

(Also NYTimes 19 Jan 73.
filed Nixon.)

Criticism from the right hits Nixon as term two begins

WASHINGTON—President Nixon has returned to Washington for the start of his second term, but instead of finding a spirit of rejoicing over his spectacular victory and elation over the impending cease-fire in Vietnam, he found many of his old supporters in a perplexed and critical mood over his recent conduct.

Here was Vermont Royster of The Wall Street Journal wondering gently why Nixon had been so remote and silent lately, especially since he had demonstrated his mastery over the presidential news conference. (He hasn't had a formal news conference since Oct. 5, a National Security Council meeting since last May or a cabinet meeting in two months.)

Kilpatrick not gentle

James J. Kilpatrick, the conservative columnist of the Washington Star-News, was not so gentle: "In the past two months he (Mr. Nixon) has become more remote and indrawn than ever . . . Everything is sliding downhill. All the buoyant optimism of November now has washed away . . . Nixon, beginning term two, has made an unhappy start."

James Burnham, writing in the current issue of the conservative weekly, National Review, speaks of "the ruler's sense of frustration—the same frustration that engulfed his predecessor." He adds:

"Secretive, enigmatic, indirect, revolving more and more closely around the person of the ruler: palace intrigues within intrigues; periods of seeming stasis interrupted by furious outbursts of energy; the great lords with independent titles banished from court in favor of the ruler's bound liegemen; decisions taken in seclusion, and put into effect without explanation of premises or aims; even Henry Kissinger as a mod Rasputin . . ."

Something lost

Well, none of this would have been surprising coming from the President's critics in other papers but when Royster, Kilpatrick and Burnham write as above, it is clear that Nixon has lost something

James Reston

between the election and the inauguration.

The most impudent explanation of his recent unexplained area bombing of North Vietnam comes from his White House staff: The President was given a "mandate" in the election to carry on the war and the peace as he pleased, and besides, Harry Truman didn't consult anybody when he dropped those atom bombs on Japan!

Charitable explanation

The most charitable explanation is that he was, as he said himself, "emotionally drained" after the election, physically tired, and personally angry at the haggling in Paris over the peace terms—and ordered the bombing without the usual consultation even with his own staff while he was in one of these periods of gloomy frustration.

He explained his decision to make major changes in his administration by saying that he was afraid his first term "players" would go stale. There was always, he said, a tendency for an administration "to run out of steam after the first four years and then to coast, and usually coast downhill . . ."

"I believe in the battle," Nixon said, "whether it's the battle of the campaign or the battle of this office, which is a continuing battle. It's always there wherever you go. I, perhaps, carry it more than others because that's my way."

Psychiatrists' field day

You can read this any way you please,

and the amateur and professional psychiatrists have been having a field day with the question ever since the President disappeared and started tossing the bombs around: either he was tired or stale himself, as he feared his players would be, or he was determined to show everybody that he was going to be the boss, an active tough guy who would tolerate no nonsense or advice from anybody, including Henry Kissinger.

One other possible notion here is that he did not go through the normal process of consultation with the Joint Chiefs, the Security Council and his staff precisely because he did not want to listen to the opposition for this cruel bombing he knew he would get.

Troubling suggestion

That is probably the most troubling suggestion of the lot, for one of the reasons presidents tend to go "downhill" in their second term is not merely that they get tired or go stale, but they begin to resent opposition within their own official family and surround themselves with men who will merely carry out orders.

Nevertheless, there was something sad in the President's return to a capital he seems to be trying to avoid more and more. Surrounded by his family and followers, and by the big bands he assures us are coming back, one would have expected him, for once, to kick up his heels and have a little fun.

But fun was the first casualty of Vietnam, and even when it was just about over the town seemed to be having a hangover even before it had its celebration.