Ford Is Likely to Differ With Nixon on Economics

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 8 — People who have long known both Gerald R. Ford and Richard M. Nixon believe that Mr. Ford's posture will be subtly but significantly different from his predecessor's in the area that is of most concern to the nation today — economic policy.

Like Mr. Nixon, Mr. Ford is a conservative who believes that maintaining tight control over Government spending is essential if any inroads are to be made against inflation.

The differences between the two men that are seen by conomists who know them both are less philosophical than they are personal. But these differences of personality could bring policy differences over a period of time, it is suggested.

For example, Paul W. McCracken, an old friend of Mr. Ford's, who also served as Mr. Nixon's chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, said he felt that Mr. Nixon had "a tendency to go for the 50-yard pass, with interludes in between without much activity." He cited the wage-price freeze of August, 1971, as an example of a 50-yard pass in economic policy—a risky attempt to turn the tide toward victory.

Hayes's Strategy

In Mr. McCracken's view, Mr. Ford, on the other hand, understands the strategy of Woody Hayes, the highly successful Ohio State football coach, that "four yards and a cloud of dust gets the ball over the line more often than the opposition."

Thus, Mr. McCracken believes that, while Mr. Ford will adhere to the broad outlines of Mr. Nixon's anti-inflation policy of budgetry and monetary restraint, he will also "work more, ady by day, on specific problems that need attention if the totality of things is to work better."

Specifically, Mr. McCracken expecs Mr. Ford to pay closer attention to union contract negotiations in such basic industries as coal mining, and to such problems as the way the Government's own regulatory policies may be adding to inflation.

A Different View

A view of the two men that was somewhat different from Mr. McCracken's, but not inconsistent with it, was expressed by Murray Weidenbaum, who was Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for economic policy in the first three years of the Nixon Administration.

It is in Mr. Nixon's nature, he said, "to lurch to extremes." He added:

"When one policy seemed not to work, he tried another. And each new policy, in turn, was rigidly described as the one true religion, with extravagant claims made for its healing powers.'

Mr. Ford, Mr. Weidenbaum continued, is more relaxed, and does not approach economic policy, or perhaps any other policy area with "theological preconceptions."

Mr. Weidenbaum expects that economic policy changes under Mr. Ford will be less abrupt and drastic than, for example, Mr. Nixon's swings from budgetary restraint to budgetary stimulus in 1972, or his vacillations on wage and price controls. But milder changes, when a policy seemed inadequate, might be made by Mr. Ford with less anguish and strain, Mr. Weidenbaum indicated.

Thus, he feels that "in a curious way, Mr. Ford's economic policies may be simultaneously more flexible and steadier than Mr. Nixon's."

That Mr. Ford is committed to the battle against inflation is doubted by no one."

In dozens of speeches throughout the country since he became Vice President, he has referred to inflation as "public enemy No. 1." And, over and over, he has exxpressed his belief that there is no "easy road" to ending inflation, that no "quick fixes" are available, and that the only possible cure lies in keeping Government expenditures at noninflationary levels.

Yet, there are those who think that Mr. Ford might be quicker than Mr. Nixon to accept — even to advocate — a much-enlarged program of putting the unemployed on the Federal payroll in public service jobs.

The day before yesterday, for example, Mr. Ford put the following paragraph into a speech:

"It serves no purpose to lecture the harassed public, especially the low and middle-income people who have been the main losers from inflation. We are mindful that some people who have been the main losers from inlation. We are mindful that some people are suffering more than others. Certain groups—older Americans, persons on fixed incomes, the unemployed—may require special help, within budgetary limitations. Their plight must be heeded."

More Activism Hinted

Mr. Ford hinted in the same speech (which was delivered by someone else when he had to cancel his appearance) that he might take a more activist position than Mr. Nixon on other economic policy problems. Among these are the extreme difficulties that are facing different groups, ranging from wuold-be home-buyers to giant utility companies, in their attempts to borrow money.

"Certain industries, such as the public utilities, housing, financial institutions and others, have been especially hard hit" by policies of credit restraint that are also aimed at cotrolling inflation, Mr. Ford said.

"There are suggested solutions that have merit and deserve prompt consideration," he continued. "The time has come for action, not doom-saying and hand-wringing."

Mr. Ford did not specify which, among a number of new proposals for alleviating the credit shortage, he might support. But Mr. Nixon had not indicated any possibility of support for any of them.

Exercising Restraint

Many people — economic experts and nonexperts alike— have expressed the view that Mr. Ford might be able to take advantage of a mood of harmony and reconciliation that could sweep the country after Mr. Nixon's resignation to persuade business and labor to exercise restraint in the interests of curbing inflation.

Mr. Ford met on Tuesday with a group of five freshmen Senators from both parties who propounded to him their idea of an "economic summit meeting," including representatives of business, labor, consumer interests, farmers and others.

Mr. Ford said after the meeting that he thought there was "merit" in the plan, which presumably includes appeals for restraint in price and wage increases, as well as attempts to discover whether there were any economic policies that had a broad base of support among these groups.

Which of Mr. Nixon's top economic-policy advisers Mr. Ford might keep and which he might let go, at least over the long run, was not known. He reportedly had not spoken to any of these men, as of the hour of President Nixon's speech to the nation neared, but he had scheduled a meeting with them for tomorrow afternoon.

A Peculiar Position

Alan Greenspan, the New York economist who was nominated by Mr. Nixon to be the new chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, was in a particularly peculiar position. His nomination has yet to be confirmed by the Senate.

He said today that he would take over the job, as scheduled, if Mr. Ford asked him to, or bow out, if that was Mr. Ford's wish.

An economist who knows both Mr. Ford and Mr. Greenspan said he thought that Mr. Greenspan was definitely more conservative than Mr. Ford. But he added:

"That may not be especially significant. What a President wants most from the Council of Economic Advisers is good analysis, and Alan can certainly provide that."

No economist who knows Mr. Ford is arguing that he is deeply knowledgable about economics.