

With Advice and Consent
 Courage and Hesitation: Notes and Photographs of the Nixon Administration.
 Notes by Allen Drury. Photographs by Fred Mareon.
 (Doubleday, 416 pp, \$12.95)

Reviewed by
 Meg Greenfield

The reviewer is deputy editor of *The Washington Post's* editorial page.

Allen Drury has put together an extremely interesting book about the Nixon administration, and its relative neglect by those of us who write about Washington politics is a comment on our own peculiar focus. One says "put together" because the bulk of this book comprises more than 50 attributed interviews—mostly with administration officials and including two with the President—and a number of talks with unidentified persons who, often enough, are readily identifiable. The neglect, I think, has something to do with the fact that this is unforbidden fruit and a bit overripe at that: it is authorized, on-the-record, out-loud stuff taken from interviews conducted around a year ago. Yet I counted numerous passages that would have been all over the news had they been pried out of the administration under adversary conditions and suited to our idea of timeliness. Thus, for example, the Deputy Attorney General discussing his accomplishments with Drury:

"These civil libertarian bastards complain about what we are doing, but the fact remains that we are clearing up many of these problems . . . In all of these areas you have to do it with vigor and determination and honest people who don't care for the political consequences, but go ahead and fight crime. You can't do it with weak, opportunistic, chicken-hearted bastards."

"Kleindienst Calls Civil Libertarians 'Chicken-Hearted Bastards'"—the headline is no trick to imagine, and neither is the ruckus that would follow. The same would be true of other selected revelations,

less vivid, perhaps, but no less telling. There is Vice President Agnew, sounding like your great-aunt on the subject of a thank-you note she never received, explaining how it was a "slap in the face" for the Senate to have allotted him only two min-

utes (rather than four) to respond to its welcome in 1969, and how an Idaho Republican, Senator Jordan, had got sore when the Vice President innocently inquired as to how he was going to vote on the ABM, interpreting it "oddly enough—as some kind of pressure, and how it all was really downhill from there in the Senate so that he wrote that one off and went back to the Executive Branch. There are such solid men as Arthur Burns and David Packard speaking frankly and indiscreetly on their difficulties with the Nixon White House staff. There is Secretary Rogers expressing an opinion that the early Soviet-Egyptian violations of the Middle East cease fire had a stabilizing effect "because now Egypt has better equipment, while Israel is content with the advantage over Egypt which the equipment we provided has given her." And there is Mr. Nixon giving away much more than seems either necessary or wise in advance of an event that could conceivably occur as a consequence of his own policy: ". . . if South Vietnam goes Communist in spite of all we've done, then communism will indeed be the wave of the future in Asia."

Actually, the fact that Drury, by his own account, was embarked on a project "basically friendly to the President" serves the reader well. True, he has a pretty high threshold for inflated tales, self-flattery and self-promotion. (The prize in this category would have to go to the minute-by-minute account of how the President's

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cool and Dr. Kissinger's genius triumphed over the wrongheadedness of the bureaucracy in the Jordanian crisis and absolutely averted World War III. This one is beginning to take on the quality of one of those Norse tribal legends expanded and improved upon each night around the fire). Nevertheless there is much to be said for learning how the men who run our government see themselves, see their problems, see their ac-

complishments.

Beyond that, there is, I think, a downright advantage to the year's distance put between the interviews and their publication in this book. Drury has fixed in amber a particularly interesting moment in the history of the Nixon administration. For it was a time of turmoil and transition—mid-winter of 1970-'71. The administration was cranking up for the presentation of a new, "revolutionary" domestic program in Congress. It was trying to salvage certain other legislation that had got caught in session's end chaos on the Hill. And all this was taking place in the wake of what it insisted on describing as a "victory" in the savage fall elections, a "victory" that struck others—to borrow from the White House idiom—as perhaps the greatest since the Saxons' triumph at Hastings in 1066. So there was much self-doubt and much self-examination and much self-justification, and Drury's interviews catch a good bit of this, along with the interplay between the administration and its Republican colleagues in Congress.

If there is an abiding theme that runs through these conversations it is one of grievance: here we are doing all these terrific things and they are out to get us. They won't help. They won't give us credit. They will only block and snipe and undermine. "They" is a kind of composite monster—part press, part Congress and part bureaucrat, and there are several things to be said about the administration's response to it. The first is that there is a measure of truth to the administration's complaint: it has proposed more worthy measures and embarked on more worthy actions than it has either got credit for and/or been permitted to carry out. The second flows from the first, and it is: So what else is new? This is after all a familiar and continuing condition of those who run the government. The third is that the Nixon administration, judging from its witness in these interviews and from its general behavior, has permitted itself to be-

come obsessed with and immobilized by the problem to a far greater degree than its predecessors did and with far greater resulting self-damage.

One draws the last of these conclusions bearing fully in mind the penchant of the Kennedy administration to blame the "bureaucracy" and the Congress for its foreign policy and domestic failures respectively and with full and painful recollection of the Johnson administration's particular regard for the press. But here we are dealing with something far more driven and all controlling. Again and again throughout this book there runs the refrain about how "we" are hated and systematically mistreated and how "we" don't care, "we" really, really don't. There is something at once sad and alarming in this preoccupation, and it is revealed most precisely in the President's lengthy rambles on the subject:

"The press? . . . I probably follow the press more closely and am less affected by it than any other President. I have a very cool detachment about it . . . I'm not like Lyndon as regards the press . . . I never get mad. I expect I have one of the most hostile and unfair presses that any President has ever had, but I've developed a philosophical attitude about it . . . I have never called a publisher, never called an editor, never called a reporter, on the carpet. I don't care. And you 'em mad. That's what infuriates 'em. I just don't care. I just don't raise the roof with 'em. And that gets 'em

. . . There are some people, you know, they think the way to be a big man is to shout and stomp and raise hell—and then nothing ever really happens. I'm not like that, with the staff or with the press. I never shoot blanks . . . You read the Kennedy press conference and see how soft and gentle they were with him, and then you read mine. I never get any easy questions—and I don't want any . . . I can tell you this . . . as long as I am in this office, the press

will never irritate me . . ."

Drury, who was permitted to attend one of the regular Saturday morning public relations sessions where the sixth item on the agenda was "how to counter the theme that the President is heartless and cold," tends pretty much to sympathize with the administration's appraisal of the maltreatment it has received. Nonetheless, he expresses disapproval in his commentary that the administration should have permitted itself to become so paralyzed by its concern with the prospective reactions of its "enemies." He lays at the door of such preoccupation what he perceives as a hesitation to go forward or to speak convictions clearly or to engage not in name calling and resentment but in active and open effort on behalf of what it thinks is right. It is possible to quarrel with both Mr. Drury's assessment of congressional/press/bureaucratic hostility toward the administration and with some of the things he thinks the administration should be pressing forward with and still recognize his complaint as resting on an acute observation.

I was struck, in this connection, for instance, by Daniel P. Moynihan's complaint to Drury that the liberals in Congress were determined that Mr. Nixon should not get credit for "really pushing the idea of a guaranteed personal income." Perhaps so, but it would surely be easier to make the case if the President himself did not seem so reluctant to accept responsibility—let alone "credit"—for the idea which in fact underlies his welfare proposal. "I do not believe in a guaranteed annual income," as Mr. Nixon was assuring an audience a few months after Mr. Moynihan spoke.

It is precisely on this point that much of the anonymous Republican congressional complaint in the book is registered—the White House's refusal to level with the public, itself or its potential allies in Congress, its

preference for dodge and maneuver; its capacity for making things look infinitely worse as a result of its overriding concern with how they look; its hesitation to engage actually and substantively in the muddled combat and comradeship of governing.

In fact a number of cabinet members and others such as Mrs. Virginia Knauer of the White House Staff and William Ruckelshaus of the Environmental Protection Agency are among the relatively rare birds who come through in this book as dominated by and focused on a concern with the challenge and substance of what they are doing. The prevailing impression is one of a White House staff withdrawn, resentful, practicing its remarkable efficiencies (and boasting of them) with ever less concern for their connection with the outside world. I was put in mind of the United Nations, where a reporter will often hear ambassadors complaining that they could have made peace on this issue or that—if only their interfering, cable-deluging foreign ministries would leave them alone. But achieving detente in the delegates' lounge is not the same thing as achieving minimally safe and stable relationships among nations, being rather easier to come by and, relatively, of little or no value. Just so, the exasperation of the Nixon administration as expressed so seems misplaced and off the consistently in this book point. The press, the congress, the bureaucracy—it is as if Drury's subjects were saying they could do a crackerjack job of governing a democracy, if only the government and the democracy would go away.