

Phone calls that didn't get through

Secretary of State William Rogers is philosophical about his position. He had profound doubts about the Cambodian invasion and its effect on this nation. He raised them with the President. Richard Nixon went ahead anyway. That is the way things happen in this Administration. Today Rogers is at his desk as loyal as ever to Nixon, but another big chunk of his dwindling personal prestige is gone.

Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird cautioned the President about Cambodia but then, once the decision had been made, fell in step. As he looks back now he wishes that the venture had been presented as a "raid" across the border, rather than as the major engagement Nixon advertised.

Walter Hickel takes issue with the President on more than just his failure to communicate with youth and his reluctance to silence Vice President Spiro Agnew. Hickel has personal disagreements with the Cambodian invasion, the Nixon economic policy, the tone of the Administration's public statements. Indeed, he regrets that the President is reluctant to use his formidable powers to race ahead of problems and smother them before they reach maturity.

Secretary of Labor George Shultz had deep doubts about the necessity of going into Cambodia. Beyond that, he has been heard arguing passionately against Vice President Agnew's continuing use of verbal vitriol. Secretary of Transportation John Volpe is known to share some of Hickel's views.

George Romney, Secretary of HUD, privately doubts the wisdom of the invasion. For some time he has been profoundly concerned about Nixon's apparent tendency to use politics as his principal yardstick for all sorts of decisions. Last week Romney spoke about his dissatisfaction with Nixon's program for combatting inflation and urged a presidential commission to watch over price and wage boosts. Secretary of the Treasury David Kennedy was chagrined at the way the President announced the Cambodian invasion. The Treasury, unwarned, had placed \$5 billion in government bonds on the market for debt refinancing. Only the intervention of the Federal Reserve Bank saved the sale from failure.

HEW chief Robert Finch ended up in the hospital last week, victim of the most brutal

philosophical vivisection in recent years. His range of disagreement with the President's recent actions was as broad as anyone's, but it was strongly counterbalanced by his 20-year friendship with Nixon. Something had to give and it appears to have been his health. An unprecedented number of people in HEW have publicly questioned Administration policies and Finch's refusal to rebut them more openly. And at the White House, aides now say openly that Nixon is disillusioned with Finch, annoyed with his effort to mute the President's hard line on racial matters and his failure to control the dissent in his own department.

All of this does not add up to a revolution in the Nixon administration. But it contributes, seriously, to the mood of spiritual distress now besetting the capital and casting doubt on the ability of Richard Nixon's government to function properly. It combines with the sharp, open opposition to the President now manifesting itself in Congress. And it is magnified too by a growing malaise among the 314,584 federal employees in Washington. In fact, it is Administration failure to implement most of its new domestic ideas, and its helplessness on the economic front, that makes the Cambodian adventure seem more reckless and ill-timed than it really may be.

Some of the unrest arises from Nixon's commendable impulses. He did not want a monolithic administration such as Lyndon Johnson had, where fear froze men's tongues. At first he smiled at public disagreements, was unruffled about leaks to the press. But then he began cutting himself off from the raspy voices of doubt and dissent. Instead of resolving their differences in secrecy, these voices have now broken into the open.

Nixon inherited a government designed and staffed by Franklin Roosevelt. For all the subsequent efforts to reshape its character, including those by the Republicans, it is evident that the old traditions still predominate. John Gardner and other former cabinet officers have testified how the huge departments are societies unto themselves, each with its own state of mind and internal mysticism capable of defying new authority. Some of the F.D.R. appointees are still on the job, now in the senior civil service positions. In four decades they

have cast their character over the departments. Nixon's own 2,500 appointees theoretically comprise the head of this dragon but have yet to control it.

A victory in war or the legislative chamber could dispel a lot of the gloom hanging over the Potomac. There are no victories in sight, however. On the contrary. Just when matters are darkest, the Budget Bureau delivered word that the nation would fall into the red this year and next. The promise of a slight surplus had been one of few bright hopes. Arthur Burns, the long-time Nixon friend and now head of the Federal Reserve, passed the word privately that he felt things in his new shop were in pretty good order. Now it was time for the Administration to get theirs in shape.

At the start of his Administration, Nixon had told his Cabinet that he would set aside an afternoon hour each day for direct phone conversation with Cabinet members. The system never worked because calls were shunted off by aides. During last week's Cabinet session, the first since Cambodia, some say that Nixon learned for the first time the extent of their frustrations. He said he would consider reinstituting some form of direct contact with his Cabinet members. The phones may start working now but it could be a while before the President hears anything good.



HEW Secretary Robert Finch testifies on Kent State before a Senate committee. He was to have answered critics within his department last week when he suddenly fell ill.