

A Turn of G.O.P.'s Tide

Nomination of Rockefeller Completes Quick Reversal of Outlook for '76

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By R. W. APPLE JR. AUG 21 1974

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 20— President Ford's nomination of Nelson A. Rockefeller as Vice President completes a reversal of national political tides of potentially historic proportions. Ten days ago, politicians were asking whether the Republican party could survive; today, they were asking how the Democrats were going to mount a challenge in 1976.

Mr. Ford, as an admiring, if somewhat staggered, Democrat said this morning, "hasn't made a wrong move yet."

In the narrowest political sense, and in the shortest perspective, Mr. Rockefeller's designation will be welcomed by Republicans seeking election or re-election this fall because of his zest and tirelessness as a campaigner.

He can work a crowd, eat a knish (or a hot dog or a pizza), sparkle on the banquet circuit and raise money—and he is expected to do so for anyone who wants him.

Suddenly, instead of looking forward to a campaign in

which the Watergate scandal would haunt them and the unpopularity of Richard M. Nixon would weigh them down, Republican office-seekers can identify themselves with a popular new President, a pervasive spirit of renewal and candor in the capital and a politically dynamic Vice President-designate.

Not that the Republicans are without liabilities. Inflation and economic stagnation, together with whatever aura of Watergate may linger over the party, could still cost them Congressional seats in November. But where the Democrats were once talking of gaining as many as 100 seats in the 435-member House of Representatives, the professionals are now estimating a gain of about 15 or 20.

In a larger sense, Mr. Ford has signaled that he is not interested in a narrowly ideological party.

Historically, insistence of ideological homogeneity has been a disaster for American politi-

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cal parties, as the Republican campaign of 1964 and the Democratic campaign of 1972 vividly demonstrated.

Some politicians had expected Mr. Ford to cling, in his policies and personnel, to the rather conventional midwestern conservatism that he had exhibited in the House.

But by some of his early policy decisions (notably his declaration yesterday for leniency for Vietnam draft-evaders), by his willingness to welcome to the White House advisers such as former Senator Charles E. Goodell and guests such as Representative Paul N. McCloskey Jr. (both liberal Republicans once considered party heretics), and now in his choice of Mr. Rockefeller, the President has shown interest in a broad political base.

Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. Ford are a classical political match, reminiscent of the pairing of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson in 1960. One is a moderate (some would say liberal), the other a conservative; one is a Midwesterner, the other an Easterner; one a man of the city, the other from a small town; one identified with domestic concerns, the other experienced in international affairs.

Perhaps inevitably, some members of the Republican right wing were unhappy with Mr. Rockefeller, who came to symbolize in 1964 and afterwards the liberal "me-tooish" that they detest. Representative John Ashbrook of Ohio pronounced himself "very disappointed," and Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona predicted trouble with the Republican rank-and-file.

But Mr. Rockefeller has moved toward the center in recent years, and many Republican conservatives have forgotten the tumultuous struggles of the nineteen-sixties. Moreover, most of them are eager to rebuild their party, which has

lost adherents steadily during the long Watergate nightmare.

"I can't believe," said Representative John J. Rhodes of Arizona, the conservative leader of the Republican minority in the House, "that conservative Republicans feel broadening the base of the party is a bad thing—unless they want to keep on losing and remain a minority."

Amonk Democrats, who suddenly see themselves faced with the prospect of trying to defeat a Ford-Rockefeller ticket in 1976, there was little question that Mr. Ford had made an intelligent political decision.

"Well, that saves us a lot of trouble in 1976," one Democratic Senator said gloomily this afternoon.

He was overstating the case, of course—A Ford-Rockefeller ticket would be far from unbeatable—but his hyperbole reflected the generally held Democratic view that such a ticket would be formidable indeed; this despite the Republicans' minority status and the inevitable end to the "honeymoon" phase of the Ford Presidency.

Problems of Democrats

The formation of a presumptive Republican ticket of real power, embracing two experienced and widely known men with varying constituencies, came at a time when the Democrats had just erupted in squabbling and walkouts during their weekend charter commission meeting.

Whether the discordant meeting represented only a temporary procedural dispute or an exacerbation of the debilitating hostility that has hampered the party since 1968, the image projected was not healthy.

Robert S. Strauss, the Democratic chairman, conceded as much in a telephone interview. The Republicans' comeback, he said, made it imperative that his party put its quarrels behind it and begin to develop candidates and issues that "will

help us in the damned difficult job we have in '76."

Few Democrats were willing to speculate even privately about what kind of Presidential nominee would be able best to challenge a Ford-Rockefeller ticket two years from now, although some said the potency of the opposition might lead Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, to defer his Presidential ambitions for a time.

In 1980, he would be only 48 years old, his accident at Chappaquiddick would be four more years behind him, and the chances are good that he would face neither a Republican incumbent nor a Republican Vice President attempting to move up.

As for the Republicans, the selection of Mr. Rockefeller almost certainly writes an end to the Presidential dreams of Gov. Ronald Reagan of California, who is 63 years old, even though he has not ruled out the possibility of challenging Mr. Ford in the primaries in 1976 if the President adopts policies too liberal for Mr. Reagan's taste.

And it means a long wait for others who had thought of running in 1976, such as former Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson and Senator Charles H. Percy of Illinois.

Mr. Rockefeller, who had often spoken disdainfully of the Vice-Presidency, has, in accepting it now, apparently concluded that he will reach the Presidency only in the event that Mr. Ford is unable to complete a term.

He himself said today that he believes Mr. Ford will run again in 1974, telling reporters, "He has every intention of it. That was my impression, that is what I urged, that's my assumption."

By 1980, he will be 72, far too old to run then.

Precisely what Mr. Rockefeller's role in the Ford Administration will be has apparently not yet been decided.

But it will surprise most

Washington observers if he does not take a substantial role in foreign policy, especially as it affects Latin America, which has engaged his interest for decades. He is expected to travel extensively.

Mr. Rockefeller's acquaintanceship with political leaders on every continent will serve to bolster Mr. Ford in an area where he has had little experience. And his long association with Secretary of State Kissinger should help make things work well.

In addition, he will provide a link to the nation's governors, whether or not he is formally charged with that task, because of his 15 years' service in New York State. Finally, Mr. Ford may elect to use Mr. Rockefeller's expertise in such fields as welfare and housing.

Washington has long since grown accustomed to the spectacle of politicians with clout—Lyndon B. Johnson and Hubert H. Humphrey, for example—wilting in the Vice-Presidency for lack of power and responsibility.

Mr. Rockefeller himself said a bit ruefully:

"I'm fully cognizant of the fact that the responsibilities of the Vice President are to preside over the Senate of the United States and otherwise to carry out any assignment that he or she may receive from the President."

But at least on the day of his designation, the ebullient former Governor cut quite a swath through the politics or Washington and of the nation beyond.

Boat's Catch Confiscated

ERIE, Pa., Aug. 20 (AP)—A Canadian fishing boat from Dover, Ont., had her trolling net impounded and one-third of her cargo confiscated after the Pennsylvania Fish Commission ruled that she was operating in Pennsylvania waters. The boat, the C.J. Weaver, was challenged early yesterday when she was seen taking smelt off the Pennsylvania shore of Lake Erie.