

Nixon Showing New Desire for Conciliation

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 14—The growing impression here that President Nixon has determined, for his own good, to put the campaign of 1970 behind him and face his greater test in 1972 with fresh faces and a new tone of bipartisan conciliation has found further confirmation by his sudden burst of public activity in the last two weeks.

News Analysis

The President remained silent about his plans and prospects for a full month after the voters, on Nov. 3, delivered their unsettling verdict on his campaign strategy and his decision to stress the law and order issue and suggest that Democrats were to blame for "permissiveness." However, since Dec. 4, when he emerged to address economic issues before the National Association of Manufacturers in New York, Mr. Nixon has sought to assert himself more positively on the issues and has offered, if only temporarily, the hand of friendship to his enemies on Capitol Hill.

The evidence of a conscious switch in tone and tenor lies partly in a series of recent public moves — the National Association of Manufacturers speech, the rapid changes in his official family, the propitiating gestures in his news conference last week and his decision to fight openly for Senate approval of his welfare program.

Cabinet Move in Line

Even his appointment of a Democrat, John B. Connally Jr., as Secretary of the Treasury may be viewed, at least in part, as an effort to improve the cosmetics of his Cabinet

and to improve his negotiating prospects on Capitol Hill.

Yet some of his unannounced decisions have been equally revealing. To remedy one much-publicized weakness — his alleged failure to keep his Cabinet abreast of major issues and consult with them more frequently—the President promised his Cabinet members at a meeting this morning that, beginning early next year, he would meet with them every two weeks.

Neither Mr. Nixon nor the Cabinet members regard the Cabinet—as President Eisenhower did—as a deliberative body. But regular meetings may do much to improve the disposition and morale of his principal associates.

The President has also decided, informed sources disclose, to conduct a series of background sessions with editors, publishers and perhaps local officials around the country, beginning in February. The meetings would be devoted to domestic issues, in stark contrast to similar "backgrounders" held this year, which were presided over by Dr. Henry A. Kissinger and devoted entirely to foreign affairs.

The belief that Mr. Nixon is regarded by the public as less interested in domestic than foreign issues may have had something to do with the switch in format.

Yet prepared to read into all this activity a marked departure from Mr. Nixon's essentially conservative approach to public policy. He adopted a tough tone against "forced integration" of the suburbs in his news conference and he showed evident distaste for parts of the report of the Scranton Commission on Campus unrest.

Further his appointment of Governor Connally can hardly be said to "liberalize" the Cabinet, given Mr. Connally's long association with the conservative wing of the Texas Democratic party, his opposition to the peace plank at the 1968 convention and his general agreement with his new boss on most issues.

Conciliation and Action

The shift is really one of posture; from combative to conciliatory in his dealings with Congress, the press, and the Cabinet (hence his news conference pledges to work "together" with Capitol Hill, and meet more frequently with newsmen; hence also his decisions to schedule more Cabinet meetings and meet with editors); and, perhaps more significantly, a shift from a passive to a more assertive posture in his approach to some domestic issues.

A case in point was his address to the National Association of Manufacturers. For weeks, Mr. Nixon had uttered only vague promises that the economy would improve; his aides were left to handle the details. In New York, however, Mr. Nixon himself offered the promise of specific action to dampen inflation and increase economic output. While these measures were criticized as inadequate in some quarters, the mere display of Presidential concern sent favorable ripples through Wall Street.

A better illustration was provided by Mr. Nixon's address to the White House Conference on Children and Youth here last night. Throughout the campaign, in an obvious appeal to conservatives, he had advertised his family assistance program as an antiloafing

measure directed against the undeserving poor and designed to force the shiftless onto "payrolls."

There was none of that last night. Instead, he stressed the positive and even revolutionary aspects of the program, including the fact that it would give families a basic income and, in time, eliminate what he called the "monstrous, inhuman," outrages of the present system. Further, Mr. Nixon pledged to fight for the plan publicly in the present session of Congress.

How long the present spirit will last is anybody's guess. The mood around the White House now is highly reminiscent of the flavor of the transition period in late 1968, when Mr. Nixon sat in the Pierre Hotel in New York and cast around for Democrats to put in his Cabinet (he finally found Charles W. Yost to serve as Representative to the United Nations), issued many pledges to work with the Democratic Congress, and spoke of "bringing the country together."

The spirit of those early days lasted until the Senate started hitting him hard on his Vietnam policy and rejected two of his nominees to the Supreme Court.

The present mood may collapse under similar pressures. Indeed, it seems virtually certain that the Democratic left—which has never forgiven Mr. Connally for his tactics at the Chicago convention — will set up a howl over Mr. Nixon's latest appointment.

Nevertheless, what can be said is that Mr. Nixon appears to have decided that the combative approach of the campaign yielded less than satisfactory results, and that he might as well try something new, if only for a time.