



VICE PRESIDENT GERALD FORD WATCHING THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS ON TELEVISION IN CHICAGO

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THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE

Aug. 12, 1974 Vol. 104, No. 7

TIME

AMERICAN NOTES

A Counsel of Silence

The accelerating drive to impeach President Nixon poses an especially troubling problem for the man who may soon have to succeed him. For months, Gerald Ford has cautiously tried to walk what he called "a fine line." On the one hand, the Vice President has declared that the evidence was insufficient for impeachment; on the other, he has urged Nixon to turn over all subpoenaed tapes and documents. After the Judiciary Committee vote, however, Ford declared that the vote was "partisan," and insisted that "the President was right."

By instinct, Ford would like to continue speaking out in defense of Nixon. Indeed Ford discussed impeachment strategy with Chief of Staff Alexander M. Haig Jr. last week. The Vice President has declared that he will not lobby for Nixon in Congress. He explained: "I am not going out, as I used to when I was minority leader, and affirmatively and aggressively try to convince them they ought to vote this way or that." But in a gesture of sorts to his own conscience, he has insisted on reserving the right to give his opinion when asked.

Ford's closest advisers and friends in Congress have counseled him to go further, and not to involve himself any longer in the impeachment fight, that it is a time for his silence. They argue, with reason, that he should not squander in partisanship his potential for bringing the racked nation together again if Nixon is removed from office.

What If . . .

Whatever the outcome of the case lodged against him, the indictment of John Connally in the milk-fund scandal last week inspired a small shudder in Washington, a fear for what might have been. So much has happened in

the past nine months that it is almost forgotten that Richard Nixon's first choice to succeed Spiro Agnew as his Vice President was not Gerald Ford but Connally. To contemplate the indictment of the Vice President, or even merely the suspicion of charges aired, in the same week that articles of impeachment were voted against the President is a scenario that almost shatters the mind. By the best accounts, Melvin Laird played a key role in persuading Nixon that Connally was too recently a Republican convert and too ambitious for the presidency to win Congress's approval as Vice President. From the vantage of hindsight, thanks, Mel. We didn't need that.

The Real Thing

No branch of the negotiator's art is more demanding, delicate or deadly than nuclear diplomacy, and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger is one of the few men in the world who can be said to have mastered it in both theory and felt-table practice. Recently, while escorting West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher to San Clemente to meet with President Nixon, Kissinger stopped off en route to visit the nuclear-missile installation at Grand Forks Air Force Base, N. Dak. There, 150 Minuteman missiles stand at the ready beneath their giant manhole covers, and Kissinger, who as a negotiator handles Minuteman, Polaris and Poseidon missiles like poker chips, had a request: might he see one?

For the first time in his life, Kissinger descended into a 90-ft. silo and gazed at a 75,000-lb. Minuteman III, the newest and largest American ICBM (range: 7,000 miles). After watching a simulated firing in an underground command center, Kissinger emerged and remarked that the world of payloads, throw weight and delivery systems had been largely an "abstraction" to him up until now. Coming face to face with the

real thing had clearly been a sobering experience for the onetime Harvard professor who made his reputation with a book entitled *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*.

Overkill

Against meteorological odds, it has rained in Waynesburg, Pa., every July 29 for 85 of the last 95 years. Such rainfall regularity would come as welcome relief to farmers in the parched Midwest, now sweltering in its severest drought in a generation (*see* ECONOMY & BUSINESS). Rain Day has become an annual rite in Waynesburg (pop. 5,152) in the years since 1879, and last week the usual festivities, from square dances to a town picnic, were on the agenda. Few townspeople elected to hang black snakeskins on their fences as offerings to the rain gods as in days gone by. Instead, many chose such commonplace precipitators as cleaning windows, hanging out laundry or washing the family car. They were duly rewarded at 12:59 a.m. as a few droplets of rain fell, sending up New Year's Eve whoops all over town. The manifestation proved to be merely an overture, however. At 5 in the afternoon, the tail end of a nearby tornado dumped a drenching .59 inches of rain on Waynesburg within 2½ hours. Observed one soaked resident: "We did need a few drops, but this was ridiculous."

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