

# President's Grip Found Looser on Bureaucracy

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By JOHN HERBERS

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WASHINGTON, June 6—Last Jan. 2, President Nixon signed a bill to establish an eight-member board to conduct an emergency study of failing railroads in the Northeast and make recommendations to the Government by Oct. 29.

Even though the legislation called for Mr. Nixon to appoint the members no later than March 17, it was May 30 before the appointments were completed and submitted to the Senate for confirmation. The White House blamed problems with Congress for the delay, but other officials said that a Presidency weakened by Watergate was largely to blame, that 14 months ago such a delay in an emergency matter would never have occurred.

However, 14 months ago the Nixon White House scheduled the dismissal of the director of a small agency for failure to display the required loyalty to Richard M. Nixon, yet that official is still there.

"They forgot about me," he said happily. "There's no interference at all, and we are accomplishing things we never could before."

These are two aspects of the effects of scandals on the Government, negative and positive, and they point up the maturing of a trend that has been under way for some months: Mr. Nixon, who more than any other modern President sought control of the vast Federal bureaucracy, has seen his once aggressive White House staff become enfeebled, and he is now presiding over a loose confederacy of departments and agencies that feel independent of White House control.

"There is no White House," Donald E. Santarelli, director of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, said in an interview with the Philadelphia Inquirer. "There is no White House any more."

Mr. Santarelli, who said that the remark had not been in-

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tended for publication, resigned in embarrassment, but his assessment of the current state of the White House nevertheless was supported in many Washington offices.

There are signs that the Of-

Office of Management and Budget, which for many months kept the Government operating somewhat smoothly with authority delegated from the President, is showing signs of strain and weakness. Frederick V. Malek, the deputy director of the agency who headed a network of Nixon Loyalists throughout the Government, has been seeking a position in private industry and is expected by his colleagues to leave soon. A number of lesser officials have quietly left or are contemplating leaving.

Morale, which has been at a low ebb in most White House offices for many months, is now reported by some officials to have a serious effect on the day-to-day operations of the Presidency. Also, there is a continuing difficulty in recruiting new talent.

A middle-level official who has been in the White House complex throughout the Watergate developments sat in his office one day last week, looked out on the North Lawn and said, "It will take a long time to put this place back together." And he saw no chance of this occurring under Mr. Nixon, even if he completes his term, which has more than 2½ years to run.

All of this, of course, is contrary to the official Administration line. Mr. Nixon is depicted from time to time as having a firm grip on the Government. He holds regular Cabinet meetings in which discussions are held on issues and policies. Cabinet officers emerge proclaiming the President to be on top of his job.

They say that when the President's two top assistants, H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, resigned last year, President Nixon made a decision through his new chief of staff, Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., to decentralize authority and give the departments and agencies more autonomy.

#### Encouraging Development

Agriculture Secretary Earl L. Butz, who once said that Watergate was one of the best things to happen to Government because of decentralization, said a few days ago, "I now have a great deal more autonomy than I did a year ago."

There were a number of signs, however, that the President and his staff have frequently been preoccupied by Watergate problems to the detriment of decisions on issues and have been so reduced in authority and prestige that there is no longer any strong White House command. They

include the following:

\*A plan by Secretary of State Kissinger to provide \$4-billion in aid through the United Nations for poor countries hurt by the oil shortage and rising price was frustrated, according to officials involved, because of internal Administration conflict that ordinarily would have been settled by an early Presidential decision but was not taken to Mr. Nixon because of his preoccupation with Watergate matters.

Mr. Kissinger and George P. Shultz, then Secretary of the Treasury, who had reservations about the plan, finally settled the issue in Mr. Kissinger's favor on April 29, just as Mr. Nixon was announcing there-Nixon was announcing the release of Watergate transcripts,

but too late to win United Nations approval.

President Nixon's position as a political leader has been so weakened that members of his Cabinet and other high officials like appointed no longer feel obligated to defend him publicly, even when urged by White House aides to do so. Although Commerce Secretary Frederick B. Dent has been delivering speeches defending the President against the Watergate charges, the usual practice is to discard defense statements sent out by the White House Office of Communications and not mention Watergate in public speeches.

Some officials when questioned have been critical of Secretary of Transportation Claude S. Brinegar said in a speech May 14 to the National Press Club, "I've been shocked, offended and discouraged by the mess of whatever the term Watergate eventually comes to embrace."

¶The Watergate stigmatism has been so closely associated with the White House that appointments of high officials throughout the Government are increasingly being made by the departments, rather than the White House, which ran a highly centralized recruiting center. Similarly, lobbying for legislation on Capitol Hill is being done increasingly by department officials rather than by the White House lobbying office.

For example, the recent successful lobbying for the Administration for the military procurement bill that passed the House was done chiefly by Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger.

#### Policy Influenced

Aside from President Nixon's efforts to appeal to conservative members of Congress, who have been his main defenders against impeachment, there are a number of recent develop-

ments in which Watergate incidents have influenced policy and actions.

When Elliot L. Richardson was Attorney General, he had under way a plan to reorganize the Justice Department to remove political influence and make it more professional. When Mr. Richardson resigned last October, Mr. Nixon appointed to succeed him a man who was available and who could be confirmed quickly, Senator William B. Saxbe. Mr. Saxbe scrapped Mr. Richardson's plan.

There are indications that Watergate is increasingly having a stultifying effect on innovations and policy initiatives, even though the process is very subtle and Administration officials deny that it is taking place.

Caspar W. Weinberger, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, said yesterday in a news conference that his department was holding up, probably until September, recommendations to Mr. Nixon for welfare reform. The President was previously committed to an income maintenance plan, but Mr. Weinberger said that Mr. Nixon did not want to submit any plan that might be beaten, and he, the Secretary, was no surveying local officials and others across the country about alternatives.

Other controversial subjects were under study and probably would be for many months, he said, including Social Security taxes and what the Government should do about biological and medical research.

Secretary of Interior Rogers C. B. Morton, in the course of stressing the positive aspects of decentralization in a separate news conference, underscored the lack of new initiatives by the Government.

"We haven't been in the kind of situation that required very many Presidential decisions," he said.