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Campaigning 'Like a Stranger in the Night'

CLEVELAND—The White House was privately informed by Ohio Republican officials that a crowd of 100,000 "at the minimum" would greet President Ford in Public Square here if he arrived before 5 p.m. on his campaign stop, last Tuesday.

But Dean Burch, the President's White House political strategist, was not impressed. The President would arrive, he said, at 5:30 (when the only occupants of Public Square were the pigeons).

Indeed, the White House and its advance men seemed so aloof from such mundane matters as a big crowd to greet Mr. Ford on his first presidential trip to Ohio's largest city that some politicians suspected a deeper reason: security. With no Vice President, they figured, President Ford could not risk the danger of exposure to large crowds.

In fact, however, security was the least of the reasons for Mr. Ford's being shipped into Cleveland like a stranger in the night—with no crowds wanted at the airport, no advance publication of his motorcade route and no real effort for the usual election-year crowd at his destination in front of the Sheraton Hotel in Public Square.

The real reason was less weighty—the inability or unwillingness of his political managers to make a minor adjustment in the day's schedule so that

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he could depart his previous stop in Oklahoma to make Cleveland in time for just the kind of mammoth rally Mr. Ford's party here badly needs.

The result was another misstep in Mr. Ford's hopelessly uphill battle to turn the sinking tide of Republican fortunes in this off-year election campaign. Instead of appealing to tens of thousands, he spoke to 300 already committed Republicans in the small Sheraton ballroom without live television coverage.

Republicans here were not impressed with the President's political managers. "They must think the President of the United States is still a leader of the House," one told us bewilderedly.

That reaction was fostered in part by Mr. Ford himself. He favorably impressed the 300 fat cats (at \$500 a head) by mingling in a pre-dinner reception without the formality of a re-

ceiving line. But when he began plugging in his dinner speech for such lowly Republicans as candidates for state judge and the state Senate, one diner murmured: "This sounds like a precinct meeting."

Far worse for the President was the blatant presidential snub by former Gov. James A. Rhodes. It was Rhodes himself who pleaded with Mr. Ford at the Columbus airport last August to return to Ohio for a campaign swing for the state Republican ticket—meaning particularly Big Jim Rhodes. Rhodes is locked in a mid-and-luck gubernatorial campaign against incumbent Democratic Gov. John J. Gilligan. That Rhodes appeal came before Mr. Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon, a political cataclysm which caused the President's popularity to plummet and converted him from political asset to possible liability in his party's campaign.

It also came before Mr. Ford surfaced his 5 per cent income surtax proposal. Rhodes, campaigning on a no-tax-increase platform, decided that a snub of the fund-raising dinner here would cost him less than front-page pictures side-by-side with a President trying to raise the income tax.

The foxy Rhodes may be right. In the two days following his boycott of the President's fund-raising dinner, not a single complaint had been received at Republican headquarters here. Moreover, Rhodes raised \$42,000 at a separate Rhodes fund-raiser near Cincinnati the same evening—far more than his share of the net-estimated \$90,000 proceeds from the President's fund-raiser.

For President Ford, such madcap campaigning as his all-but-invisible five hours here seems atrociously wasteful, quite apart from the unforeseen snub by Rhodes. As one top party leader told us, the President's "candor and decency came through vividly" to the few well-heeled Republicans who got a chance to see and hear him. His managers should make certain he is given a chance for similar exposure to the general public in the few days that remain of the campaign. If they can't do that, they are wasting his time and he might as well stay in the White House no matter how much he wants to get out and campaign.