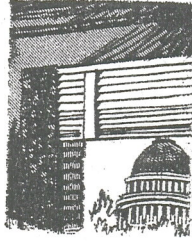


Richardson Goes To Another Limbo

PRESIDENT FORD is giving Elliot Richardson a Christmas present which many Americans would like to see under the tree, that is, a job.

Whether appointment to the court of St. James is just what Richardson wanted or asked for is neither here nor there. He is a good soldier — rather too good, some thought for most of the Nixon years — and he will take it.

Richardson's long unemployment was an embarrassment to an administration not liberally stocked with talent or symbols of conscience. The post of Ambassador to England is no less worthy for coming second-hand, after Senator J. William Fulbright's rejection of it. And Ford has made it official that the Nixon administration's only resignation-with-honor is still a Republican.



If the appointment represents a problem solved to Ford, it represents to more liberal Republicans and to many Americans as well, an opportunity lost. If Ford had really wanted to signal change and prove that he has finally struck the shackles of San Clemente, he would have asked Richardson to go back to the Department of Justice.

"If he had done that," said one Republican, "he would have wiped out the pardon completely."

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NO BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT has been more soiled or demoralized by Watergate. John Mitchell, Richard Nixon's first Attorney General, is on trial in Judge John J. Sirica's courtroom. His second, Richard G. Kleindienst, who was convicted in the ITT case, appeared there recently to take up arms for his best friend, Robert C. Mardian, a former assistant attorney general, who is also an indicted conspirator.

During Richardson's brief tenure, the department regained a measure of professionalism and prestige, which promptly declined when Nixon made his fourth and last choice, William O. Saxbe,

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BUT GERALD FORD is not given to dramatic or dangerous moves except where his predecessor is concerned. He might, given his tenderness toward Nixon, regard the employment of Richardson in any capacity as an act of courage. He may also think he has been cunning in rescuing Richardson from one limbo and dispatching him to another.

Certainly Nelson Rockefeller, his new vice president; and Donald Rumsfeld, his new chief of staff, who is also a man of intense ambition, will breathe more easily with the exportation of Richardson.

And Richardson will be muted as the political critic he was promising to be. Previously the soul of discretion in his public utterances and careful to note the Nixon accomplishments while taking bows for his part in bringing them to an end, Richardson recently made a speech suggesting that Ford's continued inaction on the economy would bring him trouble from more than Ronald Reagan.

Republicans are caught between repudiating their past and ignoring it. The matter is Gerald Ford's preferred course. With Richardson away, their chances for forgetting the whole thing are slightly improved. The big challenge for Richardson will be to see that they don't forget him, too.