

The Whip from Texas



The senator entertains his office staff at a party in his home: (left to right) Warren Woodward, Miss Mary Rather, Senator Johnson, Mrs. Dorothy Nichols, Horace Busby and Glenn Stegall. Democrat Johnson (inset) is his party's whip in the Upper Chamber

Collier's for February 17, 1951

Johnson is a man of great energy and vision. Johnson is a liberal, Democratic Vice-Presidential nominee. The Senate may do what it did for ex-Senator Truman.

By LESLIE E. CARPENTER

SHORTLY before the first meeting of the Eighty-second Congress last month, the 49 Democratic members of the new Senate gathered behind closed doors to pick a couple of floor leaders to replace Senators Scott Lucas of Illinois and Francis Myers of Pennsylvania, both of whom had been defeated in the November elections. To succeed Lucas as majority leader, they chose a veteran of 10 years in the chamber, Ernest W. McFarland of Arizona. The vote was 30 to 19. But when the time came to name a new assistant signal caller, they elected by acclamation one of the Senate's youngest members in point of service, a first-term with but two years in the chamber: Lyndon Baines Johnson of Johnson City, Texas.

To Johnson and his admirers, his selection as majority whip was just one more step on the road to the Vice-Presidency—and perhaps someday to the White House itself. The Texan makes no particular secret of his ambitions in that direction. The formula he is using in his efforts to attain this objective is perhaps better illustrated than described.

Seven months after he had been sworn in as junior senator from Texas, and had moved into Suite 231 of the Senate Office Building, a visitor observed:

"Why, you have one of the most beautiful views in Washington from your window. You can see the Capitol Plaza parks, the Mall and the Washington Monument."

Johnson turned his head to the window.

"So I can," he said. "I'd never noticed before."

The six-foot-three-inch, 200-pound, super-charged Texan, who won the Democratic nomination to the Senate by a majestic majority of 87 votes out of 988,295 cast, is not a man to take in a view. He is a worker, a man with a vigorous and intense passion for unremitting labor. To him, work is far more satisfying than play, and while this might make Jack a dull boy, it has had the opposite effect on Lyndon Johnson.

He relaxes only when there is a purpose. He will, for example, play golf with W. Stuart Symington, head of the National Securities Resources Board, or some other government bigwig when he has an idea to talk over or a public relations job to perform. But he confesses privately that he does not enjoy the game and can't waste the time it would take really to learn it.

Worry over the work he is not doing bothers him constantly when he is away from the job. This has resulted in an irritating rash on his large hands and in certain internal disorders—both from nervousness, his doctors say. But it also has played a large part in helping him achieve an impressive record as a freshman senator.

Even before his selection as assistant Democratic floor leader, the forty-two-year-old Johnson had risen to a place of prominence that was the undisguised envy of many a member who was his senior in service.

Up to last month, the high light of his career in the chamber had been his chairmanship of a group known as the Preparedness Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee, the current version of the war-investigating body which Senator Harry S. Truman headed in World War II. And although the title of majority whip is a lofty and important one, it is this committee post which may yet prove to be Johnson's most valuable stepping-stone to still higher things. For he is launching effective investigations of Pentagon brass hats, of war contracts, of waste, bungling and red tape—investigations of precisely the sort that lifted the erstwhile Senator Truman from relative obscurity and set him on the path which eventually led to the Presidency.

Johnson is proud of the fact that his committee, like the old Truman Committee, has been free of Republican-Democratic bickering. It also operates without jealousy, except for the numerous senators who are still pounding their temples in fury because

they did not think of reviving the committee first, which would have enabled them to snare its chairmanship for themselves.

In addition to his other accomplishments, Johnson has surprised many of his colleagues by emerging as a national leader for the millions of Americans who believe their government failed miserably in meeting the challenge of the Korean war. In recognition of this, radio commentator Eric Sevareid, never loose with praise, last December dubbed Johnson "the people's advocate." Those who are keeping a close eye on the senator's progress consider the term well chosen.

Just two and a half weeks after the fighting started, Johnson stepped to the Senate floor and called for an all-out defense effort, recommending immediate mobilization of the National Guard and the reserves, and demanding that the civilian economy be put on a war footing, with immediate price and wage controls. America is at war with the world-wide Communist menace, he cried, and dilly-dallying is dangerous. He followed up in December—six months after the war began and several days before President Truman proclaimed a national emergency—with perhaps the most significant speech of his Senate career.

"Is this," Johnson asked, "the hour of our nation's twilight, the last fading hour of light before an endless night shall envelop us and all the Western World? That is a question which we still have it in our power to answer. If we delay longer, we can expect nothing but darkness and defeat and desolation . . . We cannot anticipate that our enemies will be so generous as to give us another six months to discuss and debate and do little."

His mail increased enormously after the speech, and the letters are still coming in.

He is being closely watched by the present occupant of the White House. President Truman is keenly interested in the success of the new investigating committee, in much the way a star fullback remains interested in the team after his graduation. The President has been generous with advice, and, needless to say, it has been followed. He is well aware that Johnson is hurtling along at a break-neck pace in his footsteps, and he is enjoying the spectacle. He has, in fact, given Johnson's ambition subtle encouragement—despite the fact that he and the Texan are not entirely in agreement on certain key domestic issues, notably the Taft-Hartley law and civil rights.

There is nothing unusual (Continued on page 59)



Family group: Lucy Baines, aged 3, sits at the senator's feet; Lynda Bird, now 6, is with her mother, Claudia. Her husband and her friends call Mrs. Johnson "Lady Bird"

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR COLLIER'S BY GEORGE TAMES



All at once he hated Bernie, hated his assurance. "Get out of here," he shouted

Fighting Words

DAVID SANDERSON was in the restaurant where he usually lunched, when he felt a bone-crushing clout on his back and heard a familiar voice bellow in his ear, "Dave, you old goat! What do you know!"

Bernie Martin loomed over David as he always had, broad and heavy-muscled, with the same superior smile on his face. David had not seen him since high school; but in a second the years slid away and he was back in the schoolyard on that unforgettable afternoon. They had fought over a girl—Bernie, the school's leading athlete, and David, who had difficulty crossing the street by himself. Everyone expected a slaughter, but suddenly, almost before the fight had begun, Bernie was flat on his back and David was standing over him, not even breathing hard.

At that point, a teacher had intervened and the fight was never resumed. David walked home with Ellen McMorran, and that evening he kissed her for the first time and told her boldly, summoning unexpected strength from the bright vision of his triumph, that she was now his girl.

The memory of that one fight had been enough to balance the accumulated shame of all the other times Bernie had bullied him. Even now, the sight of Bernie so obviously successful could not dim David's pleasure. Before he quite knew what he was doing, he had invited Bernie to dinner.

"Ellen and I are married, you know," he said, carelessly. "She'll be glad to see you."

"I'd be real pleased," Bernie said.

David gave him the address and Bernie promised to come right after a very important conference. It was not until he returned to his office that David wondered whether Ellen would mind . . .

"No one forced me to marry you," Ellen had said once, but David could never believe the marriage was anything but a wonderful mistake that would be rectified as soon as the proper authorities got wind of it.

So he was delighted when he phoned Ellen and she said she'd be very interested to see Bernie again. On the way home after work, he bought a bottle of imported wine and a dozen long-stemmed roses. But when he came into the house, Bernie was already there and all the vases were full of flowers that David did not even recognize.

"Cleaned up that meeting sooner than I'd thought," Bernie said, airily. He was sitting on the couch, next to Ellen, and they were both having a drink. Without any warning, David felt again the weakness of the knees he had always felt before Bernie; but then Ellen got up and kissed him, and thanked him for the flowers and the wine, and he remembered that she had chosen him, after all, because he had been the stronger.

He had a drink to catch up with them, and then another because he could not match Bernie's overpowering flow of conversation, and then a third because he wondered if it was altogether necessary for Ellen to look at Bernie the way she did. By that time dinner was ready, but David found himself making a mess of the roast and Bernie had to take it from him and do the carving. David's chest felt constricted, as though his confidence were being squeezed out of him, and he said, speaking before he had really meant to, "Say, you remember that fight we had in the schoolyard?"

Out of the corner of his eye he could see Ellen stiffen, but he was watching Bernie.

"Oh, yeah," Bernie said. "You were sore at me or something."

"Over Ellen," David said. "You were annoying her."

"No kidding?" Bernie turned to Ellen and smiled broadly. "Was I annoying you, baby?"

"You certainly were," David said. He could not wait any longer. "I knocked you down for it."

"You knocked me down?" Bernie said.

"It may be difficult for you to believe," David said, "but that's exactly what I did." He was beginning to feel better already.

Bernie chewed a piece of roast beef thoughtfully. Then his eyes lighted up. "I remember now. I tripped."

"What do you mean, tripped?" David said indignantly. "I hit you in the eye."

"That wouldn't have knocked me down," Bernie said. "Not from you. I remember just the way it happened. I tripped over something."

"You tripped over nothing," David said, his voice rising. "There was nothing for you to trip over. I hit you in the eye and you went down."

"David," Ellen said.

"You got it wrong," Bernie said pleasantly. "You

couldn't have knocked me down with a baseball bat. I must have tripped over somebody's foot."

David stood up, shaking a little. "I didn't want to bring my wife into this," he said, as stiffly as he could, "since she was the cause of our quarrel. But if you insist—" He turned to Ellen. "You were there. Tell him what really happened."

"Is it so important?" Ellen asked.

"What kind of a question is that?" David said. "Go on, tell him."

"I'll tell you," Ellen said gently. "He did trip, David. I know he did."

For a moment there was only the sound of Bernie cutting another piece of roast beef. Nothing had changed in the room, but to David it seemed suddenly different.

"See that, kiddo?" Bernie said agreeably.

"Don't talk with your mouth full," David said.

HE TURNED and walked blindly into the living room. All he could think of was the walk home with Ellen after the fight and the boasting he had done. He sank into a chair and put his head in his hands.

"We'll have coffee in here," Ellen said. She came into the room with Bernie, and David looked up and saw how well they went together, what a handsome couple they made.

"What I don't understand," Bernie said, "is why you're so excited about all this. So we had a fight when we were kids. So what?"

You wouldn't understand if I told you, David thought. You never knew what it meant to be awkward and afraid. And then to have a memory of one time when you fought and won, and felt sure of yourself for the first time—to build your life on the memory of a single victory, and then discover it was a phony all the time.

All at once, David hated Bernie as he always had, hated his assurance and his strength and his easy way with Ellen.

"Get out of here!" David shouted. "Get out of my house!"

"David," Ellen said, her voice terribly calm. "You're acting like a child. If Bernie goes—"

"You'll go with him?" David said. "Is that it? Well, go, the two of you." He walked unsteadily up to Bernie and pushed him in the chest. "Maybe you tripped before," he said, "but if I hit you this time, you'll really go down."

"Now, Dave," Bernie said.

And then David reached back and brought his arm around and hit Bernie as hard as he could on the point of the chin. Bernie stood where he was and blinked his eyes slightly. David cursed and swung again.

"Excuse me, Ellen," Bernie said, and hit David in the eye. David's head went back and his feet went up, and for a frantic second there was no part of him on the floor at all. Then all parts of him were on the floor, and the room revolved around him in bright colors. . . .

When he opened his good eye, Bernie was gone and Ellen sat on the couch, looking at him dispassionately. He struggled to a sitting position and waited until the room stopped whirling.

Then he asked thickly, "Where is he?"

"I sent him home," Ellen said.

"Why didn't you go with him?"

"Because I didn't want to." She looked at him without pity. "You give me a pain. I thought it might do some good if Bernie hit you, but I guess it didn't."

"Maybe it did," David said. He got painfully to his feet. "I've been living in a dream. Bernie knocked it out of me."

"Are you sure?" David nodded, and Ellen sighed softly. "You didn't need it, you know." She stood up and crossed to the coffee table and began to pour. "It sure took you a long time to get over it."

"Seventeen years," David said.

"If I'd known what I was starting, I don't think I would have done it."

"Done what?"

"But in that case, you never would have come near me. I would have had to find some other way. And you were such a ninny."

"Done what?" David asked again. "What did you do?"

Ellen put down the coffeepot and looked at him tenderly. "Why, David, I tripped Bernie Martin that afternoon," she confessed. "What do you think I did?"

THE END