

NYTimes

OCT 13 1972

Mr. Nixon's Adjustable Principles

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ATLANTA

ATLANTA, Oct. 12—President Nixon is speaking these days with a new quiet confidence—even with a kind of philosophical elder statesman's calm—but there is a catch.

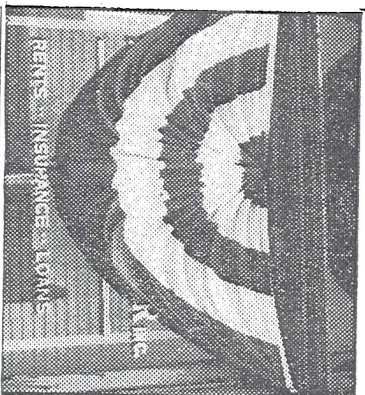
He looked and sounded almost school-maesterish in Atlanta but somehow he never quite gets his words and his actions together.

Here in this remarkably progressive Southern city, he made an eloquent appeal for moral virtues, religious ethics, integrity and justice; but also for his Vietnam policy, his antibusing policy and his economic policies, as if all these policies supported all these heroic ideals.

There was not a single policy dear to the heart of the South Mr. Nixon did not emphasize in Atlanta, from antibusing to his Supreme Court appointees, and he mentioned them all in the name of national unity and peace.

It was a masterful union of politics and theology, sort of a new Machiavelli's political manual in the binding of a hymn book. And the remarkable thing about it is that he really seemed to believe all this with the uttermost sincerity.

This has always been the puzzle about Richard Nixon. He does the day's assignment well, but there are



no connecting rods between one day and the other.

If the day's assignment is to appeal to the religious and social traditions of the South, he talks of moral virtues and character.

But if the question is the Watergate burglary, or the hidden sources of Republican campaign funds, or the controversies over the I.T.T., the Soviet grain deal, or the mysterious rise in the milk support price, somehow the guiding moral virtues are overlooked or overcome.

In Atlanta, he extolls personal ethics and trust in government as indispensable to the grandeur of the nation, but

around the Watergate and the Republican National Committee, they are a nuisance if not intolerable.

In Atlanta, he celebrates the religious life as the foundation of our moral security, but in Vietnam the religious concept of pity and the sanctity of every human life are regarded as a menace to our military security and national pride.

The point of this paradox is not that this combination of noble concepts and dirty tricks is failing, but that it is likely to win for Mr. Nixon in the short run and defeat him and his principles in the long run.

For the emerging question now in this campaign is not whether Mr. Nixon can win but whether, considering his policies and his tactics, he can really restore enough confidence and unity to govern effectively from 1973 to 1977.

He seems to be increasingly conscious of this larger objective as the campaign goes on. He was back again in Atlanta on his theme of bringing us together, and creating a "new majority"—but his assumption is that he can do this with words because his ends are good and will justify any means.

As a working strategy for the campaign, this may very well work, but as a strategy for unifying and gov-

erning the nation, it probably will not last.

For he may win by appealing to the fears of the comfortable majority against the militant blacks, the liberated women, and the student demonstrators; but come next year, he will be left with the war and the poor, and a frustrated and angry minority he has overwhelmed but not convinced.

Also, Mr. Nixon will probably have to deal next year with a frustrated and angry Democratic majority in the Congress, even if he defeats Mr. McGovern by a landslide, and this will not be easy.

For while the Democrats in the Congress admire his political skill, and are almost ready to concede their defeat, most of them—and this also goes for his Republican colleagues from Javits on the left to Buckley on the right—don't know which Nixon they're supposed to be following.

Watching the President avoid moral issues in Washington lately and celebrating them in Atlanta—and not seeing the drop of poison in between—one has the impression that he has won the election and doesn't know it. And yet is so determined to win at any cost that he won't be able to get the unity he wants and needs to govern in his "four more years."