

Justice Dept. Officials Awaiting Ax

Appointees Jittery at Lack of News

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On Monday, the hottest rumor at the Justice Department was that it would definitely be Tuesday. On Tuesday there was a confident prediction that it would be Wednesday. On Wednesday, the insiders said, "Thursday, for sure."

Thursday came yesterday, and still there was nothing definitive from the White House on who would be running the Justice Department during President Nixon's second term.

"It seems to me that it's about time to settle things over here," one assistant attorney general said.

That was hardly a daring assessment of the situation, since the nation's chief law enforcement agency is the only Cabinet department whose new—or old—top staff remains to be announced by the President. It has been a tense month at Justice since the election. Assistant attorneys gen-

eral and other ranking political appointees have taken to biting their fingernails and making frequent casual checks on the news service teletypes to see if there is any news.

It's not that they are worried anymore about the future status of their boss, Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst—but about themselves.

Although he was originally considered to be in serious trouble with the White House and there were reports that he might be replaced by a "less political" Attorney General, Kleindienst is now understood to be secure in his job, at least until next summer.

The latest sign that Kleindienst would be staying was that he resumed scheduling speaking engagements, something he would not do when he first returned from a two-week post-election trip to Europe.

But that is no guarantee that the 20 or so key personnel directly under Kleindienst will be keeping their jobs.

They and all other political appointees in the department—extending in some instances to the section chiefs responsible for major policy areas—were required to submit letters of resignation after Mr. Nixon's victory last month.

The suspense over which resignations would be accepted has been intense.

"It's been a little debilitating," acknowledged one assistant attorney general during a recent phone call to a reporter to inquire discreetly whether there was "anything new yet."

"We are very nervous," said another political appointee.

Things only became worse last week, when Kleindienst

let it be known in the department that he had been unsuccessful in his fight to retain all presidential appointees. He told some associates that he personally knew who would be staying and who would be leaving, but was not at liberty to say until there was a formal announcement from the White House about his own reappointment.

Ever since, said one official who is unsure about his status, "whenever a political appointee hears that the Attorney General is on the phone for him, his blood pressure shoots up."

Some assistant attorneys general—including Kenneth F. Tamm, of the land and natural resources division; Roger Chantton, of the office of legal counsel; Harlington Wood, of the civil division, and Thomas Kauper, of the antitrust division—only moved into their jobs in the last few months, confident that they would be staying on with Kleindienst.

They are considered likely to stay on, as are Deputy Attorney General Ralph E. E.

Jackson and A. William Olson, assistant attorney general for the internal security division.

Those believed to be most vulnerable are Jerry Leonard, chief of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration; Raymond F. Farrell, commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service; Benjamin Holtzman, director of the Community Relations Service; and John E. Ingersoll, chief of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

The others are question marks, including Erwin N. Griswold, who has served as Solicitor General of the United States since he was named to that post by President Johnson in 1967.

At the FBI, there is considerable tension over whether L. Patrick Gray III, now acting director, will be named to a full term in that job.

Some Justice Department sources say there may be an even longer wait for that appointment, at least until Gray returns to Washington after Christmas from his Connecticut home, where he is recuperating from stomach surgery.