

President Ford Steps Forward . . .

Gerald R. Ford, as he took his oath of office as 38th President of the United States of America, voiced the relief felt by millions of his fellow countrymen when he declared: "Our Constitution works. . . Here, the people rule." His inauguration, in its simple dignity, and his inaugural remarks, in their innate humanity and sure historical instinct, served notably to lift up a troubled national spirit.

That same humanity revealed itself in the address delivered by President Ford, at his own request, before a joint session of Congress three days later. It guaranteed him a sympathetic welcome to office, from both nation and Congress, even beyond that inevitably elicited for him by the extraordinary circumstances under which he entered on his new post. And in his assertion that the most important words of the Constitution are, "We, the people of the United States," he demonstrated the same grasp on the genius of the American constitutional system revealed by his inaugural confession: "I am acutely aware that you have not elected me as your President by your ballots. So I ask you to confirm me as your President by your prayers."

Mr. Ford's inaugural address was, as he aptly labeled it, "a little straight talk." It aroused interest, on that count, in what he would say in his address to Congress. Most of what he said was what Congress, the American people and the world at large expected and wanted to hear. It needed, however, to be said.

The nation over recent months has registered increasingly grave concern about the state of the economy, one that Mr. Ford frankly, and thus refreshingly, described as "not so good." In moves that embodied his pledge to seek "communication, conciliation, compromise and cooperation" in his dealings with Congress, the President announced his intention to ask for reactivation of the Cost of Living Council, to summon and personally preside over a "domestic summit" on new approaches to economic policy and to seek together with Congress for cuts in governmental spending—with defense spending pretty much excepted.

More important, however, than concrete moves was the sounding of certain other necessary assurances. In a jocular vein, but with serious intent, the President noted that, while he is a Ford, not a Lincoln, he is also not a Model T Ford. He assured the rest of the world that he stood for continuity in all areas of established foreign policy, while challenging the American people, in a graceful citation from the late President John F. Kennedy: "Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate."

One further passage, toward the close of the address, recalled more recent history and drew the rapt attention of all Mr. Ford's hearers and the greatest applause from those listening to him in the House. After reminding all that he had concerned himself with individual rights of privacy as Vice President, he pledged in most emphatic tones: "There will be no illegal tapplings, eavesdropping, buggings or break-ins by my Administration. There will be hot pursuit of tough laws to prevent illegal invasions of privacy. . . ."

Finally, as he had in his inaugural speech, the President emphasized his intention to serve all the American people, people of every color, race and creed—including atheists, "if there are any atheists left after what we have been through." This brought back to mind, of course, his earlier reference to "an hour of history that troubles our minds and hurts our hearts." No one listening to either remark could be unmindful of the President who was not on hand.

In clearly heartfelt words, Mr. Ford referred, at the end of his inaugural, to the tragedy and suffering that had befallen the nation and, in a particular and personal way, the Nixon family and the former President. "Before closing," he said to his fellow citizens, "I ask again your prayers for Richard Nixon and his family. May our former President who brought peace to millions find it for himself."

. . . and Mr. Nixon Resigns

Indeed, despite the gravity of the charges against Mr. Nixon and the amplitude of the evidence against him, it is impossible not to feel compassion for his personal tragedy and that of his family. The composure he displayed in his final, difficult appearances before the nation commands our respect. He is no ordinary man, and he deserves no ordinary judgment.

What history will record about Mr. Nixon beyond his unprecedented resignation, it is too early to tell. Now that he is no longer President, some of his friends are urging the value of his initiatives in foreign policy as a reason for forgiving whatever "high crimes and misdemeanors" he was guilty of in the sordid mess we have come to identify by the term Watergate. Many others, both friend and foe of Mr. Nixon, are urging forgiveness for the sake of political harmony and domestic peace after so much divisiveness and

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