

JOHNSON, KENNEDY ENDING COOLNESS

Rapprochement Seen Easing
Threat of Party Split

964 By TOM WICKER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 24 — The relationship between President Johnson and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, never so cool as has been reported, has improved considerably in recent weeks.

This fact, conceded at both the White House and the Justice Department, does not mean anything so specific as that Mr. Johnson will choose Mr. Kennedy to run for Vice President.

That choice will be made on the basis of many factors other than personal relationships.

The improved situation between Mr. Johnson and the brother of President Kennedy does mean that a potentially dangerous split in the Democratic party has been at least partly mended.

It also means that the President now has a much easier and more informal relationship with the Justice Department, and with one of the most influential figures in this cabinet.

Eases Johnson Task

And in all likelihood, it probably will make it easier for Mr. Johnson to choose a Vice-Presidential running mate, when the time comes, without fear of a party schism.

Many signs of an improved Johnson-Kennedy relationship were visible in Washington in late spring and early summer.

Those familiar with the developing situation believe that it resulted primarily from the deep interest of both men in two crucial situations — civil rights in this country and the war in South Vietnam.

In addition, Mr. Kennedy has been throwing himself more and more into the work of the Administration in recent weeks, after the long period when he was, first, virtually in seclusion, and later, in low spirits following the assassination of his brother.

Seld-Interest a Factor

Finally, there was the evident political and personal self-interest of both men in establishing a good relationship.

Numerous friends also urged the Attorney General to seek out the President and to try to end the coolness between them.

These factors already were at work when Mr. Johnson, in response to a letter from Mr. Kennedy, invited the Attorney General to the White House on June 4. The resulting private conversation lasted more than an hour and came off much more cordially and satisfactorily than either had expected.

Last winter, Mr. Kennedy resisted seeking such a conversation with Mr. Johnson. He told friends that he believed it was up to the President to initiate such discussions.

The two men had not been close during the Kennedy Administration, although the Attorney General's associates say he always admired both Mr. Johnson's willingness to run for Vice President in 1960 and his loyalty to President Kennedy while serving in that post.

Drifted Apart

After Mr. Johnson became President, and Mr. Kennedy went into a deep depression following his brother's death, they drifted further apart. President Johnson was having to deal with the Justice Department largely through second-level officials there.

In addition, a number of officials who had served in the Kennedy Administration felt a considerable loyalty to Robert Kennedy, with the result that there were at least the beginnings of a division in the Johnson Administration.

This situation was exacerbated when a write-in campaign for Mr. Kennedy, started without his permission, was waged in the New Hampshire primary. Voters were urged to write in his name for Vice President and more than 20,000 of them ultimately did.

This was widely viewed as an effort to force Mr. Johnson's hand in choosing a running mate. Whether it was or not, there was a large and vocal group in Washington who were advocating that Mr. Kennedy be the candidate.

Vietnam a Factor

As the spring advanced, however, and Mr. Kennedy returned more and more to full participation in Justice Department and Administration activities, the crises in South Vietnam deepened.

At about the same time, the civil rights bill neared passage in Congress and the so-called "long, hot summer" during which the Administration expects considerable racial turmoil, came nearer and nearer.

As an almost natural result, Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Johnson conferred much more frequently on civil rights. In the same way, Mr. Kennedy, who had been in on the planning of the American effort in Vietnam since 1961, was drawn frequently into Johnson Administration discussions on that subject.

Friends were also taking a hand, urging Mr. Kennedy to mend his fences with the President. At least one of them was Assistant Secretary of State Fred Dutton, who wrote Mr. Kennedy a long letter urging him—in his own interest and those of the Democratic party and the Administration — to seek out Mr. Johnson.

Whether or not as a result, the meeting June 4 at the White House followed, and the President and his Attorney General found themselves talking freely and rather fully.

Signs of Improvement

During the period of improved relations, some of the signs of it that have been observed were the following:

Mr. Kennedy's name has reappeared on the list of those

who see the State Department's most sensitive cables.

Earlier in the Johnson administration, his name had been omitted from the list. Now he is regarded as being in the top planning circle on South Vietnam.

Mr. Johnson is known to have appreciated Mr. Kennedy's offer to serve as Ambassador to South Vietnam. Though he did not accept the offer, he wrote the Attorney General a warm letter. And it became known that one reason he had rejected Mr. Kennedy was his reluctance to place a member of the misfortune-dogged Kennedy family in a physically dangerous post.

As recently as May 28, Mr. Johnson was not invited to Kennedy family observances of John Kennedy's birthday. He held his own memorial ceremony in the White House, at which Robert Kennedy was reported to have been deeply moved by the President's eulogy.

Attends Family Dinner

Then, on June 16, Mr. Johnson was invited and did attend a private dinner for the Kennedy Memorial Library, given by the Kennedy family at the St. Regis Hotel in New York.

On that occasion, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson mixed cordially with Robert Kennedy and with Mrs. John F. Kennedy. The Attorney General and some of his aides rode with the President in a limousine to John F. Kennedy International Airport, for an intensive discussion of the problems of enforcing the civil rights bill, once it was passed.

On June 18, the day before the Senate approved the measure, and again on June 19, when it took action, Mr. Johnson conferred extensively with Mr. Kennedy on the statement the President was to issue.

The June 19 conversations took place by long distance telephone from California, where Mr. Johnson was making political appearances.

That same day, the news reached the President at a political dinner in San Francisco that Senator Edward M. Kennedy, the Attorney General's younger brother, had been injured seriously in an airplane crash.

Mr. Johnson immediately opened a long-distance wire to the Senator's hospital room in Northampton, Mass., and was solicitous about his recovery.

The next day, the President wired the Senator's mother and his wife, and kept in close contact with the Northampton Hospital.

This week, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Kennedy have worked closely in directing Federal efforts to locate three missing civil rights workers in Mississippi. The meetings have been described as businesslike and without tension.

Other, lesser signs have been noticed. For instance, Mr. Kennedy has been seen more frequently, in recent weeks, in the White House mess, having coffee or lunching with members of the White House staff.

Some months ago, he seldom went to the White House, even on official business.

One man who knows both the President and the Attorney Gen-

eral well summed up the situation this way:

"They can talk easily now. They aren't wary of each other any more."