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# Another 'Czar'

PRESIDENT NIXON has now appointed a new adviser on energy and announced a reorganization of the policy-making process. The White House strongly intimates that the shilly-shallying is over, and the time for decisive action is here. It is said that the cluttered old bureaucracy is to be dumped overboard, along with some of the people who ran it, and a streamlined new system is to be installed under a new commander.

All of this fanfare makes a cheerful noise in a bleak landscape. But it is the fourth time this year that President Nixon has dismissed one energy adviser and turned to another. Is the President preparing to change his policy, or is he merely changing advisers again?

Until early this year it was Gen. George A. Lincoln, the director of the old Office of Emergency Preparedness, who kept an eye on fuel for the President. As early as the spring of 1972, the OEP's statisticians began to note the declining stocks of fuel oil. But the spring of 1972 was a time when the White House was single-mindedly preparing for the election campaign and raising enormous sums from the oil industry. It was apparently not considered, at the White House, to be a suitable time to raise questions about oil policy. At least, no serious questions were raised. By the time of the election in November, of course, the country was already well into the fuel oil shortage. In January Gen. Lincoln was retired and the OEP was abolished.

Instead, administration officials said, the President himself would set the course for fuel policy in a major message. Mr. Nixon summoned the State Department's leading specialist on Middle Eastern oil, James E. Akins, to write that message. The ensuing stalemate has never been adequately explained. But Mr. Akins is a strong-minded man, and his public statements of that time suggest the kind of advice that he may have been giving to the inner ring of aides who surrounded Mr. Nixon. It was not what they had hoped to hear. Mr. Akins was presumably arguing, as he did in *Foreign Affairs* in late winter, that we must take the Arabs' threats seriously and consumers must urgently begin drastic measures of conservation. Shortly Mr. Akins was on his way back to the State Department, pursued by a wave of hints that he was, after all, a bit over-specialized.

He was replaced by Charles J. DiBona, a highly skilled systems analyst who had not previously dealt with oil. He was to bring a fresh outsider's view to the subject, according to the party line, and he would program the computers to tell us the truth. But shortly the grumbling, from the same sources, began again: it appeared the Mr. DiBona was too wedded to his numbers, and did not comprehend the nature of American politics.

The energy message, after endless advance speculation and innumerable postponements, finally appeared in April. It was a damp squib, almost lost in the wave of Watergate revelations that culminated two weeks later in the departure of several prominent figures from the White House staff, including John Ehrlichman, the chief domestic adviser, who had also been involved in oil policy. As summer arrived, the gasoline shortages became more apparent. In late June Mr. Nixon tried another energy message, this time appointing another energy adviser, Gov. John Love of Colorado. Here at last, the voices from the White House suggested, Mr. Nixon had a man with a seasoned grasp of American politics.

Mr. Love came to Washington, and Mr. DiBona stayed on as his deputy. Rapidly Mr. Love moved to the conclusion that the oil shortages were serious, and the only practical way to meet them was to discourage pleasure driving. The row within the administration boiled along interminably with no one winning, no one losing, and no one apparently getting much access to the President. Eventually the murmurs became audible again: that Mr. Love was indecisive, that he was not a man of action, and so on. There was plenty of indecision, clearly, but perhaps by this point in the story the reader will have formed his own opinion as to where it lay. In any case, one lesson in this story, and one of the most disquieting measures of this presidency, is the rate at which it is using up the decent and honorable men who volunteer to come to its aid in a time of desperate trouble.

The President is now appointing William E. Simon, the under secretary of the Treasury for the past year, to head a new Federal Energy Administration. Like his predecessors Mr. Simon is a man of notable intelligence. He has a better record of foreseeing the true nature of the energy emergency than most people in Washington. If Mr. Simon's appointment means that the President is at last ready to make painful decisions and to end the bureaucratic warfare among his subordinates, it is greatly to be welcomed. If not, then Mr. Simon will last no longer than the others.

Mr. Love gloomily observed on Monday as he resigned, that Mr. Nixon is still going around to public meetings saying that the oil shortages are only a temporary inconvenience that will be over in a year or so. None of his successive energy advisers, including Mr. Simon, think so. Perhaps the President has decided that, in the present crippled condition of his presidency, he cannot afford to call on the country to believe or do anything difficult. He may be right.

If the federal government does nothing, the likliest outcome will be a highly turbulent combination of rolling shortages and drastically higher prices. There will probably be quite a lot of speculation and a recurrent edge of panic, but that is the way that the market works. Each business and each family will have to find its own way. Americans pride themselves on their level-headed adaptability. They may now find that quality put to an unexpected test, and their sense of citizenship as well.