



Memo to the President

By RICHARD J. WHALEN

Like every other occupant of the modern, monarchical Presidency, you are now a King and you live in a splendid Court, surrounded by an aura of majesty. Every moment of every day you are compensated in ways large and small for the hard knocks and disappointments you encountered on the road to the White House.

In spite of the panoply of the presidency, as you seek re-election this year you resume the role in which I served you in 1967-1968, that of petitioner for popular favor. Then you were simply "R.N." and you sought plain-spoken counsel, for you wanted very badly to win and were prepared to say and do whatever seemed necessary. It was your extraordinary good fortune—or so it seemed then—that the Democrats, in their suicidal divisions, spared you the necessity of spelling out your views in detail.

Even so, we Republicans, exercising the prerogative of the Outs, made a great many generalized promises. In sum, these amounted to the pledge that you would bring to Washington a different kind of government, one that would pursue a different course at home and abroad.

What the yea-sayers and your "realistic" Republican apologists do not dwell upon is the direction of your Administration. It is away from the goals you proclaimed in the 1968 campaign. The difference between what your Administration has done and proposed to do, and what a Humphrey administration would have done, is not very significant. What is sadly significant is that a liberal Democratic administration would have acted out of mistaken conviction. Your administration's slithering to the left—to borrow a phrase from our common political hero, Churchill—is prompted by mistaken calculation.

Apparently each would-be king must discover for himself that the American people, though sometimes fooled, aren't fools. They know what their real needs and interests are. They are mature enough to face harsh facts, whether these relate to our position in South-east Asia, our growing strategic weakness vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, or our approaching fiscal-financial crisis arising from the uncontrolled expansion of the Federal budget. They are intelligent enough to distinguish between straightforward government and political gimmickry. They are prepared to follow a steadfast leader who does not hesitate to invoke a spirit of genuine national sacrifice in dealing with America's trials.

To be believed, you must act on what you believe. As it is, your Administration does not appear to have any settled beliefs. John Ehrlichman once stated your position on a proposed domestic program and a highly placed member of your official family challenged him, saying the statement contradicted what he knew of your philosophy. Ehrlichman informed the stunned questioner that you didn't have any philosophy—that you did what was feasible and tactically shrewd. "Ehrlichman didn't realize what he was saying," the official later told me. "I know Nixon has values and a philosophy, but why doesn't Ehrlichman? And why does Nixon rely on a man like that?"

I, too, know that you have a philosophy, to which you once privately gave the name "conservative." Publicly, however, you give your Government the label "centrist," which shifts meaning so frequently as to be meaningless.

Not long ago one of your more thoughtful assistants spoke to me in a tone of discouragement, almost despair, that probably did not reach your ears. "You do have to be committed to ideas, values, a direction," he said. "In here"—he gestured toward the White House walls as though imprisoned—"we're just coping day to day. And I can see circumstances in which it could all come apart very suddenly."

Our opportunity in 1968 was clear. If we had honestly defined what was worth conserving and set about it, if we had done everything possible to turn power back toward the people (instead of merely talking about it), if we had performed the tasks government can perform well, showing re-

spect for the integrity of individuals, communities and smaller nations—if we had done these things and more, we might have rallied a cultural majority and made it an effective new political majority.

Our peril was also clear, and we have succumbed to it. We Republicans, while temporarily enjoying governing power, have contented ourselves with overseeing a Government we do not truly control, one that is moving by blind momentum further and further away from our party's distinctive beliefs. Without intending it, we have replaced the meddling philosopher-king of the liberal state with the repressive policeman-king of the pseudo-conservative state.

The alternatives, then, were to govern or reign. You have reigned.

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