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**After  
 the  
 Landslide**

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 By Tom Wicker

During the 1964 Presidential campaign, Richard M. Nixon, then a New York lawyer, had lunch with some of the editors and executives of The New York Times. He was asked why he was working so hard for the Republican nominee, Barry Goldwater, when it was clear that Mr. Goldwater would not be able to defeat President Johnson.

"Because I got to know Lyndon Johnson well when he was majority leader and I presided over the Senate as Vice President," Mr. Nixon answered. "He's a sound leader when he's closely challenged, but I worry about his reaction if he wins a landslide. I'd like to see his margin held down."

Considering that in the wake of his landslide Mr. Johnson launched the air war against North Vietnam, then followed up by sending a half-million troops, this was a prescient remark. Now that Mr. Nixon has won his own landslide, perhaps even larger than Mr. Johnson's, it must be hoped that he will have as much insight about the possibilities, good and bad, of his own reaction.\*

Those of us who have most seriously questioned Mr. Nixon in his first term and in his re-election campaign are all but compelled by the size of his victory to assume the best from him now. Nearly two-thirds of the Americans who voted clearly thought him the best of the available choices, and that is not a fact to be lightly explained away by critics or to be lightly demeaned by the man so honored. On the morrow of such an impressive personal triumph, only the most vindictive opponent would refuse to believe that Richard Nixon might prove worthy of the great opportunity that triumph brings.

Besides, the fate of Lyndon Johnson is not the only practical reminder that a landslide does not necessarily insure a free Presidential hand. Mr. Nixon is a good enough student of history, for one thing, to know that it was

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after the Roosevelt landslide of 1936 that an overconfident F.D.R. committed the capital error of his political career—the Supreme Court packing scheme, which might have led to his defeat or retirement in 1940 had it not been for the opening of World War II.

Mr. Nixon, moreover, may well be the first President upon whom the full effect of the two-term limitation may fall. Since its adoption, only Dwight Eisenhower has served two full terms and Mr. Eisenhower's personal popularity and stature partially insulated him from the effects of "lame duck" status, as from so many other political developments. In comparison, Mr. Nixon has a more hostile and partisan relationship with Congress and, even after Nov. 7, probably is not so well loved by the people; whether he will easily surmount being a lame-duck President remains to be seen.

As in the case of the Eisenhower landslide of 1956, Mr. Nixon failed to bring in a Republican Congress on his coattails; in fact, the Democrats gained a couple of Senate seats. So there will be pressure on the President from the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue—not necessarily stalemating pressure, but enough so that he will have to give some consideration, for instance, to opposing views when he send up important nominations for Senate confirmation.

As for the opposition, despite the ineffectiveness of Senator McGovern's campaign and the magnitude of his defeat, history will yet say of him that he raised some of the right issues. In the monetary historical circumstances of the campaign, he was neither personally persuasive nor politically timely; but there will be other elections and other candidates who will talk, as he did, of a reduction in American reliance on military power, of a more equitable tax system, of a more humane and open society, even of the redistribution of income and wealth (a subject on which he had the right principle but the wrong figures). These are not issues that will go away—any more than did the issue of nuclear arms limitation after Adlai Stevenson raised it ahead of its time in 1956, or the issue of Vietnam after Gene McCarthy took it to the people in 1968.

Mr. Nixon is entitled, of course, to interpret his enormous victory as an explicit endorsement of every position

he has taken; but he is probably too experienced in the ways of electioneering to believe that. On great questions such as China and arms limitation he has shown the capacity to change and grow, and to carry enough of his supporters with him; and the political security he should derive from his landslide might well encourage him to lead his followers more boldly, to base his actions more broadly on the public interest than he has felt himself able to do in the past.

In any case, the first item on Mr. Nixon's post-election agenda should be to make good Dr. Kissinger's pre-election promise that "peace is at hand" in Vietnam; because if that cannot be done, nothing that follows will redeem the opportunity the American people have given Richard Nixon.

\*See Richard J. Whalen,  
 Washington Post,  
 12 Nov 72, this file.