

For a Grassroots Vice-Presidency

By Endicott Peabody

WASHINGTON—When our shiny new Vice President, in his first major speech in Atlantic City the other day, castigated the President's Watergate enemies and voiced his belief in the President's innocence, it should not have been surprising that the time, occasion and the subject were selected by the President and that the speech was written by the President's staff.

It was disappointing, nevertheless, because it re-establishes that Presidential selection of a Vice President, either by the 25th Amendment or at a national convention, does not provide us with a representative of the people but only of the President himself.

When the chances are one in three that Gerald R. Ford or any other Vice President may be President of the United States, we should ask ourselves why we permit a potential President to be selected for and imposed on us. Why, in a nation that prides itself as a democracy, don't the people have some say about the person who may become their highest official? Why, indeed, don't we insist that the Vice President run for office in the same manner that the President and every other elected official in the land does?

The tragedy of the selection of Thomas F. Eagleton as the Democratic Vice-Presidential nominee, and the more recent resignation of Spiro T. Agnew,

don't merely point up the Presidential nominees' mistakes in their selections. When the people have no say, when the candidates are not faced with the exposure of a political campaign, it establishes that desperate errors can be made that may cause the whole nation to suffer.

The Democratic National Committee recognized this when it created a commission to review and improve the party's method of Vice-Presidential nominations. Unfortunately, the commission, whose chairman was Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, labored mightily and brought forth a mouse.

This commission's majority report, which is to be considered by the National Committee when it next meets in March, if anything further eliminates the people's voice, first by giving the Presidential nominee the opportunity to adjourn the national convention for two weeks so he may have more time to select his running mate, and second by recommending an "official" selection advisory committee to name "acceptable" candidates.

This Maginot-Line philosophy of trying to win the next war by focusing on mistakes of the last one can only seal in the Vice President as the President's henchman.

The commission's minority report, which I wrote, would limit nomination for Vice President on the first ballot only to those candidates for Vice

President or President who had run in state Presidential primaries or conventions.

This proposal has several advantages:

It requires the person who may become Vice President to seek the people's support for the candidacy; it requires the candidate to submit to the scrutiny of the elective process; it focuses national attention on those eligible for the position, making possible a thorough investigation of each candidate; and it still permits the Presidential nominee to have a significant, if not determining, voice in who the running mate shall be.

Harry S. Truman in his memoirs admonished the country: Instead of considering a Vice-Presidential candidate as a sort of "appendage to the Presidency," the voters "should select him as a spare chief executive."

When we require the Vice-Presidential candidate to seek first the people's support, we will be relieved of the kind of Charlie McCarthy speech uttered by Vice President Ford at Atlantic City and may expect that the people's interest will be an obligation that takes precedence over any service this elected official performs for the President.

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