

SFCronicle

FEB 12 1976

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A Mixed Blessing



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ELLIOT RICHARDSON sat on the stage of Dartmouth's Webster Hall before 600 polite and receptive students, soberly recounting the achievements of Richard Nixon, "which history will recognize in due course."

The new secretary of commerce had come, not to give the devil his due, but to sing the praises of Gerald Ford. But inevitably he was asked how different Mr. Ford is from Nixon — a query that nettled the President on his weekend visit here.

Richardson as a Ford advocate is a mixed blessing, like so much else in the Ford campaign in this first and most treacherous presidential primary.

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ON THE one hand, he is a Yankee over-achiever from neighboring Massachusetts, and more important, Watergate's only Republican hero. On the other, he brings back the issue of the Nixon pardon, which was floating around even before the former President startled the world again by announcing he was about to kick off his carpet slippers and fly off for another fitting on his Mao suit.

Gerald Ford's jaw clenched when he was asked about the trip at one of his local news conferences. He said evenly that it was "wholesome and healthy."

But his private view was probably accurately expressed by Mary McKerley, a jovial, gray-haired Ford partisan

from Pennacook who grumbled, "They ought to keep him over there."

The immediate prospect is bad enough. Nixon will be departing for Peking in one of Mao's planes just as Gerald Ford may be returning to these less glamorous precincts. His recent trip was supposed to be his last, but Mr. Ford has to do something to make the front page on February 21.

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THE LONG-TERM prospect is even worse. Nixon will be making his sentimental journey at a moment of mysterious shakeup in the Chinese government. No one doubts that he will come back hugging some great secret that Mao could not bear to impart either to Mr. Ford or to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

The secretary of state will have to make the pilgrimage to San Clemente to pry it out of him, and Nixon is not above demanding in turn that he be made chairman of the GOP Foreign Policy Platform Committee, or even a star speaker at the convention.

It is a jolt that the Ford campaign didn't really need. And, of course, it wouldn't be happening if the pardon had been arranged according to the Richardson prescription. In one of the few indiscretions of his long career at the top, Richardson recently confided to reporters that he thought his formula in the Agnew resignation — full publication of charges — would have been better.