



Then and Now

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NOW THAT President Ford appears to have the Republican nomination safely tied up, Democrats are clearing their throats for the campaign oratory to come. They intend to portray him as a lackadaisical leader and to condemn him for pardoning Richard Nixon.

Yet the truth is that the Democrats had a lot to do with catapulting Mr. Ford into the White House and encouraging him to pardon Nixon. We have the evidence.

After Spiro Agnew was forced out as vice president, Nixon wanted to appoint John Connally in his place. But the Democratic leaders in Congress made it clear that Connally couldn't get confirmed. Then Nixon began to weigh other prospects — William Rogers, Melvin Laird, Nelson Rockefeller, William Scranton and even Ronald Reagan.

BUT IT WAS Gerald Ford, the favorite in the cloakrooms of Congress, who got the appointment. Afterward, Speaker Carl Albert boasted: "I think I was the first in Congress to tell the President that Jerry would be the easiest candidate to sell to the House. He's a very fine man to work with."

As the first appointed vice president in history, Mr. Ford was put through the wringer. His entire life was investigated by the FBI. Agents conducted more than 1000 interviews.

Among those questioned were such staunch Democrats as Senators Hubert

Humphrey (Dem-Minn.), George McGovern (Dem-S.D.), Edmund Muskie (Dem-Me.), Henry Jackson (Dem-Wash.), Phil Hart (Dem-Mich.) and James Eastland (Dem-Miss.). In these background FBI interviews, they expressed strong support for Mr. Ford's nomination.

What these Democratic leaders told the FBI in 1973 isn't what they plan to say about Mr. Ford in the 1976 campaign. They intend to make a campaign issue, for example, of the Nixon pardon.

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YET two years ago, some leading Democrats had the same views as Mr. Ford about punishing the fallen Nixon. Representative Robert McClory (Rep-Ill.), a key member of the House Impeachment Committee, recorded what these Democrats told him.

On August 7, 1974, just two days before Nixon quit, House Judiciary Chairman Peter Rodino (Dem-N.J.) is quoted in McClory's diary as saying "that he did not have any desire to prosecute the President beyond the time of removal from office or resignation and that he was not interested in any criminal prosecution."

The same view, according to McClory's diary, was expressed by Representative Don Edwards (Dem-Calif.).

Speaker Albert also told McClory that "resignation was sufficient penalty and that he would advise against any subsequent criminal proceedings involving the President."