

Johnson and Kennedy Exchange Words of Praise



Associated Press Wirephoto

President Johnson and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy during White House reception

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 8—President Johnson and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy exchanged high praise for each other today. The Attorney General said that the country was fortunate to have Mr. Johnson

as President. Mr. Johnson hailed Mr. Kennedy as "our outstanding Attorney General" who he said had rendered a service to the nation in awakening national conscience to the cause of equal justice. The occasion was a talk by the President in the East Room of the White

House, where he greeted United States attorneys, some of them with their wives and children, who were in Washington for a conference. The exchange of compliments was considered noteworthy for at least two

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reasons. First, there have been reports of coolness between the Attorney General and the President; second, despite such reports, there has been speculation that Mr. Johnson might ask the brother of President Kennedy to run for Vice President on the Democratic ticket this fall.

The remarks by both men today served to support indications in recent weeks that the relationship between them had improved considerably.

Mr. Kennedy's laudatory remarks today followed his commendation of Mr. Johnson yesterday at the opening meeting of the Conference of United States Attorneys. At that time, the Attorney General said President Johnson's leadership was responsible for general nationwide compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

"He has spoken out," Mr. Kennedy said of the President. "There is confidence in him and confidence in his judgment, and the people have followed him."

Cites 'Great Service'

Today the Attorney General, in introducing the President,

commended the Government attorneys to Mr. Johnson as persons who had been "dedicated to the interests of President Kennedy and now with great energy and devotion serve your interest."

Mr. Kennedy said that the attorneys were fortunate in their careers "and they are fortunate in having you as President of the United States."

Mr. Johnson, who had been sitting with Mrs. Kennedy, smiled broadly and with obvious pleasure as he got up to shake the Attorney General's hand and address the group.

In Mr. Johnson's prepared talk, Mr. Kennedy was not mentioned by name. The President, however, in urging the Federal attorneys to be "restless champions of the cause of equal justice for the poor as well as the rich," said:

"Our outstanding Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, has performed a great service for our nation in awakening our national conscience in this regard."

In another passage the President again interpolated a reference to Mr. Kennedy that was not contained in the prepared speech. This occurred when he called upon the attorneys to "join the Attorney General and us in helping to overcome" the "disadvantage of the underprivileged in our courtrooms."

In discussing the civil rights law, Mr. Johnson urged the attorneys to be "leaders outside—as well as inside—the courtroom in helping to achieve" the law's "full value and meaning."

"In our times," he went on, "there has been no greater challenge to responsible, articulate citizens than to make this law the landmark of human justice that it deserves to be."

"The task cannot be discharged perfunctorily and certainly it cannot be discharged in a punitive spirit," he said. "You have a great opportunity as Americans—as well as United States attorney—in this new undertaking."

The meetings today completed two days of intradepartmental discussions of current problems, including civil rights. All 91 United States attorneys now in office attended the conference.