

The White House Becomes a Wheel

Every White House staff reflects its President's style, whims and, most important, use of power. No sooner had Gerald Ford been sworn in than he began to dismantle the tightly hierarchical system erected by Richard Nixon. Ford is designing his presidency like a wheel, with the Oval Office at the hub and spokes radiating out in all directions. The new President intends to be in the middle of the action.

The blueprint that Ford is following is a 23-page report that was drawn up by four members of his transition team, all old and trusted friends: former Pennsylvania Governor William Scranton, NATO Ambassador Donald Rumsfeld, Interior Secretary Rogers Morton and White House Counsellor John O. Marsh Jr. The four were careful to sound out the views of the Cabinet and a wide circle of Ford's advisers and confidants, including Melvin Laird, the former Congressman and Secretary of Defense;

Bryce Harlow, an aide to both Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and Nixon; and Michigan's Robert Griffin, G.O.P. whip in the Senate.

As one of his most important reforms, Ford plans to abolish the job of White House chief of staff. The post was used by H.R. Haldeman, with Nixon's approval, to dominate the staff and bar the door of the Oval Office to all but a favored few. General Alexander Haig Jr., the present holder of the job, replaced Haldeman's officiousness with diplomacy, but still retained enormous powers over the workings of the White House. Such a power center has no place in Ford's thinking. As Secretary Morton points out, the title itself connotes "some sort of overlord."

Haig, who has been indispensable to the President during the transition, is expected to stay on until the staff has been reorganized. As for what lies ahead, Haig says that he has been "too

busy to wrestle with my future in a violent way." In his heart, Haig hopes to go back on active duty in the Army; he had resigned only because Nixon appealed to his patriotism by insisting that he needed him to run the White House. Failing a return to the colors, Haig would like to get a public service job—perhaps as an ambassador or a National Security Adviser. He is likely to be granted his wishes. Ford and his men deeply appreciate the fact that Haig wore himself out performing a thankless task. "If I were Al Haig," says one top Ford adviser, "I'd go down to the West Indies and sleep for six months."

With no chief of staff, Ford intends to make himself directly available to half a dozen of his top assistants in the White House, plus such key members of the Cabinet as Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Defense Secretary James Schlesinger and Secretary of the Treasury William Simon.

To disperse power even more, Ford intends to upgrade the importance of the

Domestic Council, a group set up but largely ignored by Nixon, which includes a number of leading Administration officials, including nine Cabinet members. The council lost out badly to the economists and efficiency experts of the White House's Office of Management and Budget, which Nixon created to help centralize control of his Administration. Interior Secretary Morton, himself a member of the Domestic Council, says that Cabinet members no longer want to be "cut off at the pass by the OMB." Morton and other Cabinet officials have long complained that the OMB has tried to impose its concepts of management and budgetary controls on their departments from the top on down.

The change in the powers of the Domestic Council and the OMB will most likely result in a change in the men who run their operations. Council Director Kenneth Cole Jr., 36, who also serves as the President's top domestic affairs adviser, is expected to leave soon. Cole, a former advertising man, simply lacks

the clout and political experience that Ford will demand in the new job. Cole will probably be replaced by what one presidential adviser calls "an alter-ego type of person"—a seasoned political figure who thinks very much like Ford. The director will also double as Secretary to the Cabinet, arbitrating disputes or making sure that differing viewpoints are called to the President's attention.

As for Roy L. Ash, the present head of the OMB, his future with Ford is limited by the fact that he made enemies by the way he accumulated and used power in Nixon's White House. Ash is expected to be replaced by someone who the President feels will work well with the new domestic adviser.

While these major changes lie in the future, Ford has already relaxed the mood of the White House and quietly put a number of his closest advisers on his staff. Jerry terHorst, 52, the former political reporter for the *Detroit News*, is performing capably as Press Secretary. Robert Hartmann, 57, Ford's long-

time close aide, is ensconced in Rose Mary Woods' old office. Philip Buchen, 58, the President's early law partner back home in Grand Rapids, is White House Counsel. John Marsh, 48, who was serving as a Democratic Congressman from Virginia when he was initially attracted to Ford, is now a Presidential Counsellor. All of these old friends can drop in to see the top man pretty much as they please.

The President is in no rush to make over the rest of the White House in his own image and style. Many of Nixon's aides may linger for a while on the payroll. "I don't see him pushing people away," says one presidential adviser. "I would think that you will see these emotionally drained, physically exhausted people drifting away one by one."

But from what Ford has already accomplished, the White House staff will be totally different in style and organization from the palace guard that Richard Nixon created to enable him to rule in splendid—and ultimately disastrous—isolation.