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# For Ford, Advice With Consent

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On the theory that everyone is ready to advise the President, but that few are prepared to do so, Princeton University has just held a two-day conference on "Advising the President."

"There's no one person in the country smart enough to be President by himself," suggested Donald Rumsfeld, assistant to the person who is currently President, adding: "He needs help."

Other veteran advisers and academics with advice of their own, about 150 participants in all, joined the introspective inquiry, which ended today.

## A Matter of Logistics

Mr. Rumsfeld compared his job to trying to get 40 elephants under an umbrella and said he spent 75 per cent of his time trying to coordinate staffs and people.

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., the historian who advised President Kennedy, promptly advised Mr. Rumsfeld that this apportionment was a "ridiculous misappropriation" of talent.

"There are people in the White House who are assigned substantive jobs," Mr. Rumsfeld countered. "It happens I am not."

In what he described as "massive understatement," Mr. Rumsfeld told a dinner audience that "the government of the United States is really improperly organized." He suggested that much of the blame lay with Congress, with the bureaucracy and with lobbyists.

Professor Schlesinger thought one of the problems was the massive overstaffing of the White House.

## Ineptly Organized

While disputing Mr. Rumsfeld's figures, which tended to minimize the number of elephants under the White House umbrella, Joseph A. Califano Jr., who was a special assistant to President Johnson, argued that a large staff was inevitable "as long as the government is as ineptly organized as it is."

To document the chaos of the state, Thomas E. Cronin, a visiting professor at Holy Cross College and Brandeis University, scrawled the names of advisory bodies on the blackboard in the auditorium of the Woodrow Wilson School, where most of the sessions were held. Each body represented attempts to solve innumerable problems, and for every solution there was a problem. Reviewing the art of the state, Professor Cronin called it "ad hococracy."

## Trial and Error

Speaker after speaker noted that the kinds of advisory bodies and advisers admitted to counseling depended on the President. "I don't know how you plan ahead of time to organize the White House for a new President," said Clark Clifford, adviser to Presidents Truman, Kennedy and Johnson. He told the conference that what was important was not the quantity of the advisers but the quality of their advice, and called advice-giving a phenomenon at once curious, esoteric and evanescent.

Mr. Clifford told the story

of the successful investor asked for the secret of his success. "Making the right decisions," the investor replied. How? "Experience." How did he get the right experience? "Making the wrong decisions."

Asked to describe a good adviser, Mr. Califano quickly sketched what appeared a self-portrait: "Very pragmatic, skeptical, tough-minded guy with knowledge of his field . . . cynical, very realistic about what can be done."

He recalled that President Johnson had soured on his scientific advisers when they proved unable to express themselves clearly on paper or in person. "They were not able to make their business relevant to his business," Mr. Califano said.

President Johnson dispatched them into outer darkness, and President Nixon dispatched them altogether. (Though distance lends enchantment, Professor Cronin noted that in advising a President, proximity offers clout.)

Prof. Marvin L. Goldberger of Princeton, a physicist who once served as chairman of the strategic military committee of the President's Science Advisory Committee, suggested that it was time scientists got back into the White House, since they could hardly "do it much worse" than the Administration is doing without them.

## Advice and Dissent

Even the best adviser was in trouble with an insecure President, noted a paper prepared by Prof. Fred I. Greenstein of Princeton, director of the conference, and Larry Berman. They suggested that Presidents Johnson and Nixon offered examples of such insecurity and that advisers were often listened to but not heard.

Professor Schlesinger said that some presidents tolerated dissent more than others, and Professor Cronin pointed out that politicians craved approval and support more than advice.

"I quickly learned there was no such thing—at least there was none for me—as pure advice," Mr. Califano said. He noted also that many task forces were instituted nominally to advise but really to reinforce, for example, to press Congress to pass specific legislation.

Having served President Nixon as Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, Prof. Paul W. McCracken of the University of Michigan, spoke of the adviser's difficult path between monastic purity and political complicity, and suggested that academics might consider his time with President Nixon as "an association with Mephistophles."

## Poor Counsel

He recalled that John B. Connally, then Secretary of the Treasury, reportedly told President Nixon that Dr. McCracken's advice was a disaster.

"I find that comment downright reassuring," Professor McCracken said, "because advice that qualifies as a disaster could hardly be called trivial or meaningless."

Edgar R. Fiedler, a former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, reviewed the roster of economic advisers to post-war

Presidents, and wondered why, with advisers so good, the advice was so bad.

There was no clear answer to that question or many others left dangling, such as why Vice Presidents are invariably consigned to obscurity instead of important advisory roles, and whether it is easier to advise an intelligent President. Professor McCracken tried to deal with that one by saying: "I would rather take an intelligent President, but I'd rather not have the machine-gun-mind President. In that sense I think I'd rather advise Gerald Ford than Nixon."

General A. J. Goodpaster, who was Commanding General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, having earlier been an adviser to President Eisenhower, recalled that President's saying that "hindsight is much more accurate than foresight, but not as valuable."

The reward for the adviser was service to President and country, General Goodpaster suggested. "So far as being a big shot on the Washington scene," he said, "that appeals to some and not to others, in my experience that does not appeal to some of the best ones."

It was up to the President, said General Goodpaster, to inculcate advisers against "Potomac fever," an illness in which the warming of columns sends the ego rising.

Professor Schlesinger had his own cooling observation, suggesting that the President influences advisers a good deal more than advisers influence the President: "and that is why the principal becomes the principal and the advisers, advisers."