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How Will the President React to His Victory?

By JAMES RESTON

President Johnson has dealt with the past and must now turn to the future. The days between election and inauguration are critical, for it is in this period that the President sets his course and picks his team.

No other 90 days in the whole four-year term are more important, for it is then, when the nation and the world are paying attention, that he establishes the tone of his Administration, sets the standards for the future, establishes his order of priorities, and decides on the quality of his top associates.

On the whole, the Kennedy team has held up remarkably well and it is a tribute to the President and to them that they have worked so well together. But some decisions have to be made before long.

The Cabinet

There has been no Attorney General since Robert Kennedy resigned to run for the Senate. This will be the first major appointment for the President. Will he fill it primarily on personal grounds, as President Kennedy did, or reach for a man who will be widely accepted as "the first lawyer in the land"? Will the Attorney General regain control over the communications of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, or will the F.B.I. retain the independent access it has had to the White House for the last ten months?

The rest of the Cabinet cannot very well stand as it is. It is competent but dull. Secretary of State Rusk, Secretary of Defense McNamara, and Secretary of the Treasury Dillon have all won the confidence of the President, and all three have apparently been asked to stay on, but personal relationships are not the whole of the job.

The State Department is coming into another critical period and there is scarcely a top official there or in the White House who thinks the place is efficiently run. This has been true through most of Secretary Rusk's four years. He has been a good adviser to the President. He is trusted and respected in the Washington diplomatic corps and on Capitol Hill. But he has not mastered his department, and the situation has recently got worse since U. Alexis Johnson was transferred to Vietnam.

Secretary of Commerce Luther Hodges and Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Anthony J. Celebrezze have no doubt satisfied the political forces they were designed to appease, but beyond that they have not been remarkably successful.

The situation at Commerce has been further complicated by turning over the critical problem of transportation to Under Secretary Clarence D. Martin Jr., whose political connections have proved to be more impressive than his accomplishments. Changes will no doubt be made in both departments.

Elsewhere in the home front Cabinet the record is much better. Secretary of Interior Stewart L. Udall has done more to keep the problems of conservation before an increasingly urbanized country than any Secretary since Harold Ickes. Secretary of Agriculture Freeman has also impressed most observers here, and Secretary of Labor W. Willard Wirtz of Illinois has proved to be one of the most articulate and effective administrators here in many years.

It would be pleasant if the future of these key public jobs could wait until everybody had a long rest free of all noise and criticism, but the campaign has already delayed many decisions, and budgets and programs have to be arranged.

The Vacancies

Two major Under Secretaryships, for example, have been vacant for many weeks at Treasury and Interior. The President also has to find a chief for the General Services Administration, which is the largest builder in the world. He has to find top men soon for the Interstate Commerce Commission, the Civil Aeronautics Board, the Home Loan Bank Board, and many others.

In addition, he will undoubtedly have to change many of his major diplomatic assignments abroad, particularly in Europe, and take another look at his own White House staff, which is undermanned and overworked.

Until now all the key personnel in Washington has been operating on a crisis basis and trying to keep pace with Mr. Johnson, which is a physical impossibility. Some of them have stayed on because of the emergency after the assassination of President Kennedy. Others have been pressed into service because they were known personally to President Johnson. Many others just kept doing their jobs, efficiently or inefficiently, because everybody over them was too preoccupied to bother with them.

But now for the first time there is a chance to sort things out, to redeem the President's promise to find the "best men" who can do the "best job for the country." He will have a mandate from the country, a working majority in the Congress and the automatic and formal resignations of all top officials on his desk.

How he deals with this opportunity will tell us quite a lot about the quality of his new Administration.