

Friends and Critics Debate Future of Connally as

by **CHRISTOPHER LYDON**
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 18 — John B. Connally, acquitted here of a bribery charge yesterday, has survived too much bizarre fortune, with too boldly unconventional a personality intact, to invite guesses about his future. Yet numerous friends, rivals and uncommitted political observers shared today a vaguely awed sense that the 58-year-old former Texas Governor, former Democrat and former Treasury Secretary could be a powerful agent after his near brush with scandal.

He can expect to be a hero and, if he chooses, a political force in his home state, fellow Texans said. And a warm welcome awaits him, if he wants it, among a restless national movement of right-wing Republicans.

"He's a factor," said Clarke Reed of Mississippi, the leader among Republican state chairmen in 13 Southern states. Mr. Reed sees the Presidential contest of 1976 as a "wide-open ballgame" in which Mr. Connally might still play a part. "He's more of a factor than many of the announced candidates in the Democratic party," Mr. Reed said.

Strauss Bars Comment

Kevin Phillips, a strategist in President Nixon's campaign and still an apostle of conservative party realignment, commented: "I think he's just about the most talented man on the conservative side, and I think we're entering an era where talent will be in demand."

"If I may cite the French Revolution," Mr. Phillips went on, "we're coming to the Thermidor. The accusations hurled about in the Terror, so to speak, will be forgotten. I think people will discount the charges that were leveled but never proven in the last two or three years."

Robert S. Strauss, chairman of the Democratic National Committee and one of Mr. Connally's closest friends, declined comment on his political prospects. Another Texas friendly to Mr. Connally gave him "one

chance in four of rising from the ashes." Still another estimated his future as "zilch."

"These scars last a lifetime," the former Connally ally said. "Probably half the people in this country think he's guilty." Many others observed that even if the taint of indictment faded completely, Mr. Connally's once-promising strategic base within the Republican party—namely Richard M. Nixon—had lost its value, and then some, since Mr. Nixon left the Presidency in Watergate disgrace.

President Nixon welcomed Mr. Connally into his Cabinet in 1970, into his campaign of 1972 and into the Republican party in April, 1973.

H. R. Haldeman, the former White House chief of staff, said recently that Mr. Nixon had longed to substitute Mr. Connally for Spiro T. Agnew as his Vice-Presidential running mate in 1972. Later, in what was viewed as the first round of a Connally-for-President build-up toward 1976, President Nixon described the Texan as well-equipped for any public role the nation or the world could offer.

A Dissenting Signal

But Mr. Nixon's last chance to promote Mr. Connally came in the fall of 1973 when Mr. Agnew was convicted of income tax evasion and resigned his office. Again Mr. Nixon weighed a Connally selection. At the time, Mr. Connally was dazzling Republican fund-raising dinners with his convert's enthusiasm; one of his most impressive speeches was delivered in Grand Rapids, Mich., at the invitation of Gerald R. Ford, then the United States Representative from there.

Other party leaders at the time, including Melvin R. Laird, the White House counselor, and Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, signaled to Mr. Nixon that Mr. Connally's nomination would be challenged by Republicans in Congress. Mr. Nixon chose Mr. Ford for Vice President instead.

From that point until he was

charged with accepting a bribe by milk producers for helping raise Government price supports, Mr. Connally's political explorations were directed mostly at conservatives in the Republican party, and particularly at other recent converts to Republicanism in the South.

Even among Southern conservatives, however, he was a second choice for Presidential consideration behind Ronald Reagan, the former Governor of California.

Mr. Connally's political positioning with respect to the Ford Administration presents an obvious dilemma if he chooses to become active again, observers remarked today. Several friends thought he would be disinclined to criticize Mr. Ford. His conservative admirers, on the contrary, were looking for an anti-Ford ally more aggressive than Mr. Reagan.

"Conservatives are not looking for heroes," said Howard Phillips, director of the newly formed Conservative Caucus and no kin to Kevin Phillips except in his political views. "Conservatives are looking for principles and programs," Howard Phillips said.

Over-all, the interest in a Connally comeback here today turned less on tactical considerations than on the fascination with Mr. Connally himself.

Shot and nearly killed in

1963 when he rode alongside President Kennedy in Dallas, Mr. Connally has long struck both friends and enemies as a politician of nerve and destiny, a man who has guessed wrong in politics but a "high roller," in gamblers' language, who never retired and never lost his compelling self-confidence.

William Safire, a former Nixon speech writer, wrote in his White House Con memoir: "Before The Fall," that Mr. Connally had urged President Nixon to take big risks. "If you lose, you lose big—but what's the sense in losing small," Mr. Connally was quoted.

The criminal trial that ended yesterday never daunted him, friends observed. A Texan in touch with Mr. Connally at least once a week for the last year said, "I never saw him with his dauber down."

Other Charges Dismissed

WASHINGTON, April 18 (UPI) — At the request of Watergate prosecutors, United States District Judge George L. Hart Jr. dismissed remaining conspiracy and perjury charges today against Mr. Connally.

"In large part, all of the evidence which would have been admitted on [the conspiracy and perjury counts] was admitted during the trial and considered by the jury," an

TIMES, SATURDAY, APRIL 19, 1975

Political Figure

associate prosecutor, Frank Tuerkheimer, said in a two-page affidavit accompanying the motion.

Greeting in Texas

Special to The New York Times

HOUSTON, April 18—More than 200 well-wishers greeted Mr. Connally as he debarked from a plane today at International Airport. As an all-black high school band played, Mr. Connally walked slowly through the crowd shaking hands smiling, kissing cheeks, picking up small children and thanking everyone.

At a small news conference, Mr. Connally said there was no chance of his accepting the second slot on a ticket in 1976, and added that he could support President Ford.

Although he said he had no immediate plans, Mr. Connally indicated he would probably stay in Houston a few days before going to his ranch. He is expected to return to his law practice in Houston soon.