

New Style at the White House

The revolutionary changes now going on in the White House were dramatized at last Thursday's Cabinet meeting when President Nixon said that Laird had flatly rejected the kind of large, personal staff which marked the un-mourned days of H. R. (Bob) Halde-man and John Ehrlichman.

With Laird sitting with him, Mr. Nixon told the Cabinet meeting, enlarged for the first time by the presence of the House and Senate Republican leaders, that Laird would work directly with Cabinet members "and their own staffs."

That Laird pledge, if kept, amounts to a virtual policy revolution in the Nixon administration. Now, instead of domestic policy being made by White House super-powers operating in semi-isolation from the major executive departments, Laird will keep his White House staff small and work directly with Cabinet members and their staffs.

This direct contact between Laird and the executive agencies will be matched by similar high-level contact between Bryce Harlow, expected to be named next week as the newest White House counsellor, and the Democratic Congress.

Less clear than Laird's pre-eminent role as domestic policy chief is his special role, disclosed by the President, as a regular attendant at National Security Council meetings, presided over by Henry Kissinger. As former Defense Secretary, Laird and Kissinger substantially agreed on most security matters, but they had some significant differences, particularly on the question of trade with the Communist world. Laird, a spongelike absorber of power, worries some NSC staffers.

But Laird and Kissinger conferred privately and at length in the White House last week before Laird's appointment was announced. Friends of both say Kissinger told Laird that as of now he intended to keep his job as Mr. Nixon's top foreign policy adviser. Should Kissinger change his mind, however, it is agreed at the highest White House levels that Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., now the White House staff chief, would take over as national security adviser.

While most Democratic politicians are courting party unity, Sen. George McGovern's 1972 presidential campaign manager is blasting away at two of the party's senior figures: Sens. Hubert Humphrey and Edmund S. Muskie.

Gary Hart, in a forthcoming campaign memoir called "Right From the Start" (Quadrangle), has harsh words for Humphrey, Muskie and just about everybody else who opposed McGovern for the nomination. He also supplies two new historical footnotes reflecting adversely on Humphrey and Muskie. But others with firsthand knowledge of the two incidents (including McGovern men) say Hart is rewriting history.

Incident No. 1: Less than 48 hours before the June 6 California Democratic primary, Hart writes, Humphrey offered "to deliver an election night endorsement" in return for McGovern picking up "a quarter of a million dollars of Humphrey campaign debts." So, Hart contends, Humphrey really cared little about issues or ideology. Humphrey backed out, says Hart, when the primary results were closer than expected.

In rebuttal, the two negotiators iden-

tified by Hart—Max Kampelman for Humphrey and Ted Van Dyk for McGovern—separately gave us similar versions far different from Hart's. They agreed the negotiations were informal and inconclusive, no firm offer of money was ever made and no Humphrey endorsement as early as primary election night was ever contemplated. Furthermore, Kampelman told us the conversations were initiated by Van Dyk, not the Humphrey campaign.

Incident No. 2: Among Muskie's three conditions for becoming McGovern's second running-mate, Hart writes, was "control of the configuration of the vice presidential campaign jet . . . While democracy tottered in the balance, we seriously debated the interior decoration of an airplane!" Moreover, Hart implies McGovern never really made a firm vice presidential offer to Muskie.

In rebuttal, others present at the Aug. 4 McGovern-Muskie staff meeting say Muskie was demanding control over the financing and operations of the vice presidential campaign and that Muskie staffers mentioned their campaign jet only in passing. By all counts, McGovern did make a firm offer to Muskie though many of his staffers (Hart included) disagreed.

A footnote: Other McGovern operatives are furious at the criticism of them in Hart's book. "Hart's account of the campaign is like a Dr. Goebbels writing the history of the battle of Stalingrad," a high McGovern campaign aide told us. Hart may get little help from his former McGovernite colleagues in his expected fight for the Democratic Senate nomination from Colorado next year.