

H.E.W. Employees to Confront Finch

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WASHINGTON, May 17—A confrontation without known precedent will unfold here at 4 P.M. tomorrow when employees of a Cabinet department call its Secretary on the carpet to account for his actions.

The man on the spot is Robert H. Finch, the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, who is generally regarded as the most liberal Cabinet member.

Mr. Finch agreed to discuss his personal leadership of the department as well as departmental and Federal policies at a meeting with 600 of his employees in the headquarters auditorium. The discussion will be carried by closed TV circuits to the cafeterias of all H.E.W. buildings in the Washington metropolitan area.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of employees in the department have expressed bitter frustration not over Mr. Finch's actions but over what they consider to be his inaction in not speaking out against acts that include the sending of troops into Cambodia and Vice President Agnew's attack on students.

Finch View Tempered

Mr. Finch perhaps revealed his true feelings about the Agnew comments nine days ago when he told a group of students that the remarks had "contributed to heating up the climate in which the Kent State students were killed." Hours later, however, he issued a statement substantially tempering his remarks.

It is viewed by some as ironic that President Nixon chose Mr. Agnew as his running mate after Mr. Finch had declined an offer to take the second spot on the Republican national ticket.

Attempts in the last few days by The New York Times to discuss the situation at his department with Mr. Finch have been unsuccessful, but he did state in a telephone conversation that he was aware that many employees were upset with him.

One top aide said the other day, "If Finch doesn't speak out dozens of top people are going to quit. He's got to get out in front, to talk about national priorities, rebut Agnew. He's simply got to get off his tail, to exercise some leadership."

Friends of Lewis H. Butler, Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, who is a mover and shaker in the department, have said he is so discouraged that he is thinking of leaving.

Dr. Robert O. Egeberg, Assistant Secretary for Health and

Scientific Affairs, has also made remarks about resigning. But he said last week, "I won't quit—I may be fired because of my words and actions but I won't quit with a burst of rhetoric like a moth in a flame."

Tomorrow's meeting was first demanded on March 6 by more than 2,000 employees who were seeking to have Mr. Finch justify the department's school desegregation policies. The first petition came a week after the resignation, under fire, of three of the department's key civil rights aides.

In the intervening 10 weeks, however, the Cambodian affair, campus disruptions and the slaying of college students by National Guardsmen and policemen have not only pushed aside the desegregation disputes but also angered and deeply offended many people in the most socially aware of all Federal departments.

Bitterness Over Nixon

Interviews in the last week with H.E.W. personnel ranging from Assistant Secretaries to middle-level "feds," as they call themselves, have turned up evidence that many persons are extremely bitter at the Nixon Administration, at themselves for being attached to it, at their own department and at Mr. Finch.

They expressed these main grievances:

¶They are deeply puzzled, if not angered, because they had expected Mr. Finch to lead the focus of Cabinet-level discontent with the Cambodian affair and the Vietnam war in general. Yet Mr. Finch has refused to speak out.

¶They are amazed at what they regard as the vacillation of Mr. Finch and the failure of his department even to take positions on the major social issues of the day. To them, the department should be the social consciousness of the Government but they believe it has failed to make contact with society's most alienated groups—the young, the poor and the blacks.

¶They are aghast at what they regard as total disarray in H.E.W.'s subdepartments of social welfare, health and education. It is contended that the department has lost contact with Congress, that the department's leaders do not do their legislative homework and that key decisions are either not made or postponed for too long.

¶They contend that Mr. Finch has ceded his supposed leadership on domestic issues to such White House advisers as John D. Ehrlichman, the President's principal domestic aide. Some persons contend that Mr. Finch, a long-time personal friend of the President has not fought

hard enough for Mr. Nixon's ear.

"Chaos" was the most commonly used description of the doings inside the department by the people who work there. Some policy makers have quit and others are considering following them, although dozens of major departmental jobs have gone unfilled in the 18 months since Mr. Nixon took office.

Republican recruiting efforts for the department are generally regarded as a failure, and the situation is worsening because it has become harder to find replacements for those persons who do leave, much less fill the jobs already open. Disaffection with Mr. Finch is bipartisan, with old-line H.E.W. workers, most of whom are emocrats, being joined in the discontent by the more recently arrived Republicans, some of whom Mr. Finch recruited himself.

Even some of the persons Mr. Finch installed in his office as assistants have, behind his back, tried to pressure him into action. Last week, for instance, several of his aides organized a secret campaign to bombard Mr. Finch with telegrams and letters from personal friends, leaders in education and health and students. More than 1,000 persons responded by asking Mr. Finch to speak out against the military action in Cambodia.

As never before in this relatively close-mouthed administration, department officials have sought out newsmen to express and try to explain their deep frustrations with the department and its leader. Some

With Criticism of His Actions

reiterate their earlier statements that Mr. Finch is one of the finest men they have ever known.

Thus, they cannot fathom his silence, and in many cases they resent it. They wonder why it was Interior Secretary Walter J. Hickel and not Mr. Finch who chose to tell Mr. Nixon pointedly that the Administration was failing American youth.

Shift to Right Cited

While the departmental dissenters have focused on the Cambodian affairs in the last month, they have expressed annoyance with Mr. Finch's performance on other issues. He has been blamed, for example, for what critics contend is an ideological shift from the left to the right in desegregation disputes under pressure from the White House.

Three members of the department's civil rights staff including its chief, Leon E. Panetta, were ousted in February because they had pursued vigorous school desegregation efforts. Mr. Panetta, whom Mr. Finch had strongly defended previously, attributed his ouster to pressure from four key advisers to Mr. Nixon who want to slow the pace of school integration to placate Southern voters.

H.E.W. staffers have said they could not understand why Mr. Finch did not stand up to the pressure and keep Mr. Panetta.

Last year the big controversy was over the so-called Knowles affair. Mr. Finch offered the job as the nation's top physi-

cian to Dr. John C. Knowles, the liberal-minded head of the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. Mr. Finch was forced to retract the offer under pressure from the American Medical Association and the White House.

And last week the Justice Department announced that it would support the tax-exempt desegregation rulings. Mr. Finch's status of private schools deliberately set up to circumvent said in January that he would fight such a move.

Critics maintain that this is just another example of the Justice Department's meddling in social affairs that are H.E.W.'s province. Some staff members in Mr. Finch's department believe that Attorney General John N. Mitchell and a group of White House advisers including Mr. Ehrlichman, H. R. Haldeman, who regulates the flow of visitors and messages that reach the President, and Harry C. Dent, the chief White House political strategist, are controlling decisions that should be made by Mr. Finch.

"You can't run a department with that many people reversing and revising you," said Mr. Finch's predecessor, Wilbur J. Cohen. "Bob Finch is an excellent man who, left to his own instincts, would do a marvelous job."

Mr. Finch said last year that he did not "want to be known as the man who had the President's ear." His detractors at H.E.W. believe that Mr. Finch should fight harder both for the good of the department and the country.