

Johnson's Still A Question Mark

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Washington Post Special

Washington, D. C.—What kind of a man is Lyndon B. Johnson? What kind of a president will he make? How will he differ from John F. Kennedy?

These were the questions uppermost in Washington's mind and indeed in the minds of leaders on both sides of the iron curtain all around the world.

There is, of course, no simple answer to any of these questions. Indeed, it is probable that the new chief executive could say no more than what he said to the American nation on Friday: "I will do my best. That is all I can do."

If he were to have a moment now to reflect, he might well say again what he said on July 5, 1960, when he entered on the quest for the Democratic presidential nomination.

"Since 1937, in FDR's (Franklin D. Roosevelt) time," said the then senate majority leader, "I have known the presidency—and the men in it—intimately. I cannot truthfully say that any man is qualified for it in advance."

And he expressed his philosophy as "progressive — prudent without being radical; conservative without being reactionary."

The 55 year old president has always said that "politics is the science of the possible" and his credo has been "let us reason together." After a lifetime based on such a philosophy, President Johnson is certain to conduct the office he now holds in the same vein.

As vice-president he was, by nature of the post, suspended between the executive and legislative branches. He had an office in the executive office building across the street from the White House.

He once told a visitor to that capitol office: "I won't say I wouldn't like to be out in the well of the senate pounding my fist and saying

'Let's go' but I want to do the best job I can."

As vice-president he had an immense respect for the presidency. He took what those who were with him at cabinet and national security council meetings described as a "speak when asked" position. He himself has said: "If the president calls on me, I speak."

But if he spoke little, he

absorbed everything. Describing the effect on President Kennedy of his Vienna meeting with Soviet Premier Khrushchev, Mr. Johnson said:

"It was a shock to the president, though he was well briefed, to see it at first hand. A man knows his daughter will leave him when she marries but he does not feel it

really until after the wedding. In the end the (Vienna) meeting was good for us by alerting us, as the Communists often have helped us."

One man who has worked closely with the new president said he likes short memos, short meetings and quick decisions.

Another who knows the new president well points to what is perhaps the key: The problem of separating the outward appearance of personal vanity from deeper qualities of intellect and shrewdness.

"His tremendous ego," this man said, "has led him into postures which have a tendency to conceal the real man. These secondary characteristics are not impressive. But if you let yourself judge by them, then you fall into very serious error."

He went on:

"After a man moves into the presidency by succession, he wants to have the office in his own right.

"His will be a much more practical, much more down to earth approach (than President Kennedy's). There will not be the same innovations. But he is a good operator even though his thrust will be different. He has intelligence and experience. Do not underestimate his intelligence. He has watched the presidency with avid interest for years."

The new president is no devourer of books as was his predecessor; he runs to newspapers and magazines and to masses of official documents. But, as one top administration figure has put it, "he keeps to the main line and moves quickly to the gut issue."

Many feel that this ability to discern the heart of a problem, to know the outer limits of accommodation, to realize where the power lies — all characteristics which proved themselves so well when he was majority leader — will serve President Johnson in the White House.