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The Office as Castle

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Whatever the Watergate outcome, the bureaucrats will remain entrenched behind the granite and sandstone compounds of government, fighting their own paper war, bombarding one another with memos in septuplicate.

Presidents come and Presidents go, reaping fame or calumny, but the bureaucrats endure. These soldiers of the swivel chair remain nameless and unnoticed. But now and then, we pause to shine the spotlight briefly upon them in their backrooms.

A bureaucrat's office is his castle. His standing is determined in exacting detail by his office acreage, furniture array and the width of wood paneling on his wall. There is a constant struggle for plush carpets, larger desks and softer sofas.

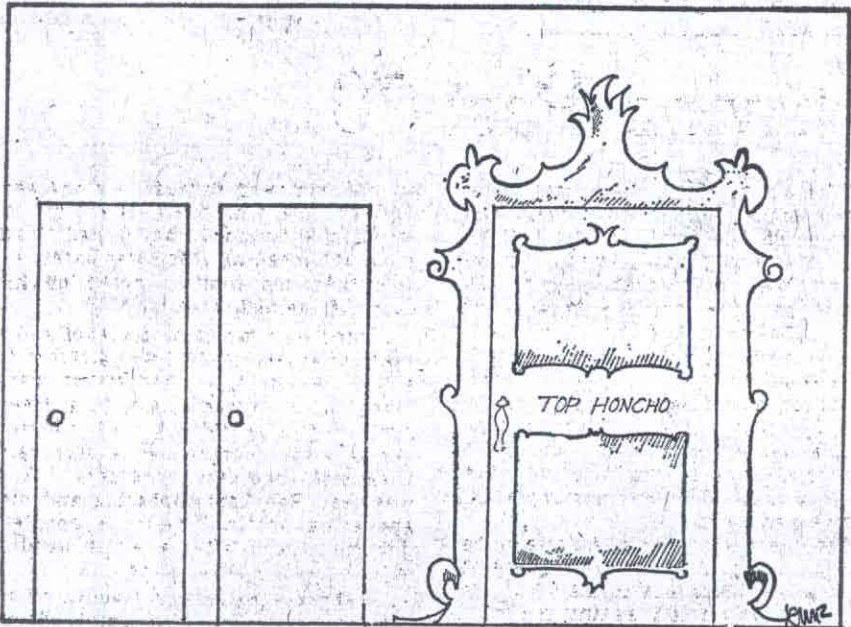
As one of our services, we occasionally calculate how much government bigwigs extract from the public purse for office trappings and other appurtenances of power. We discovered, for example, that 10 per cent of the National Aquarium's annual budget went to provide fancy fish tanks full of exotic fish for the bigwigs. An official with a bleeding heart tetra in his fish tank, clearly, was a person of consequence.

It is also a matter of solemn protocol that no bureaucrat, with any status, can move into a predecessor's lair without refurbishing it. Offices must be done over to fit the personality of the new personage.

To determine whether this sacred rule is still in effect, we checked on several bigwigs who have been appointed recently. There is Alexander Butterfield, for instance, who was put in command of the Federal Aviation Administration after departing the White House. He is the man, it will be remembered, who broke the electrifying news that President Nixon was bugging himself.

Sure enough, Butterfield has redone his chambers. New drapes and furniture were installed at a cost to the taxpayer of \$5,400. We did some pricing of our own and found that even the highest estimates for outfitting a large office fell below that amount. Butterfield's furnishings must be something special.

We also checked with the Secret Service to see if the new director, H. Stuart Knight, had been able to manage with the luxurious suite the previous chief left behind. Once again, the "refurbishing law" was at work.



By David Gunderson

Knight has somehow managed to spend \$11,200 to do over his digs. Some \$3,500 went for a new paint job alone.

At the Bureau of Standards, Director Richard Roberts splurged over \$55,000 to remodel his office layout. He magnanimously extended the job to redo his secretary's office and an adjoining conference room.

Social and Rehabilitation Administrator James S. Dwight, a stern critic of welfare cheats, didn't mind lavishing \$120,000 upon his own welfare. The money was expended for plush carpets, tinted glass, sliding doors, a floor-to-ceiling bookcase and other fancy fixtures in his domain.

At the Justice Department, government lawyers will no longer have to suffer the indignities of waiting in line for airline tickets. Plans have been approved to rip out a training office, which was refurbished only two years ago at a cost of \$50,000, and to convert it into an in-house airline counter.

No bureaucrat we have yet encountered, however, has been able to out-refurbish the Lord High Poohbah of the Postal Service, Elmer Klassen. While the postal system crumbles around his head, Klassen has ensconced himself and his rubber stamp Board of Governors in splendiferous new quarters replete with a \$50,000 kitchen, a \$5,280 personal pantry and nearly \$6,000 worth of miscellaneous furnishings.

At the Washington Navy Yard, we

found some bureaucrats who used a little money and a lot of imagination to turn their drab working quarters into an exotic wonderland of plants and ornaments. The refurbishing at the Chesapeake division of the Naval Engineering Command started many months ago on orders from above.

Scores of plants were brought in until they threatened to engulf the office. Wastebaskets and file cabinets were brightly painted. Posters and colorful partitions were installed. Statues and assorted gewgaws were placed here and there, including a piece of driftwood which rests artfully atop a file cabinet.

In the men's lavatory, the official who directed the interior decorating, Jack Dirks, put up a "graffiti board" and invited his subordinates to scribble away their frustrations. When last we checked, the primary author appeared to be a phantom who called himself "The Chopper."

In all government departments, of course, the fanciest facilities go to the biggest bosses. Most cabinet officers have room on their rugs for a public event.

It should be said, of course, that most bureaucrats perform dedicated service. But possibly they could shuffle their papers on less pretentious desks and pace on rugs of less luxurious thickness.