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Gerald R. Ford, President of the United States. As all week the expectations grew that he soon would be, the questions came tumbling after. What sort of man? What sort of President?

In a way it may seem surprising the questions should have to be asked. Gerald Ford has been in Congress for a quarter century; for nearly a decade he has been his party's leader in the House. He will be the first President to have been exhaustively investigated by the FBI: a 1,700 page report examines every corner of his past. And he will be the first President to have had his political philosophy and qualifications probed by a former Senate cross-examination, all before the television cameras for all to watch.

But Jerry Ford will also be the first President-by-appointment in our 200 years. The first to sit in the Oval Office without having been elected to any nationwide office, and so the first never to have been exposed and tested in the crucible of a national political campaign. The only voters who have had a chance to judge him are those of the Fifth Congressional District of the state of Michigan.

Inevitably, then, there are things to wonder about. As President, how will he be at negotiating with the Russians, at using U.S. power and influence in the world; what is his



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grasp of foreign policy? How deep is his understanding of economic problems; can he grapple with inflation? And beyond such specific questions on specific issues, the more intangible—but no less important—questions about the general quality of leadership Jerry Ford will offer the country. All these questions are made more haunting by the circumstances of the day.

An afternoon's private conversa-

tion hardly suffices to answer them. But when the conversation is wide-ranging, when it is put against his private and political past and the insights of those who have long known him it surely offers some clues as to what manner of man this is. And so what sort of President he might be.

One clue indeed may lie simply in the occasion . . .

When it actually came, the visit was at the end of a frantic day. Last Monday saw the capital's turmoil thrice compounded by President Nixon's admission that he had been less than candid about Watergate, and by the aftermath which found more and more voices raised against the President. All of a sudden the Vice President was at the center of a vortex buffeted by Cabinet meetings, an avalanche of phone calls from this Congressman and that Senator, and the remorseless importunings of the press.

Hardly an auspicious moment for a relaxed conversation. Under such circumstances a man might be expected, and surely would have been excused, if he had cancelled the routine items on his calendar. Mr. Ford did not. The hours of the day were necessarily disarranged but the appointed visitors were received, including a ceremonial delegation, as courteously as if nothing had occurred.

Moreover, to his journalistic visitor Mr. Ford appeared completely relaxed, however much the appearance may have belied an inner tumult. The ubiquitous Washington coffee, the casual exchange of pleasantries before the conversation turned to more substantive matters gave the illusion of an unhurried afternoon. The allotted time went its course.

The impression left was of a man who does not easily get "uptight" when all about him may have. It bespeaks the quality of a man either unaware of the cause for excitement, which in this case Mr. Ford surely was not, or of a man sufficiently self-assured not to yield to it. It is the sort of self-assurance demanded of the football player in the "big" game or of a war-time naval aviator, both of which Mr. Ford has been. It may seem a small item, but it offers its comfort about a man about to become President.

You suspect, indeed, that Mr. Ford even enjoys the tension and will enjoy being President, not so much for the panoply of office as for the excitement. He is clearly one who enjoys people and the interaction with people in times of stress, being probably the most extroverted presidential prospect since Harry Truman. It is hard to im-

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# What Kind Of President Will He Be?

agine Jerry Ford brooding long alone over his troubles.

It is equally difficult to imagine him brooding alone in deep thought over either philosophical questions of government or over the complexities of economics or foreign policy. None of his long-time associates mark him as an "intellectual" given to abstract analysis, an assessment borne out as the afternoon's conversation turns to some of the specific problems of the day.

Mr. Ford says publicly that the number one problem today is inflation, and

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privately thinks that it is matched by the problem of regaining public confidence in government in general and the White House in particular after the shocks of Watergate. As President he clearly intends to devote his energies to both.

But his approach to both, as far as it can be discerned, is that of the practicing politician. It is not at all clear that he follows all the abstruse arguments of the economists about the causes and cures of inflation, nor that he is given to Wilsonian reflections about the role of the President in the American system.

But his approach is not thoughtless in either case. On inflation, for example, he feels that for years (he says since 1965) the U.S. has simply tried to do too much, spending money without regard to the resources available. The word "spree" is one that recurs. And he thinks this process must be reversed. The government must put its own financial house in order.

If that view stems more from instinct than from profound analysis, reflecting in large measure a Middle-American view of good husbandry, it is not without its support among economic analysts. Anyway, the conclusion is probably more important than the method of arriving at it . . .

Instinct seems to be his moving force in other areas too. He claims no expertise in foreign affairs and until recently his involvement in it has been limited to that of a congressional leader supporting administration policies as they involve the House of Representatives, which is less than they do in the Senate.

Yet he is, in his own phase, a

"reformed isolationist," the reform coming as much from his intuitive feeling that the United States cannot withdraw from the world as from any profound analysis of the world's troubles . . .

Still, his instinctive feelings show when he discusses the need for, and the problems of, détente: He knows the world will be better off if it can be achieved—that true success in the second round SALT talks, for example, can both ease world tensions and save the United States billions in defense appropriations. He is wary, though, of unilateral concessions in the name of détente. His instinct is that we can only negotiate with the Soviets from a position of strength, and his strong support of military appropriations is a derivative of this.

Most of his other positions on current issues seem to derive from similar instinctive feelings—from what some of his critics have called an "off the top of his head reaction" and what his friends prefer to call common sense.

When he talks about civil rights, for example, he sounds neither like a sociologist nor a Supreme Court Justice. He simply thinks it is wrong to have a dual standard in society—whether as between whites and blacks or men and women—on voting, housing, jobs or anything else. He supports the civil rights laws and thinks they should be enforced.

It is evident, though, that some recent directions of the civil rights movement do trouble him. He opposes forced busing merely to achieve some theoretical racial balance, thinking it has recently caused more trouble and tension than any other social problem.

He believes in equal opportunity, whether to a college campus or a job, for all qualified people and thinks government should protect that opportunity. But in his mind the key word is "qualified." For a school, a business or a profession to lower its standards for the unqualified seems to him to degrade the whole process. To him, the approach to the problem of racial and sexual balance is education and training to enable more to be qualified. It can be surmised from this that under President Ford there would be no rush of new civil rights laws but a renewed effort by the government to enlarge the opportunities for training and education for those so far lacking them.

And perhaps some other things, too, can be surmised about a Ford presidency. For as he talks about many problems of the day you keep hearing phrases like "too much" or "too fast."

We got into troubles abroad (Vietnam, for example) because we tried to do too much, thinking we could and should manage the world. We are beset by inflation because we tried to spend too much with too little regard for the

costs. In other areas, from civil rights to welfare, we have created problems and divided the country because we tried to do too much, too fast in rectifying ancient problems not solvable overnight.

So the surmise would be, watching what he does and listening to him talk, that a Ford administration would try to give the country a time to breathe, a time to recuperate, a time to heal some wounds. This implies that it would not be an adventurous time in foreign affairs nor a time of great new experiments in domestic legislation.

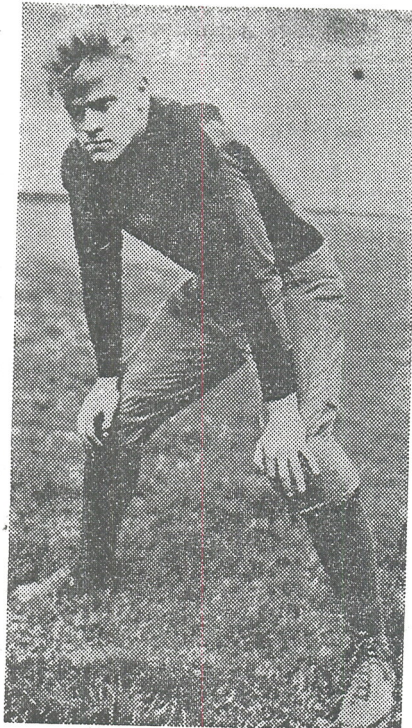
This does not mean it would not be a time of change, of new policies; after all, Jerry Ford is a politician and as such would be responsive to the changing needs and moods of the country. It suggests only that he would be cautious at a time when the country is already wrought up . . .

Specific issues aside, perhaps the more intriguing question is what sort of leadership President Ford may provide . . . The first clue here is that he is basically a friendly, outgoing man. This suggests that he will not retire into isolation, surrounding himself only with cronies and courtiers, the pitfall of both our last two Presidents. A President's door can never be as open as a Vice President's but Mr. Ford will certainly keep it ajar.

This should help him tremendously in dealing with other politicians, and Mr. Ford like Mr. Nixon will have to deal with a Democratic Congress. You will find few on Capitol Hill who dislike Jerry Ford, as many disliked Lyndon Johnson, the last President to come from congressional leadership.

It may also help him when he speaks to the nation. His addresses are not likely to be profound state papers or sophisticated oratory. They are more likely to be simple. Too simple, possibly, for the tastes of some. But for a time, anyway, simplicity may strike a responsive chord. It will be refreshing, at least . . .

Because no one is going to mark him as a man of towering intellect, he is



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not going to appeal to the intellectual elite once they have recovered from their relief at being relieved of President Nixon. He may have no honeymoon at all with liberals, and only a brief one with doctrinaire conservatives because he himself is not doctrinaire . . .

Make no mistake, though. This is not a man wanting in intelligence or in the varied experiences that shape political leaders. His law degree is from Yale, he has served under every President from Truman to Nixon, much of the time as a member of the key House Appropriations Committee. He sufficiently impressed his peers so that in due time they chose him for party leadership. Today, when you talk to him on any subject, you may not find profundity but you find a wide range of knowledge.

Finally, of course, any President must be measured against the needs of time, and it is possible that the times do not call for a great philosopher or a towering political giant. What we are going to need now is some calm, some common sense and most of all some simple, straightforward talk from our next President.

So a visitor could not escape one final impression. In the best of all possible worlds, the country might do better than Gerald Ford of Michigan. In the world as it is, we could surely do worse.