

4 Months After Nixon, His Legacy Haunts

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 18—On the night of Nov. 2, when President Ford was speaking in an auditorium in Wichita, Kan., a ragtag band of youths marched through the cold rain chanting: "N-I-X-O-N . . . What does it spell? Ford!"

It was a small incident and brought only a ripple of laughter in the Presidential party. Yet even now, four months after Mr. Ford succeeded the discredited Richard M. Nixon, he continues to be haunted by the Nixon legacy.

Today a bit more of that legacy was eroded with announcement of the resignation of the third Cabinet-level hold-over from the Nixon Administration, Transportation Secretary Claude S. Brinegar, along with reorganization of the Presidential staff.

Even so, the Ford White House is plagued daily with assertions by both its supporters and its critics that the new President has not made a clean enough break with the past and removed the Nixon aura from the executive branch.

Melvin R. Laird, the former Secretary of Defense, a close friend of Mr. Ford, said today at a breakfast meeting with reporters that the new Administration was having difficulty persuading top-quality people to come to work in the Government because of the memory of the Watergate scandals.

In the President's own party, the criticism ranges from the far right, with Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona charging excessive Presidential travel, a vestige of the Nixon regime, to the left, with Senator Richard S. Schweiker of Pennsylvania asserting that Mr. Ford is still too much dependent on Nixon personnel and Nixon policies.

The Inside View

This is the outside view. As in the Nixon Administration, the inside view is quite different. Presidential aides insist that Mr. Ford has been working 18 hours a day to restore public confidence in the Presidency and to give the Administration its own character and direction; that the turn over of the White House staff, if not the Cabinet, has been almost complete; that Donald Rumsfeld, the new chief of staff, has begun what some have called "de-imperialization of the Presidency," an effort to make White House personnel less imperious and more in touch with reality.

Mr. Rumsfeld, announcing the reorganization of the White House staff today, said, "It's pure Jerry Ford."

There is growing irritation within the Administration about questions as to when Mr. Ford will put in his own Cabinet. The current standard reply is the one given a few days ago by Secretary of Labor Peter J. Brennan: "Even President Ford was nominated by President Nixon. If we are going to go by the premise to get rid of everybody that was appointed by Nixon, it gets a little silly."



Associated Press

Donald Rumsfeld telling of changes in the White House staff organization, under President Ford, yesterday.

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New President

Although there will be announcements of staff changes and one or two Cabinet changes over the next few days, the die for continuing Nixon policies may be set for some time in that the budget, the State of the Union Message next month, the plan for a full year ahead are being shaped now largely by Nixon holdovers throughout the Government.

Without Clear Focus

Yet it is an administration still very much in transition and, in the opinion of many observers, is yet without any clear focus as to what it will be, other than Mr. Ford's personal quality of decency and openness.

Despite the sharp contrast in style and character between Mr. Ford and his predecessor, a strong Nixon flavor persists. This is attributed largely to the fact that Mr. Ford is comfortable and at home with Nixonian Republicans and policies.

Currently Government under consideration for high jobs, to replace Nixon appointees, are Republican members of Congress defeated in the November election, people who gave Mr. Nixon support in the past—men like Senator Peter H. Dominick of Colorado.

Beyond that, and perhaps more important in continuing the Nixon legacy, is the fact that many of the practices for which Mr. Nixon, and some of his recent predecessors, were criticized have become so institutionalized that the Ford people are having trouble rooting them out.

An example is the President's relations to veterans. It has long been an orthodox doctrine in the White House that the President, as Commander in Chief and supporter of the armed forces, cannot appear in public to be less than generous with those who fought the nation's wars, whatever the budget restraints he exercises.

In a Veterans Day address at Arlington Cemetery on Oct. 28, President Ford said that a special Government force on veterans' task benefits had "submitted a jobs-for-veterans plan for action with the option of recruiting and hiring into the Government at least 70,000 Vietnam-era veterans during the fiscal year 1975."

"I am ordering Federal departments and agencies to move and move now on this action plan, to make sure that these veterans are hired as quickly as possible," he said.

This clearly implied a new Government effort. But when the Senate Veterans Committee inquired into the situation it

Substance and Image

This is generally considered a valid exercise in democratic government. There is a constant effort, however, continued under the Ford Administration, to obscure how much of the President's actions abroad constitute substantive achievement and how much is aimed at improving his image at home.

An example of this was seen on President Ford's recent trip to East Asia. When Mr. Nixon was President, until a few days before the end, Mr. Kissinger was generous in praise of him as an able negotiator and architect of foreign policy. But in Vladivostok, Mr. Kissinger, in conversations with a number of people, characterized Mr. Nixon as inflexible and difficult in negotiations with Leonid Brezhnev, whereas, he said, Mr. Ford was just the opposite.

After the tentative agreement on strategic arms control was reached, the praise of Mr. Ford was escalated, with Ron Nessen, his press secretary, saying publicly, "Richard Nixon could not achieve this in five years, President Ford achieved it in three months. Kissinger indicated Ford and Brezhnev were much more simpatico than Nixon and Brezhnev."

Mr. Nessen later apologized for the statement, saying it was obvious that much of the work toward the agreement had been done under Mr. Nixon. It was never made clear, however, how much of the negotiating at Vladivostok was done by Mr. Kissinger and how much by Mr. Ford.

Mr. Ford's four-month presence in the White House has brought a distinct change of

learned, according to a spokesman, that 126,000 such jobs had been provided in the previous fiscal year, that the 70,000 jobs had been already budgeted and that, in effect, the Administration was saying that it would not subject these jobs to a new cutback plan.

A White House official, confronted with this view, told a reporter that if true it was a case of staff people, who advised the President, continuing to operate as they had in the past and striving for "effect over substance," an exercise of White House orthodoxy. Mr. Ford, the official said, is determined to eliminate misleading assertions.

Mr. Rumsfeld, a former member of Congress from Illinois, director of the Office of Economic Opportunity and Ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, has been chief of staff for about two months and has now completed a reorganization of the White House staff.

He is seeking to achieve a rather drastic change in the way the institution operates. In the past, he said, one of the problems was that a large number of people sought direct access to the President, with the result, under Mr. Nixon, that none of them had access without going through one man—first H. R. Haldeman and then Alexander M. Haig Jr. His implication, in an interview in his office, was that those assistants held too much power as Presidential conduits and Mr. Ford was determined to have a different, but orderly system.

Thus, on a regular basis Mr. Ford is to have direct communications with nine senior Presidential aides, in addition to the Cabinet, other agency heads and Congressional leaders. But in order to keep the aides from developing a "siege mentality," an unrealistic view of the world as a result of too much confinement at the White House and a competitiveness among themselves for the President's time, each will have a deputy with equal access to the President and full authority to act in the aide's absence.

"It is already beginning to work this way," Mr. Rumsfeld said. "General Scowcroft has been meeting with the President for Henry Kissinger, and Dick Chaney has been meeting with him for me, and I want people to call on him just as they would me, when I am not here."

Maj. Gen. Brent Scowcroft is deputy assistant to the President for national security affairs, and Richard B. Chaney is deputy White House chief of staff.

Mr. Rumsfeld said he was going a step further in seeking to prevent the development of imperious attitudes in the White House staff. Without enumerating the details, he said the perquisites long available to White House aides, such as use of automobiles and limousines, travel and other privileges and unrealistic titles that suggest a close association to the President, are being cut back sharply.

Advance men who formerly went into a community in preparation for a Presidential visit and as a matter of routine would "push people around" have been restrained, he said.

"They are the same people but they are acting differently under different orders," he said.

Asked why all this had not been announced, Mr. Rumsfeld said the White House for so long had been accused of striving only for "effect" that it was believed it would be better to let the change gradually become apparent.

But the old ways die hard.

President Nixon was criticized for excessive travel, for avoiding the White House as much as possible and for running the Presidency from his coastal homes or from the Presidential caravan, with its enormous costs and ostentatious display of authority.

President Ford has shown no inclination for acquiring warm-weather residences. He will spend Christmas, as usual, at Vail, Colo. Mr. Rumsfeld said

the President while at the Rocky Mountain skiing resort would not bring out Cabinet members and other officials by daily jet for the purpose of showing the President at work as Mr. Nixon was accused of doing at San Clemente, Calif., and Key Biscayne, Fla.

"If any Cabinet members are flown out, it will be for a good reason," Mr. Rumsfeld said.

But for a new President putting his Administration in place, Mr. Ford has spent what seems to many—including Senator Goldwater—an unusually large amount of time on the road, despite criticism that he, like Mr. Nixon, seems strangely restless.

He has traveled about 46,000 miles during his four-month tenure. Although Administration spokesmen say the number of aides traveling with him has been cut back sharply from the number who traveled with Mr. Nixon, and advance men have been put under restraints, there is no visible change in the pomp of Presidential travel.

People in more than 40 cities in this country and abroad have witnessed this display under President Ford—the majestic and finely polished Presidential jet, and another just like it brought in for a spare; limousines flown in by cargo planes; fleets of helicopters; swarms of Secret Service agents pushing back the crowds or hanging out of cars as they careen around corners in the Presidential motorcade; red carpets and bands playing martial music.

This panoply and pomp, a stark contrast to Mr. Ford's plain, folksy manner, seems to have become institutionalized in the White House, as have other practices that tend to perpetuate the mystique of Presidential invincibility, whoever is the occupant of the Oval Office.

Even the President's harshest critics concede that Mr. Ford's foreign travel serves a useful purpose for carrying out the policies begun by President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger.

There is also acknowledgment within the Administration that in undertaking extensive foreign trips early in his term Mr. Ford is continuing a long-established White House precedent of traveling abroad when troubles at home seem insurmountable. Both Presidents Johnson and Nixon did this extensively for the purpose of improving their political position in the United States.

mood. During the Nixon years, as the former President accumulated power, then succumbed to the ravages of Watergate, there was an air of tension and suspense throughout the executive complex as both observers and officials wondered what the reclusive man at the top would do next.

Now everyone seems relaxed. The feeling of military snap and efficiency is gone from the Oval Office and from the chief of staff's quarters where H. R. Haldeman and later Alexander Haig ran things. No one talks of moving against Congress, the press or the regulatory agencies. A conscious effort is being made to restore credibility to a damaged institution.

On some days the place is downright dull, if somewhat confused. One staff official who served throughout it all said, "it is a little like the slaves after the Civil War. They don't know yet what to do with their freedom and they're going this way and that."

In this atmosphere, there seems to some observers to be a pervasive insensitivity to the outside view that too much of the Nixon legacy remains. Mr. Ford's friends have been urging ever since he took office that the Nixon Cabinet be replaced, quickly and thoroughly. But Mr. Ford has indicated he is no more convinced than Secretary Brennan that service in the Nixon regime should matter.

A partial shakeup on the Cabinet level has begun with the imminent departure of Attorney General William B. Saxbe and Roy Ash, director of the Office of Management and Budget. Unlike Mr. Nixon, Mr. Ford is expected to move into

the moderate wing of the Republican party for some new Cabinet members.

There are indications, however, that he will continue to rely largely on Nixon holdovers or defated Republicans associated with Mr. Nixon in the past. For example, Mr. Ash will be succeeded by James T. Lynn, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, who formerly served in the Commerce Department.

An Innovation Kept

As to the White House staff, Mr. Rumsfeld, who himself was brought into the executive branch by Mr. Nixon, says there has been a turnover in excess of 60 per cent and there will be more. Yet controversial Nixon innovations remain.

The White House Office of Communications, which had become known largely as a strident public relations effort Charles W. Colson and then Ken W. Clawson, will be continued, though on a smaller scale and in a less aggressive manner, under Gerald L. Warren, who was Mr. Nixon's chief daily spokesman in his last year in office.

White House officials, when asked about the operation, seemed surprised that anyone would question the decision. They said Mr. Warren would carry out a legitimate information service under Mr. Nessen.

Before Mr. Ford took office, he ordered his close staff members to read a book by George Reedy, the former Johnson aide, entitled "The Twilight of the Presidency." One of the themes of Mr. Reedy's book is that the traditional fierce competition among aides for the

President's favor and time contributes to the isolation of that office and to the making of decisions in a distorted and artificial atmosphere.

Yet that kind of competition has gone on among some of the top Ford aides. For example, Robert T. Hartmann, one of two Presidential counselor counselors who have direct access to the President—the other is John O. Marsh Jr.—and who has been a long-time associate of Mr. Ford, publicly advocates such competition.

Paul Duke, interviewing Mr. Hartmann recently on the educational network show "Washington Straight Talk," said to him. "You have been called autocratic, mean, temperamental, abrasive."

"All true," Mr. Hartmann replied, but added, "Well, I think some people think I'm a nice guy and some people think 'I'm what you said and a bit more. But I think that all depends on whether they get their way or don't get their way.'"

All of this—the changes as against retention of Nixon personnel and many of the old ways—has contributed to the lack of focus as to what kind of institution the Presidency will turn out to be under Mr. Ford.

Nelson A. Rockefeller will soon be coming in as Vice President with the promise that he will head the White House Domestic Council, which remains as Mr. Nixon left it. Many in Washington are waiting to see what happens when the high-powered Rockefeller staff, bristling with answers to every problem, come up against the more doctrinaire and staid Nixon and Ford people.