

# 'Depreciation of a New Ford'

Post  
9/16/74

INDIANAPOLIS—Here in the heart of what used to be Nixon Country, President Ford's pardon of Richard M. Nixon has traumatized the Republican faithful into ugly resentment against their new President and despair over their election prospects Nov. 5.

Although the old Nixon hardcore has diminished to a corporal's guard even in Indiana, the angry mood here goes not to the substance of the Nixon pardon but to its political impact. From top to bottom of the Indiana Republican hierararchy, one consistent theme is sounded: The uphill fight by Mayor Richard G. Lugar of Indianapolis to unseat two-term Democratic Sen. Birch Bayh has been undercut by Mr. Ford's timing.

These Republicans are disappointed that Mr. Ford instantly transformed himself from glittering asset to at least a temporary liability. But beyond that is deep resentment that Mr. Ford thought so little of the pardon's political consequences. "I keep asking myself: Why did he do it *now*?" says one county chairman. "We were just starting to get moving."

Indiana is no isolated case. In Ohio the day after the Nixon pardon, one hard-pressed Republican candidate removed from his campaign brochure a letter of praise from Mr. Ford (explaining to us: "I just couldn't take the chance"). In New Jersey, an incumbent Republican representative facing a stiff challenge scrapped a campaign flyer because Mr. Ford's picture was on the cover.

The surest test of how much the pardon deflated Republican prospects came in Nixon-loving Indiana. When a fund-raising visit to Indianapolis Oct. 16 by the new President was an-

nounced in the midst of the Ford euphoria, Bayh's managers trembled. They toyed with the idea of counteracting the \$500-a-ticket Ford reception with a \$1-a-ticket Bayh rally here the next night.

But the pardon immediately undermined the Ford visit. "My husband told me he just doesn't want to pay \$500 to see the President now," a party worker confided. Even though Republican leaders claim tickets are selling briskly, few see the President's visit as a political bonanza. Neither do the Democrats; Bayh's managers have abandoned the \$1 counter-rally.

Bayh's own campaigning also has been affected. While recent television commercials were crediting Birch Bayh as principal sponsor of the 25th amendment, which made Jerry Ford President, the senator sharply changed his tune last week. "It's surprising how fast a new Ford depreciates in value these days," a grinning Bayh cracked to a cheering Democratic rally.

The new President was scarcely mentioned at Republican rallies. Campaigning in southwestern Indiana, Lugar ignored Mr. Ford except when reporters or students questioned him about the pardon. His answers were cautious and tentative. While suggesting the pardon was an effort to get rid of Watergate once and for all, Lugar added dryly that the effort "may not have been successful."

The Nixon hardcore has so diminished in his old heartland that Hoosier enthusiasts for the pardon were hard to find. "I was amazed," related one county chairman, "how many Republicans wanted Nixon to eat some crow before he was pardoned."

However, hard-boiled leaders of the Indiana Republican organization are

long past caring what happens to Richard Nixon, pardon or no pardon. Their despair stems from fearing that persistent disregard for Republican fortunes in the Nixon White House may continue in the Ford White House. Lugar conceded to us he expects nothing of benefit from Washington, but wistfully added: "I hope I won't get bombed from Washington every other week."

Lugar's campaign manager, National Committeeman L. Keith Bulen, is considerably less phlegmatic than his candidate. Angered enough by the pardon, Bulen was absolutely outraged by last week's maladroitness suggestion from the White House of possible blanket Watergate pardons.

In fact, Bulen had been simmering even before the pardon over a less comic event: Mr. Ford's selection of Mary Louise Smith, whose credentials in organizational politics are meager, to be Republican National Chairman without consulting national committee members. If Bulen, urged on by fellow committee members, expresses this discontent when the committee meets in Washington today to "elect" Mrs. Smith, he will have plenty of allies.

What makes the Bulens of the Republican Party so frantic is that Mr. Ford's conduct as President, from the appointment of Mrs. Smith to the Nixon pardon fiasco, suggests he realizes no more than his predecessor that the Republican Party and the two-party system are on the brink of destruction. Their grumbling about the President stems from genuine anguish that even the Ford Oval Office may have forgotten that there is a Republican Party.