

White House: A Display Of Normality

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The White House was about as normal yesterday as it would be any time that there is an all-day air raid alert limited to the area immediately surround the Executive Mansion.

President Nixon was determined to show he was conducting "business as usual". The citizens outside were assembled in unprecedented numbers, within a stones' throw of his oval office windows, demonstrating for exactly the opposite purpose: to break that pattern.

Normality was the theme that the administration wanted to convey yesterday. Abnormal efforts were made to get that point across.

But the scene was too quiet, too empty, for normalcy. Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House was swept clean of pedestrians and vehicles, except for roped-off sidewalks, widely-spaced patrolmen, and an occasional police car.

The only sounds outside at first were the scuttering of wind-swept leaves. Then came the muffled, electrically-magnified voices, carried by the wind from the Washington Monument grounds.

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You could not hear what they were saying, but the voices were angry. The roar was audible, but not specifically intelligible, as far north as H street.

You could barely hear the voices inside the White House. You could not see the huge crowd from inside the oval office either, because buses parked on the Ellipse blocked the line of sight. But you could see from the family living quarters upstairs.

The President spends few full Saturdays at the White House. Usually, if he is in the Washington area, he is at Camp David at least part of the day. But yesterday it was, as White House aides kept saying, "normal."

From 10:25 to 12:30 the President met with Secretary of State William P. Rogers, Defense Secretary

Melvin R. Laird, Attorney General John N. Mitchell, and the President's national security adviser, Henry A. Kissinger.

Their meeting was to discuss "foreign policy matters in general, including the upcoming SALT (strategic arms limitation talks) talks, Vietnam, and the upcoming visit of (Japanese Prime Minister) Eisaku Sato."

The routine reference to Vietnam would not be lost on anyone. It meant that the President, convinced that his policy is right, would proceed with it despite the huge anti war protest just beyond his back doorstep.

At 12:30, for the President's next visitor, there was an unexpected picture-taking opportunity.

It would show photographically, if anyone was otherwise inclined to doubt it, that the President indeed

was conducting business as usual. Photographers and a few reporters allowed into the oval room found a smiling President and a smiling Secretary of State and a smiling Walter P. McCaughy, U.S. Ambassador to Taiwan, the visitor.

All appeared relaxed and they were chatting, in front of newsmen, about colleges and football and when the President last visited Taiwan.

It was a good day to watch a football game, the President said, and that's what he would do, probably the Ohio State-Purdue game. But he also had a 3 p.m. meeting on the next budget, newsmen knew. There were other staff meetings, too.

After a few amfawoaoaoao picture taking, Press Officer Ronald L. Ziegler signaled that time was up.

As newsmen filed out, the President, with a broad grin, called out to Herbert Kaplow of NBC television, "Herb, are you part of the Eastern liberal Establishment?"

Kaplow, already out of the door, begged pardon and said he had not heard the President. This time the President, still grinning, said, "Herb, are you part of the Eastern Establishment?" Secretary Rogers grinned, too, but he looked sheepishly embarrassed.

Kaplow, taken aback at this unexpected allusion to the ferment aroused by Vice President Agnew's attack on television news, replied uncertainly to Mr. Nixon, "I don't know, at this point."

The newsmen were hustled out without further exchange. It was that kind of an abnormally normal day.