time to discipline the 1972 Republican National Convention.

At the presidential retreat in Camp David, Md., Mr. Nixon instructed top domestic policy aide John Ehrlichman in Miami Beach to send word to the Platform Committee (using Rogers Morton, Secretary of the Interior and former Republican National Chairman, as a conduit).

MORTON'S INSTRUCTIONS: Tell the committee's conservatives—particularly Tower—that the President insists on the strongest pro-labor plank in Republican history and certainly no right-to-work nonsense.

Moreover, Mr. Nixon ordered Ehrlichman to leave the definite impression, without stating it flatly, that the President would publicly repudiate any right-to-work plank that was adopted — perhaps in his Wednesday night acceptance speech, perhaps some other way. Tower promptly subsided.

What makes this presidential intervention so remarkable is that the White House at the same time was letting the Platform Committee move rightward on busing, amnesty and other issues. In greater contrast, the Nixon political operation was extricating itself from the fight over shaping the 1976 convention while the President cracked the whip on the labor plank.

The reason: as of this momentous week,

Mr. Nixon is interested neither in ideology nor the future Republican succession. His sole interest is a landslide reelection. His new coalition of Jews, organized labor and other disaffected Democrats have added to his 1968 support. Thus, the convention must do nothing to offend this new support.

The labor plank adopted was a panegyric ("We salute the statesmanship of the labor union movement") written weeks ago at the White House. "It made me just a little bit sick," a Southern platform member told us. "But who's going to buck the President?"

The White House last week had seemed to be supporting the drive by conservative party leaders from the South and West to maintain their disproportionate delegate strength for 1976. Nixon campaign aide Harry Flemming had been working secretly with the conservatives for weeks. He was much in evidence a week ago as the rules deliberations began.

SUDDENLY, Flemming was gone—called off by an Ehrlichman order barring any intervention on either side in the struggle for 1976 power. Since then, the President's agents have indicated they would like a compromise but have not insisted on it.

So, Gov. Nelson Rockefeller got a sympathetic hearing but no promises when he telephoned. Nixon Campaign Manager Clark MacGregor replied only that he would be available for negotiations. But he did not press for a compromise or even inform Mr. Nixon of Rockefeller's call.