

# Calhoun Resigned

## As No. 2 in 1832

Only one other Vice President has resigned in the nation's history: John C. Calhoun.

He quit in 1832 in a stormy dispute with President Andrew Jackson over federal tariffs that the South, and especially Calhoun's home state of South Carolina, considered discriminatory.

A South Carolina convention of the state's social and political elite, including Calhoun, decided in November of 1832 to declare the federal tariff act of that year null and void, asserting the state's right to reject acts of the federal government that they considered unconstitutional.

Jackson responded with warnings against secession and threats to send 100,000 troops to South Carolina to quell signs of forcible resistance. Just re-elected with another running mate, the President saw the issue in terms of anarchy more than of constitutional theory and even threatened to arrest Calhoun for high treason.

With less than three months left to his term of office, the Vice President wasted no time in quitting to take a seat in the Senate as a champion of states' rights. The South Carolina legislature named Calhoun to the Senate on Dec. 12, 1832, and he formally re-

signed as Vice President on Dec. 28, to the surprise of no one.

Addressing a brief note of Secretary of State Edward Livingston, Calhoun wrote in full:

"Sir,

"Having concluded to accept of a seat in the United States Senate, I herewith resign the office of Vice President of the United States."

According to one of Calhoun's biographers, the letter was so completely ignored that Calhoun finally had to write Livingston to make sure that he had received it.

Calhoun returned to Washington the next month and served in the Senate for 15 years. Congress authorized Jackson in 1833 to halt resistance in South Carolina but Henry Clay quieted the excitement by producing a compromise on the tariff question. The principle of the tariff was kept, but the duties were reduced. South Carolina repealed its act of nullification.

Years later, on his deathbed in 1845, Jackson was asked what he would have done if Calhoun and the other nullifiers had persisted. His answer was:

"Hung them, sir, high as Haman. They should have been a terror to traitors for all time, (and posterity would have recorded it the best act of my life."