

The Road Ahead

Catapulted into the White House by an assassin's bullet, President Lyndon Baines Johnson faces one of the greatest tasks that has ever fallen to the lot of a Chief Executive of this land. In an era of turmoil and transition, President Kennedy had initiated far-reaching new policies at home and abroad. His untimely death leaves the former Vice President to bring them to fruition.

Under the impact of the tragedy President Johnson must have felt as did Vice President Harry Truman when the sudden death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt shifted the weight of national leadership to his shoulders. "If you ever pray," said Mr. Truman, "pray for me now . . . when they told me yesterday what had happened, I felt like the moon, the stars and all the planets had fallen on me."

Fortunately for the new President and for the country, he is much better prepared to absorb the shock than was President Truman. Mr. Johnson has been closely identified with our national political life for a quarter of a century. For 12 years he was an alert, active and influential member of the House of Representatives. Elected to the Senate in 1948, he emerged as its natural leader and for many years was its dominant influence in the role of Majority Leader. In 1960 he was the major rival of Sen. John F. Kennedy for the Democratic presidential nomination and ultimately agreed to take the vice presidential nomination because some of his close friends persuaded him that it was his national duty to do so.

In the role of Vice President, Mr. Johnson has been a regular participant in Cabinet meetings and other top policy-making bodies for the Administration. In the absence of the President he presided at sessions of the National Security Council. Two of his major special assignments were the chairmanship of the National Aeronautics and Space Council and of the President's Equal Employment Opportunity Committee. He visited foreign countries around the globe on fruitful missions of good will.

As a close adviser to the President, Mr. Johnson was often at the White House two or three times a day. During the Cuban crisis last year he almost lived at the White House. He has taken over the office of President as well prepared to assume its awesome responsibilities as any Vice President could be expected to be.

From this association strong presumptions arise that the new President will carry out the Kennedy policies so far as that is possible. There are, of course, many contrasts between the two men, but they were pulling together in harness toward a single goal. President Johnson will not have all of President Kennedy's advantages and strengths in this quest, but he brings to the great office some assets that his predecessor did not have.

Mr. Johnson's experience as Majority Leader in the Senate should be of enormous help in rallying Congress to the work it has so sadly neglected in recent months. In this the very shock of President Kennedy's assassination should also be a stimulus. The fact is that the Congress has been pitifully negligent in meeting its responsibilities. The least that the Congress and the country can now do in these tragic hours is to sweep out pettiness, prejudices and lassitude and surge forward under the new leadership.

The strength of the Presidency lies in the support the people give it. Our greatest Presidents have been men who have mobilized and directed the will of a free people. With a national resolve to rally behind Lyndon Johnson, to purge from our national life the sordid hate that destroyed his predecessor, and to move forward in the great cause of human betterment, the country will safely surmount this tragedy. Out of new dedication to the principles for which President Kennedy stood it can find new purpose and new determination. The will to be free and clean and forward looking must be reasserted under the democratic system which has served us well.