

# A 'Quiet, Undramatic' Leader

By Roger W. Hooker Jr.

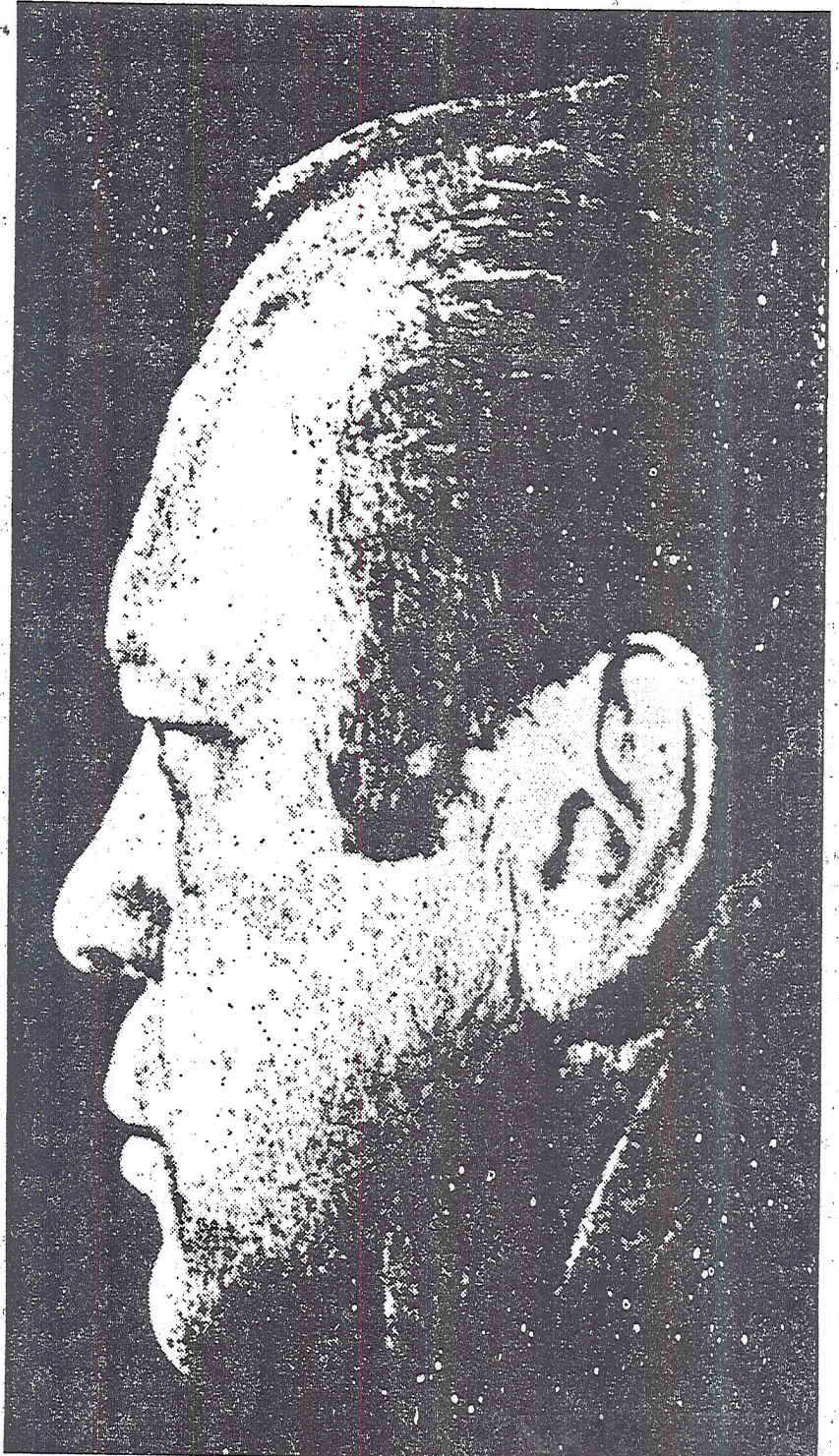
WASHINGTON—None of us committed to civil rights in this country could have failed to be deeply moved by the vision of Dr. Martin Luther King Sr. delivering his benediction at the Democratic National Convention with George Wallace flanking him on the platform in Madison Square Garden. Even many of us at home found ourselves spontaneously singing along with the thousands of delegates on the floor "We Shall Overcome." And to the extent that we haven't already, we shall overcome.

The question, of course, is what is the best way to do so. Jimmy Carter offered us, along with much more, jobs for every person able to work, comprehensive national health insurance, an end to inflation and a balanced budget.

All are laudable goals—but given the fact that, to take one example, health-care expenditures are increasing at an alarming rate and already account for some 8.5 percent of the gross national product (compared with 4.5 percent in 1953), this program promise alone precludes balancing the budget, much less managing inflation, in the foreseeable future.

Nevertheless, given the painful reality that eight cents out of every dollar of Federal expenditures today are devoted to servicing debt for Government programs previously undertaken, the fact that Mr. Carter emphasized a balanced budget—albeit among a host of mutually exclusive objectives—is encouraging.

Inflation, the cruelest tax on the poor, the aged and the jobless in this country, was running at a double-digit pace when President Ford took office in 1974. The fact that it is now within tolerable limits is a remarkable achievement and a tribute to the leadership Mr. Ford has exerted by his unprecedented use of the veto controlling the uncoordinated excesses of the Democratically controlled Congress as well as by his foreign policy that has helped reduce cost-push inflationary pressures in the energy and agriculture sectors.



John Caldwell

It is this kind of leadership—quiet, undramatic and diplomatic—that permitted the unity of this nation to exhibit itself with such grace and exuberance over the Fourth of July, and even created the climate in which an apparently unified Democratic convention could focus on our noblest instincts in New York City!

Another event that occurred in New York deserves particular notice because, unchallenged, it will come up again and again during the campaign: the demagogic reference by Senator Walter F. Mondale (who knows better) to President Ford's pardon of Richard M. Nixon and the resulting protracted ovation it received.

There can be no doubt that the Nixon White House indulged in perhaps the most shameful—or shameless—abuses of power in our nation's history. At the time of the pardon I suspect I was by no means alone in feeling outraged, but also, and more ignobly, somehow personally cheated and frustrated that I could not witness, if not participate in, a public hanging sanctioned by the kind of moral indignation that sustains lynch mobs.

Certainly President Ford is an astute enough politician to know that his pardon would be an immensely un-

popular move given the passions that prevailed at the moment. But I suspect, as I reflect on the alternatives to that pardon and compare them to the peace of mind and general good will underlying our 200th birthday celebration and the mood of the Democratic convention itself, that Mr. Ford's was an act of uncommon courage and moral leadership; that he, in pardoning the pitiful Mr. Nixon, also saved us from ourselves.

I have never been entirely comfortable with the shibboleth that ours is a nation of laws, not of men. It is true that for the most part it is and should be, but in times of extreme moral crisis throughout history, strong leadership has emerged to supersede the letter of the law and deliver us from the evils of vindictiveness.

In most cases this nation's legal institutions can give us a close approximation of justice, but the process of arriving at justice for Mr. Nixon would have been cruel—more in terms of the wounds it would have inflicted on our society than on Mr. Nixon himself.

The impact of President Ford's merciful and lonely decision was more significant for preserving the rich moral fabric of this society than for

preventing the obviously guilty and broken Mr. Nixon from undergoing relentless persecution.

As we enter this quadrennial election season, we might ask ourselves where we were two years ago, where we are now, and who, more than anyone else, is responsible for our remarkable recovery—both economic and moral.

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