

# A New Problem for Nixon

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 10.—For the seventeenth time in 184 years, the republic is without a Vice President, and the immediate question is how President Nixon will approach the choice of someone to succeed Spiro Agnew for the next three years and three months.

Eight times during these 184 years, a Vice President has succeeded to the Presidency in mid-term, and with another

war in progress in the Mideast, the Administration weakened by scandals and resignations, and the people troubled by internal dissension and inflation, Mr. Nixon's decision will come at a particularly solemn moment.

Mr. Nixon seems to be facing his decision in a cautious and responsible way. He had said that he had no "contingency plan" for replacing Mr. Agnew, and he has now committed himself to consult with other leaders of the nation before submitting his nomination to the House and Senate, both of which, under the 25th Amendment, must confirm the nomination by a majority vote. Nevertheless, he is faced with a dilemma. It has been widely reported that he regards John B. Connally, who has been Governor of Texas, Secretary of the Navy and Secretary of the Treasury, as the man best qualified to be President. But

## Whether to Choose a 'Best' Man or a Caretaker

Mr. Connally is a controversial figure who has only recently joined the Republican party, and his choice would not only split the Republicans but also infuriate many Democrats.

### Political Contention

This is why his approach to the decision is so important, for while he must propose a qualified man, selection of a probable candidate for the Presidency in 1976 would give the new Vice President a big advantage in the 1976 election and lead to more political contention just when the country is looking for quiet and calm.

The same problem arises with the nomination of either Governor Rockefeller of New York or Governor Ronald Reagan of California, for while the Democratic majority in Congress scarcely reject either on merit, the nomination of the progressive Mr. Rockefeller would irritate conservative Republicans, and the nomination of the con- amny progressive Republicans. Accordingly, there has been considerable support here for selecting a capable caretaker Vice President, who would avoid a bruising battle over confirmation by committing himself not to be a candidate for the Presidency in 1976.

### Several Are Mentioned

Among those discussed on this approach to the problem are William P. Rogers, the former Secretary of State and Attorney General; John Sherman Cooper, the former Senator



The President and Vice President at a Republican celebration in Washington of their re-election last Nov. 7

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from Kentucky; Melvin R. Laird of Wisconsin, the White House assistant and former Secretary of Defense; Elliot L. Richardson, the Attorney General, and his deputy, William O. Ruckelshaus.

Washington has been playing this guessing game for weeks, but it was nevertheless stunned by the Agnew resignation and astonished to discover that last week's parlor gossip was suddenly an immediate decision of state.

In the interests of making a calm and orderly transition, it has even been suggested that the President might consider asking Chief Justice Warren Burger to resign from the Court and agree to take the Vice Presidency. Associate Justices Lewis F. Powell Jr. of Virginia, Harry A. Blackmun of Minnesota and Potter Stewart of Ohio have also been mentioned, though their enthusiasm for giving up lifetime appointments on the Court to act as temporary designated hitters for Mr. Agnew might be somewhat limited.

#### Opposition to 'Caretaker'

There is, however, strong opposition to this "caretaker" idea. This city has gone through so many surprises and shocks in the last year that it has come to expect the worst.

During these last 12 months, it has re-elected the President by a landslide, only to find him a year later not triumphant but despondent. The two former Presidents, Mr. Truman and Mr. Johnson have died in these last few months.

The war in Vietnam has ended, and just when the country was celebrating the first peace in a decade, another war has started up in the Mideast at the crossroads of the continents. All this and a devalued dollar, soaring prices, Watergate and finally a confession that last month's "damned lies" on Mr. Agnew were this week's truth have shaken the capital and made everybody ask, what next?

So there is also pressure on

the President here now, but to assume the best after the worse is so apparent or to concern himself with the short-range interests of compromise candidates who will calm things down, but to concentrate on choosing the best potential President available, on the theory that anything may happen and that in the end the best thing to do is the right thing to do.

#### Conflicting Advice

It will be interesting to observe how the President deals with this philosophical question, with the conflicting advice he is now getting; to go for what he believes to be the best, even if this provokes more battles and controversies he doesn't need, or to go for another compromise, which will calm things down.

#### Sin of Long Ago

In his "Dear Ted" letter accepting the Vice President's resignation, the President seemed to be almost apologetic. He praised the Vice President's loyalty and courage, but Mr. Agnew had been caught for sins of long ago—not the news sins of political burglary, espionage and sabotage, which are still before the courts, but for fiddling with his income tax, like the late Senator Thomas J. Dodd. They did not get him for big crimes like Cambodia or Watergate, which he did not commit, but they got him on taxes, and the President, who has some tax problems of his own, let him go as gracefully as he could.

So the interesting thing here now is what the President does with all this. Nothing has quite worked out as he thought. The element of accident has confounded him ever since his triumphant re-election last November. Events have really been in the saddle. They have reduced his popularity, destroyed his Vice President, inflicted some of the principal members of his Cabinet, forced the resignation of his old buddies on the White House staff and now produced a new war in the most critical area of the world.

All this has not only startled but saddened Washington. It was the assumption of this Administration that it could produce peace, but now it has another war, that it could reach an accommodation with the Russians and the Chinese about a new order in the world, but now the Russians are saying pleasant things in diplomatic channels but apparently to destroy Israel.

#### Symbol of Law and Order

Also, it was the assumption of this Administration that it was the symbol of law and order, even that it could impose a new moral order on the republic, but now it has been caught breaking the law, and the resignation of the Vice President is not the end of the story.

Still, with the resignation of Mr. Agnew, and the outbreak of war in the Middle East, there is a chance now to look at all these events and personal tragedies again. And this is what Washington is now watching for. It has not the vaguest idea of how Mr. Nixon will approach this new situation, so it waits, not really knowing him after all these years, and asks questions.

Will he use this latest crisis to compromise on the tapes? Or will he try, like Mr. Agnew, to "tough it out" until events bring one more surprising disaster?

Nobody around here knows the answer to these questions, but this was the talk of the town after Mr. Agnew's resignation, and the first clue is likely to come when the President decides how to pick Mr. Agnew's successor.