

Nixon's Latest Counterattack

4/9/74
By JOHN HERBERS

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 8 — Last Wednesday evening, after the White House put out a statement saying the President would pay his back taxes, the stooped, familiar figure of Richard M. Nixon was seen moving along the drive beside the West Wing, a man like millions of others trudging home after a long day's work.

Unaware that he was being watched, Mr. Nixon did not wear the campaign smile he has routinely displayed on television, in his speeches around the country and on the streets of Paris last weekend. His expression, in his speeches around the little more rounded than usual.

Yet his unhurried pace and the firm set of his jaw conveyed the aura of normality that his Administration is seeking so hard to portray these days. The deeper Mr. Nixon's personal crisis has become, the more the President and his assistants have sought to show that the Government has been functioning routinely and successfully.

A number of incidents during the last two weeks have given rise to speculation that beneath the aura of normality is a measure of desperation and a willingness to take risks that might or might not turn the tide that has been running since Watergate — the trip to Michigan this Wednesday, for example, to campaign for a Republican Congressional candidate said to be behind in the polls.

Since Avalanche Began

A full year has passed since the Nixon Presidency became threatened by the avalanche of scandals. Once again laborers on the White House lawn are sawing deadwood from the giant elms and replacing sod where crabgrass and dandelions have intruded. It will soon be tulip time in the Rose Garden.

It was the same a year ago when John W. Dean 3d, the former White House counsel, began implicating the President in Watergate. In the summer there were the Senate hearings. The first leaves fell when the special Watergate prosecutor, Archibald Cox, was dismissed during the October "Saturday night massacre." There was snow on the lawn when the public uproar over missing tape recordings reached its peak.

In the small tight world of the Nixon White House during this period, there have been all the convulsions, recrimina-

Willingness to Take Risks Indicated in Last 2 Weeks

tions and defense strategy sessions that one would expect of a powerful Presidency under siege.

By now there seems to be little capacity for shock among the President and his assistants. Day after day they are pursuing routinely but doggedly the current strategy — full-scale campaigning by the President, refusing to give up tapes and documents until absolutely necessary and a zig-zag legal defense that has kept the Nixon opponents guessing what will happen next.

Latest Counterattack

This is at least the ninth district effort at counterattack during the last year. It replaced the eighth, popularly called "Operation Candor," in the early winter, and there is no sign of its being abandoned soon.

Yet some aspects for the Nixon White House seems constant. Even as reports from Capitol Hill depict Mr. Nixon's position as increasingly precarious, there is no such sense of urgency apparent in the White House. The view there is that the Nixon Presidency is still very much in charge of events.

General Alexander M. Haig Jr., and Ronald L. Ziegler, the assistants who spend a great amount of time with Mr. Nixon, frequently reflect a mirror image of what the President is thinking.

In Paris last week, they seemed euphoric after the President encountered friendly crowds on the street and conferred with other world leaders, and they left the impression that this display of acceptance abroad could well turn the tide for Mr. Nixon at home.

Congress continues to be viewed by those in the White House as motivated by partisan, anti-Nixon considerations. After the Joint Committee on Internal Revenue Taxation released its report last week finding that Mr. Nixon owed more than \$430,000 in back taxes, one of his top assistants exploded in anger in the privacy of his office and denounced the committee as irresponsible, even though the Internal Revenue Service had reached much the same conclusion.

Attacks on the news media have been stepped up in some aspects. Patrick J. Buchanan, special assistant to the Presi-

dent, delivered a speech at the University of Pennsylvania a few days ago in which he advocated that conservatives boycott the products of advertisers who sponsor what Mr. Buchanan called distorted news presentations.

"Better 5,000 letters to the principal advertisers of N.B.C. evening news than 5,000 into the trash can of a news editor," Mr. Buchanan said.

The indications of desperation in the White House include the extraordinary ways in which the Administration is seeking to win and hold popular support. At least a dozen persons around the country who have bought newspaper advertisements or collected petitions in support of the President have been invited, one by one, for private audiences with Mr. Nixon.

The President, who likes privacy, now spends hours in mundane meetings with obscure persons. One day last week a sample of the White House announcements was as follows:

"The President will greet Congressman James Martin, Republican of North Carolina, who has painted a portrait of the President. Following that, the President will greet Congressman John Hunt of New Jersey who will present Mr. Robert Semler of Pitman, N.J., who also has painted a portrait of the President."

One day Mr. Nixon, who campaigned very little in his 1972 re-election bid, delivered a 90-minute address for a small group of agriculture editors who were meeting in Washington. A year ago he was making no such appearances.

In pursuit of normality, talk of trouble and controversy is studiously avoided. A two-hour Cabinet meeting a few days ago was void of any talk of the President's difficulties. Mr. Nixon's trade legislation was discussed, but no mention was made of the chief block to its passage, the issue of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union. A long meeting Mr. Nixon held with Congressional Republican leaders followed the same pattern.

Mr. Nixon's assistants leave the impression that he never talks of the possibility of leaving office before his term is up. His own actions underscore this feeling. Gerald L. Warren, deputy White House press secretary, was asked the other day to describe Mr. Nixon's mood after he learned of his income tax troubles.

"Businesslike," Mr. Warren replied.