

his "White House priority No. 1." Yet for more than a year he has put little of his prestige and even less of his energy behind his own reform measures. Last week, with welfare legislation finally before the full Senate, the President turned thumbs down on the various compromise reform measures that came to a vote. Thus he got apparently what he wanted—nothing.

Nixon's own welfare-reform plan was advanced three years ago by Daniel Moynihan, a Kennedy Democrat who used his charms and powers of persuasion as a presidential assistant to help win over Nixon's more conservative inclinations. Buried in the ore of a tough work-ethic requirement for the able-bodied on welfare were the Administration's glittering liberal jewels: 1) a guaranteed annual income eventually set as \$2,400 for a family of four, 2) income supplements for the working poor, and 3) an extension of coverage to all male-headed families, since many states do not extend welfare to such families and thus encourage family breakups. The idea was to replace the fantastically complex welfare payments that varied enormously from state to state with a federally controlled minimum income, both for the working poor and those with no income. In order to qualify, those capable of working were required either to obtain job training or employment if available. When Moynihan departed for Harvard in early 1971, the proposal lost its architect and articulator.

More recently, it has been ably supported by the current HEW Secretary, Elliot Richardson, and by the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Wilbur Mills, who put it at the top of the House agenda in 1971. But the opposition—both right and left—was just as determined. On the right, Russell Long, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, filibustered the House bill through the latter part of 1971 and 1972. This summer Long's committee added some stiff work provisions that would have required 1.2 million recipients to accept federally guaranteed, low-paying jobs.

Once changed by the conservative Finance Committee, the bill faced strenuous opposition on the left from the more liberal Senators. It was clear that the Administration would have to be willing to accept a compromise. One promising proposal came from Connecticut Democratic Senator Abraham Ribicoff. The "Ribicoff-Administration" measure, as the Senator called it, set the guaranteed annual income for a family of four at \$2,600 and stipulated that it rise automatically with the cost of living. It also stated that no welfare recipient would be required to take a job that paid below the minimum wage.

Where the Administration plan would supplement the income of the working poor on a decreasing scale until earnings for a family of four reached \$4,200 a year, Ribicoff's plan raised the

break-even point below which the poor remained eligible for benefits to \$5,053. But before he had even finished arguing his position in the Senate, a courier arrived with a press release saying in effect that the White House would not support his version of the bill.

The sticking point was Nixon himself. Although Richardson was willing to compromise, the President was not. He argued that the White House version of the legislation already "stretches the budget as far as it can be stretched." Furthermore, he had McGovern in a corner on the welfare issue, and he was not about to give him breathing room by softening his own position. So he stood firm, knowing full well he was sealing the fate of his own "priority" domestic legislation. Said one Congressman: "He preferred a campaign issue to the bill." An Administration executive ruefully agreed: "The President has to share a major part of the blame."

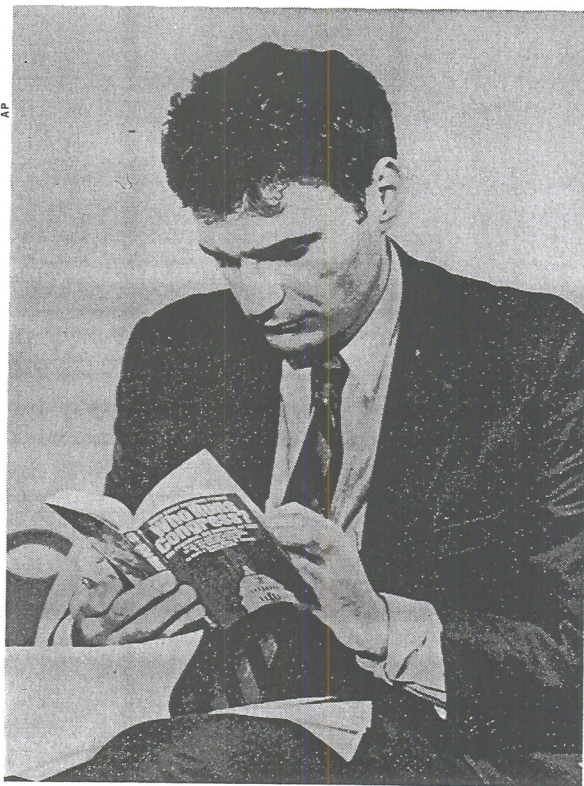
Instead a bill was approved that provides for a two- to four-year "test" of three different reform schemes, but without any "trigger" mechanism to put the one that works best into effect nationwide. The welfare "mess" thus perpetuated, the Senate moved on to pass an \$18.5 billion welfare and Social Security bill. If signed into law by Nixon, the measure will increase Social Security taxes by 8%, expand both the number of people and services covered by Medicare, and permit older workers to earn almost twice as much—\$3,000, compared with the present \$1,680—without loss of Social Security cash benefits.

THE CONGRESS

Nader's Bird Watchers

Attacking the U.S. Congress is a venerable enterprise. Back in 1906 David Graham Phillips wrote a series of savage attacks titled *The Treason of the Senate*. The series was so outrageous and inaccurate that it inspired President Theodore Roosevelt to decry it as "muckraking"; thus another word entered the American vernacular. But as bad as Phillips' articles were they played a major role in bringing about the constitutional amendment that provided for the popular election of Senators.

Whether Ralph Nader's much heralded study of the Congress will accomplish similar and much needed congressional overhauls remains to be seen, but the first segment of the study, published last week as a \$1.95 paperback titled *Who Runs Congress* (Bantam Books), bears a distressing resemblance in its tone and quality of research to Phillips' tirade. The tract revels in recounting every instance of bribery, influence peddling and even criminality in the congressional history books, but it is neither explicit nor persuasive in presenting its view of the problems that short-circuit congressional progress.



NADER AT PRESS CONFERENCE ON REPORT
A resemblance to muckraking.

Nearly everything but Nader's intent is wrong about this book, the first of several to come out of the study (the next: profiles of every Senator and Congressman). It is tendentious, hostile and superficial, and contains nary a footnote to indicate its sources. Hastily edited, the book is flawed by a number of factual errors and incorrect data. Examples: the book refers to "former Congressman Clem Long"; presumably Maryland Democratic Congressman Clarence Long. It cites Missouri Congressman Richard Bolling for putting his wife on the congressional payroll; she works in his office but is an unpaid volunteer. Senator Mike Mansfield, the book says, served in the House until 1955 (wrong); it adds that he was elected to the Senate in 1952 (right).

Nader stoutly defends the project, on which he has spent \$200,000 and employed 1,000 paid writers and volunteers. His hope is that the effort will spur Congress to hold a special session next year specifically devoted to its own reform. Congress, he says accurately enough, has abdicated its constitutional power to the Executive Branch, and the process is quickening at a "geometric rate." He asserts that the U.S. is in the throes of a "devolution of the three-part system of Government" as a consequence. He admits that it will be hard to rally wide public support for his latest crusade. "We do not have to get 200 million people interested in Congress," he says. "But perhaps we can make Congress as interesting as bird watching." When a wisecracking reporter asked him how many bird watchers there are, Nader answered. "Roughly 400,000," he said. It was a too facile riposte: The number of dedicated bird watchers in the U.S. is generally estimated to be at least 3,000,000.