

Views of a Cautious Conservative

The style of Gerald Ford's presidency will certainly differ from that of Richard Nixon, but the policies, at least initially, will be much the same. In major areas of Government concern, Ford's substantive views can scarcely be differentiated from those of his predecessor. As the new President once put it, "I'm a conservative in fiscal affairs, a moderate in domestic affairs, and a liberal in foreign policy." Ford's record shows that with certain qualifications, his judgment on himself is substantially accurate. Items:

THE ECONOMY. A consistent defender of free enterprise and balanced budgets, Ford may well be slightly to the right of Richard Nixon on economic matters. He has labeled inflation "world public enemy No. 1" and declared that it should be fought "the hard way." By that he means sharp cutbacks in Government spending to produce a budgetary surplus next fiscal year, and avoidance of any personal tax cuts to head off recession. He has also advocated "a restrictive monetary policy that means, among other things, the discipline of high interest rates." Shortly before his inauguration last week, Ford endorsed a recent proposal by a number of commentators for an "economic summit" of leading economists, bankers, businessmen and labor officials to hash out some unified approach to the problem of inflation.

Last January, he indicated that, given a choice between high inflation and high unemployment, he "would prefer to keep unemployment down and take our chance on the cost of living increase." He has probably hardened that humane view now that the inflation rate has soared beyond 12%. Ford is steadfastly opposed to the reimposition of economic controls and thinks that Government trustbusters and regulatory agencies should go easier on big business. He "would feel happier with virtually no tariffs" on goods imported into the U.S., provided that America's major trading partners are willing to tear down non-tariff barriers to the free exchange of goods.

FOREIGN POLICY. The new President was a steadfast cold warrior in the 1950s and a particularly hard-beaked hawk during the Viet Nam War. Yet when Richard Nixon began winding down U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia and moving toward détente with the Soviet Union, Ford staunchly defended those policies on the floor of the House. He also approved Nixon's overtures to Peking, but concedes that he would not have made them had he been President then. "Not with my record of 23 years' opposition [to Communism]," he told a reporter. "But I approve of the policy, and I would hope when the time came, I would have been flexible enough to listen to reasons advanced by a person such as Kissinger."

Ford is likely to carry on with the broad outlines of the Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy. Not that Ford lacks opinions of his own. In the past, he has strongly favored U.S. support of Israel, a stance that worries some Arab leaders, notably Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Ford also believes in maintaining a large U.S. troop presence in Western Europe, at least until the Soviet Union agrees to some kind of mutual force reduction. As a longtime member of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, he consistently endorsed big defense budgets. Says Ford: "The way to win peace is to build up a military establishment strong enough to win a war."

In general, the new President retains the same internationalist outlook he acquired from his original mentor, the late Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg of Michigan. As Ford said during his confirmation hearings last November, "I think the United States, because of our influence, our assets, our principles, must be a force on a worldwide basis to try to maintain peace, to try to help disadvantaged nations. It makes a better world, and that helps us in the United States."

SOCIAL PROBLEMS. In Congress, Ford was a vigorous and persistent foe of the health, education and housing programs advocated by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. He has railed against welfare as destructive of the work ethic

and endorsed the Nixon Administration's later abandoned family assistance plan, which contained work incentives, as a way out of the welfare mess. Ford was initially leary of federal revenue sharing but later became an enthusiastic supporter; he saw it as a way to help reduce the role of federal agencies in state and local affairs. "We need a national government that is the servant and not the master of the people," he has said. "We must strengthen our state and local units of government." When Ford goes hunting for ways to balance his first budget by cutting federal spending, domestic social programs are likely to be prime targets.

Ford's record on civil rights legislation is mixed; he has supported most major reform bills on the floor but only after first voting to emasculate them. He has long opposed the busing of schoolchildren to attain racial balance, a move that sits well with his Grand Rapids constituents but has earned him the hostility of most major civil rights leaders.

On certain other social issues, Ford's views seem inconsistent. For instance, he has favored broader use of wiretaps against citizens suspected of serious crimes, and was an early supporter of the federal "no-knock" law; yet he has also spoken out for the protection of individual privacy and expressed alarm about the creation of a comprehensive federal data bank. Ford voted for all the important pieces of environmental legislation, but holds that many federal environmental standards for industry should be eased.

In some cases, Ford's past voting record—which in 1972 was rated 68% by the Americans for Constitutional Action but only 6% by the Americans for Democratic Action—may reflect his desire as House minority leader to back a presidential program more than his personal legislative views. Although that record is consistently right of center, Ford is not inflexible; he candidly admits to having made mistakes. To a visitor who noted Ford's somewhat negative civil rights record, he said: "Forget the voting record. The voting record reflects Grand Rapids." Now that his constituency has grown from 470,000 citizens to 211 million, Gerald Ford's mind may well undergo a similar expansion.