P.S. to the NEWS
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THE KISSINGER POWER GRAB

The grab for power attempted by Henry Kissinger on the evening of Wednesday, July 16 must be one of the most incredible events in the history of the American Presidency. While on the floor of the Joe Louis Arena in Detroit, 1,994 duly elected Delegates and 1,994 Alternates to the Republican National Convention were in the process of nominating Ronald Reagan as President, a few blocks away on the 69th floor of the Renaissance Plaza Hotel, Kissinger was promoting a secret deal under which he, not Reagan, would exercise the powers of the Presidency.

The cover for this proposed transfer of power from a constitutionally elected President to the hands of a man who is not even eligible for the office (because he is not a native-born American) was to be the nomination of a Reagan-Ford "dream ticket." But the nature and details of the deal to transfer the power of the office were completely unknown to the Delegates who told reporters that Ford would be acceptable as Reagan's running mate.

Purporting to speak as the "negotiator" for Ford, Kissinger demanded that Reagan agree to turn over to Ford and Kissinger the National Security Council (which controls U.S. foreign and defense policies), the Office of Management and Budget (which directly controls not only all federal budgeting but the purposes and way in which it is spent), and the Council of Economic Advisers (which controls U.S. economic policies). Walter Cronkite designated this as a deal for a "co-presidency," but in fact so little power would remain in Reagan's hands that he would be President in name only.

This "sharing" of Presidential powers would have left Reagan with supervision over agriculture, the Indians, and an assortment of minor matters and ceremonial concerns. It would make a farce of the whole process of democratic elections. Such a division of Presidential powers would, at the very least, have been highly impractical. Successful organizations and corporations don't have co-presidents; they have one chief where the buck stops.

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Such a gutting of Presidential powers might even be an unconstitutional delegation of the President's authority. There was also the additional stumbling block of the 12th Amendment to the Constitution, which is a bar to the election of a President and Vice President from the same state. Ford would either have to give up his California residence or forgo receiving the electoral votes of our largest state.

Part of the proposed Reagan-Ford bargain was that Ford would be relieved of the only duty assigned to the Vice President by the Constitution: presiding over the Senate. Presumably, he wouldn't have time for such mundane chores when he had charge of all our foreign and most of our domestic policies.

Kissinger was not only using his negotiating talents to persuade Reagan to "cut a deal", as the networks described it, but he was using his oratory to induce Ford to accept it. Kissinger made what reporters called "impassioned private arguments" to Ford to accept the nomination.

Although Ford used four negotiators, Kissinger was the one described by Reagan aides as "ubiquitous." He was said to have been brought into the deliberations as "the kind of person" Ford would want to see in a Reagan Administration. In the face-to-face Reagan-Ford meetings, Ford said several times that he wanted Kissinger as Secretary of State.

Reagan aides expressed themselves as "astonished" at the scope of the power which Kissinger demanded, purportedly on behalf of Ford who has never impressed friends as so power-hungry. Casper Weinberger, one of Reagan's close advisers, said he "was never quite sure" whether Ford's negotiators were speaking on behalf of themselves or Ford.

In the midst of the Reagan-Ford negotiations on that fateful Wednesday evening, Gerald and Betty Ford went into two network booths, and exercised media leverage to promote Ford as the senior partner of the Reagan-Ford "dream ticket." Whether these perfectly timed interviews were coincidence, or were Ford-media collusion to force Reagan to accept the secret deal, will probably remain a matter of dispute.

When Reagan came to the platform at midnight and first said he had asked Ford to be his running mate, there was only pitiful scattering of applause. But when Reagan in the next sentence said Ford would not be his running mate, the applause was tremendous. The Delegates showed their intuitive good judgment even though they then knew nothing about the secret deal on transfer of Presidential powers.

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