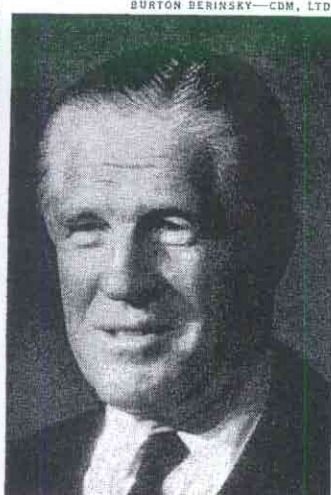




ROGERS



FINCH



ROMNEY



HICKEL

The Widening Cracks in Nixon's Cabinet

It is not yet mutiny, but there is deep malaise and disarray in the Government of Richard Nixon. Sullen resentment and overt bickering compound the dreariness of Washington's labyrinthine bureaucratic corridors. Cambodia and Kent State, the slumping economy and the rhetoric of Spiro Agnew have divided the nation and split the Government. In the capital, a loss of confidence in presidential leadership plagues clerks and Cabinet members alike. And it is unfolding against a tumultuous background of challenge to Richard Nixon from the Congress of the United States.

It is an extraordinary spectacle, both in public and in private. Interior Secretary Walter Hickel's letter chiding Nixon for ignoring the agonizing question of the young has widened his estrangement from the power center; his criticisms of the Administration now extend to the war, economic policy, White House organization, treatment of the press and the leadership vacuum. At one dinner, Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, a longstanding Nixon loyalist, concluded that the Cambodia invasion should have been quietly announced in Saigon as an expanded "raid" rather than trumpeted as something like Armageddon by Nixon on national television. At another party, Labor Secretary George Shultz argued intently that the time has come to put a muzzle on Vice President Agnew.

White Face. Despite his doubts on Cambodia, Secretary of State William Rogers says that he has no thought of resigning. One reason is apocalyptic: he believes that the authority of the presidency is imperiled and that his departure might be its *coup de grâce*. But Cambodia will go on creating discord in Washington. While the Administration continues to maintain that U.S. troops will be out of Cambodia by July 1, that commitment is clouded by South Vietnamese insistence on staying—which would require U.S. air sup-

port and possibly American advisers as well (see THE WORLD).

The two Cabinet members who have publicly taken issue with Nixon are Hickel and George Romney, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. Both are ex-Governors accustomed to command, and both are frustrated by Nixon's isolation behind the palace guard of Assistants John Ehrlichman and H.R. Haldeman. Romney told TIME Correspondent Jess Cook: "I think the key question that the President is going to have to decide is whether he is to have White House staff people basically responsible in policy areas and playing leadership roles, or whether the Cabinet officers are going to do it." Romney has strong feelings on that point. Says one Nixon aide: "I've seen George Romney get white in the face, literally white in the face, because he couldn't get around that amorphous White House staff and get to the President."

Romney openly differed with Administration policy last week by proposing wage-price guidelines to counter inflation; Romney, a millionaire, said that he would do his bit by turning back 25% of his \$60,000-a-year salary to the Federal Treasury. He agrees with Hickel that Agnew's rhetorical assaults have become "counterproductive." Romney is restive because of the Administration's low budget priority for housing, and complains privately that the politics of self-preservation plays an overweening part in Nixon's decision making. But he has no plans to quit—"as long as I feel I'm making a contribution to national policy." Nor, seemingly, does anyone else, though the open disagreements within the Administration have once again raised the classic dilemma of principle *v.* expediency (see ESSAY).

In the perennial bidding for President Nixon's attention, past friendship has not proved to be a present asset. Secretary Rogers became a close Nixon as-

sociate during the Eisenhower days, when Rogers was Attorney General. Never expert in foreign affairs, he has found himself a poor second on his own turf to the formidable Henry Kissinger, Nixon's national security adviser at the White House. But the most poignant case is that of Health, Education and Welfare Secretary Robert Finch, who has known Nixon since the President's first congressional campaign in California in 1946—and who reportedly turned down the vice-presidential position on Nixon's 1968 ticket.

Numb Arm. Unlike Rogers, Finch started strong in the early days of the Administration. His position, however, has become steadily less tenable. In the first months, he bobbed the nomination of Dr. John Knowles as HEW's chief health officer, which the American Medical Association successfully opposed. This year a series of splashy resignations and open disagreements have blotted his copybook badly. His liberal civil rights director, Leon Panetta, was forced out by the White House in February. Others have since left, among them Toby Moffett, his 25-year-old student-liaison man, who quit after Nixon called student protesters bums. Last week, drawn with fatigue, Finch was whisked off to Walter Reed Army Hospital—90 minutes before he was to defend and explain Administration policies to an unusual meeting of some 2,000 HEW employees.

Finch's medical difficulty, a numbness in his left arm, was diagnosed as the possible result of a nerve injury. He was released from the hospital after four days and ordered to take a week's complete rest. It will take longer than that to cure his ills at HEW. The liberals in his department feel that he has not pushed their cause strongly enough at the White House, while the White House thinks that he has flirted excessively with pro-civil rights, pro-spending factions that are not now and never could be a part of the Nixon political coalition. Both sides agree that he is not a forceful ad-

ministrator. The President was reportedly furious at Finch two weeks back for allowing welfare protesters to occupy his office for seven hours. One presidential aide says flatly: "Nixon is disgusted with Finch."

Empty Jobs. Within HEW, the Office of Education is a special locus of angst. Education Commissioner James Allen privately deplored Nixon's March 24 desegregation statement because it deliberately failed to make positive integration a goal. But most liberals were partly mollified by the Administration announcement last week that it would spend all of the \$500 million that Nixon had earlier pledged for ending legal segregation rather than for aid to deficient all-black schools. That pleased those who had had reservations, including Johns Hopkins' Dr. James Coleman, whom Nixon had consulted in preparing his March position paper. Coleman was "encouraged" by Nixon's decision now, he said, because "it represents an incentive to desegregate rather than an incentive not to."

But where Finch had disappointed HEW workers by backing Nixon on Cambodia, Allen became the first Administration official to challenge the President's actions directly and in the open. "I find it difficult to understand the rationale for the necessity of the move

into Cambodia as a means of supporting and hastening the withdrawal from Viet Nam," Allen told applauding listeners in the main HEW auditorium. "We must withdraw from there as rapidly as we can. The war is having a disastrous effect on the young people of this country." Allen's position in the Administration may fast become even dicier than Finch's. There are eight top jobs in his office that are already open or will be vacant by the end of the month; the White House has refused to approve any of Allen's candidates.

Helluva Fix? There was other unrest over the Cambodian decision at lower levels, many of which are largely staffed by leftover Democrats, in Nixon's sundering government. A hastily circulated petition against the Cambodian intervention that originated at AID and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency gathered 250 signatures—including those of 50 Foreign Service officers.

There remain plenty of bastions of support in Government for the President. No one suggests that the dissidents are anything more than a growing minority. Postmaster General Winton Blount is one of Nixon's stauncher defenders. Says Blount, an Alabamian: "The fortunate thing about America is it doesn't happen to be oriented around

the New York-Washington axis. You get out around the country, and you don't feel the sense of despair you get around the East. The columnists are trying to say this country is in a helluva fix, and it isn't true."

Agnew amplified that thought last week in a Houston speech that made it clear he was not going to be muzzled, no matter what his critics say. He renewed his attack on "the columns and editorials of the liberal news media, those really illiberal, self-appointed guardians of our destiny who would like to run the country without ever submitting to the elective process." He called the roll of offending newsmen and newspapers;* some of them now take it as a badge of honor to make Spiro's blacklist.

German Expectations. The White House made a few gestures last week toward papering over the cracks in the Administration. Some 250 sub-Cabinet policymakers from every department were summoned to what one irreverently called a "pep rally" in the State Department's west auditorium. They got a welcome from Agnew and briefings on Cambodia and the economy. Nixon held a Cabinet meeting, the first since April 13, but left after 90 minutes without hearing any discussion of the Hickel letter or of dissent on the nation's campuses.

At the initial meeting of his Cabinet early in 1969, Nixon promised to set up a special telephone line so that each member could reach him directly during a specified hour each day. Nothing came of it, though last week Nixon said that it was "a good idea" to revive the plan. Even if he does, it will be only a cosmetic change. One aide explained: "The old man wants to talk to Henry Kissinger about foreign policy, and he expects the Germans [Ehrlichman and Haldeman] to keep people away from him so he can do it. He expects Cabinet members to run their departments and leave him alone. He'll step in there when something gets big—environment, for instance, or the hunger problem. But he doesn't want to be bothered day by day."

However wedded to that style of operation Nixon may be, it has already proved expensive for him. When he introduced his Cabinet members on television before taking office, they seemed to be faceless men stamped from the same die. That is no longer so. He declared at the time that each possessed "an extra dimension." Some of them have proved that they do, and not always in a fashion that is to Richard Nixon's liking.

* The *Arkansas Gazette*; the *Atlanta Constitution*; the *New York Post's* Pete Hamill; the *New York Times* and three of its columnists, Anthony Lewis, James Reston and Tom Wicker; the *Washington Post* and its cartoonist Herbert Block (Herblock); the *New Republic*; *I. F. Stone's Bi-Weekly*; Syndicated Columnists Carl Rowan and Harriet Van Horne; Hugh Sides of TIME-LIFE.

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