

Squeak! Scrabble! The Washington Rats are on the Move10-25-72
A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

They put a picture in the papers the other day of a fine, sleek-coated, long-tailed rat taking in the sun near two old ladies in a park a few blocks from the White House. The sound of scratchings and scrablblings are audible in this capital of the world. Claws and fingernails on cement. The news media mice on tilting sheets of glassy no comments . . . and Washington's rats.

In the first days of the Nixon administration the rats were like those of any other city, visible only by night enough to appear by day scuttling under cars and running then just in the alleys. About the time of the Cambodian invasion they grew more populous and emboldened, running across the streets. Now at the end of the term, with John Connally heading up the Democrats for Republicans Committee, they're in the parks, not running but standing still contesting with the pigeons for dry crumbs.

In this city of predators the rats have no natural enemies. Yes, there's a rat abatement program, but like so much else under the Nixon administration it doesn't work. People don't realize that. They think these Republicans are efficient because they don't make big, dreamy, Democratic promises and then fail to carry them out.

You can break modest promises, too, but that hasn't

sunk in any more than the Watergate Scandal or the Milk Scandal or the Wheat Scandal or the You-Fill-In-The-Blank Scandal. Nor does the country over which this capital presides know about another scandal: the almost nightly escape of the crooks from Washington's jails. Since January they have averaged one escape every four days. They make good their get-aways not only singularly, but in groups.

Fat City/Rat City, who's to blame? One test of an administration is how it runs Washington. Do we blame the low caliber of Nixon's appointees or are the crooks bribing their way out? That accusation has been made but not answered. No questions get answered in the rat kingdom where the rodents come out of their holes and a faceless President slips down and out of sight, broadcasting modest radio messages in the television age from impenetrable places.

Many, many questions. There are questions to be asked about John Alessio, a large Nixon campaign contributor and a business associate of C. Arnholt Smith, a San Diego buddy-buddy of the President's.

Last year John and Angelo, his brother, pleaded guilty to income tax evasion and were sentenced to the federal slam at Lompoc, Calif. Unlike the crooks in Rat City they didn't need to escape because the New Republic (Oct. 21) reports, ". . . the Alessios had things

much their own way at Lompoc. Fine food, liquor and women were enjoyed by them behind bars . . . they made regular unauthorized trips from the institution, often staying overnight. Meanwhile the prison officials who made all this possible were being entertained royally and treated favorably in business deals by members of the Alessio family not in prison . . ."

Do they have a rodent problem at Lompoc too? The media mice might like to ask that question also, but they're kept on a starvation diet by Ron Ziegler, the humanoid keeper/press secretary the President has set over them to feed them occasional pellets of information and grains of news. With presidential press conferences abolished for all practical purposes, the mice must live off Ziegler briefings. And they only have half enough of them because he has cut the daily briefings from two to one.

With their rations reduced to the level of pernicious anemia last week, they squeaked at their keeper as he stood in front of the blue curtain in the White House briefing room; but Ziegler squelched the weakened things, telling them that, "We're not going to have this type of chaos in future briefings . . . (and) as far as this briefing is concerned, I'm ending it, it's ended." But out in the parks the rodents did play.

The questions pile up. Instead of answers there are

diversions such as Marina Whittman, the most presentable member of the Council of Economic Advisors, who makes those monthly admissions that prices have gone up again. "Dahlings," the Zsa Zsa Gabor of economics says in effect, "we have our good months and we have our bad months, and this was a bad one again, but not so bad if you know how to read the numbers like us experts. Sure, bread's up, rent's up, milk's up, but we've told GM to hold the line on Cadillacs and diamond prices are stable."

And wouldn't it be nice to ask his nibs who is the comsymp now? He has Kissinger running about the world like a berserk hamster arranging the Vietnam surrender he denounced George McGovern for advocating. Why, then, were so many killed and so much money spent these past four years to get this deal which he could have had his first day in office? And why is he arranging trade after trade with the Russians while telling us we must spend \$80 billion a year to protect ourselves from this "most favored nation" and his Chinese drinking buddies?

When he dies the Russians are going to request that Alger Hiss lead the honor guard escorting his body to Moscow where it can be interred in the Kremlin Wall next to Lenin and Stalin and the Washington Rats will move to the suburbs.