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Nixon's Reorganization

President Seems Determined to Take Firm Control of U.S. Bureaucracy

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—Day after day, the announcements of personnel changes have kept on flowing out of the Nixon Administration in no evident order and with no surface coherence. But a strong underlying theme is becoming increasingly apparent. The President is bound and determined to run the Government. On the evidence of past experience, such an effort is laudibly, but almost

News
Analysis

laughably, optimistic. Other Administrations have sought to harness the mixed allegiances of the vast department bureaucracies, answerable in fact to Congress and their own special constituencies as well as the White House

For the most part, all these efforts have produced is exasperation—of the kind once articulated by John F. Kennedy—that dealing with the bureaucracies was like trying to nail jelly to the wall.

But Mr. Nixon appears to be undertaking the most rigorous effort yet—either to toughen the jelly or broaden the nail. The watchword appears to be an undramatically simple sentence offered 22 months ago by a Presidential advisory panel:

“The public holds the Administration accountable for effective government, but without relatively clear and discrete assignments of responsibility, it is difficult to hold line officials truly accountable.”

As appointments and removals continue, it is increasingly apparent that, as he enters his second term, Mr. Nixon will be acting on that diagnosis in four different ways at once.

Executive Branch

The first, most obvious, level is formal reorganization of the executive branch. A plan, to mold seven Cabinet departments into four, has already been proposed to Congress as a major component of the “New American Revolution” once heralded by Mr. Nixon.

The plan, surely, will be re-submitted to Congress with at least ostensible White House support. For one thing, Mr. Nixon has appointed its principal author, Roy L. Ash, as the new head of his Office of Management and Budget. But the way of such a reorganiza-

tion plan is hard, vulnerable as it is to opposition from special interest groups, ranging from teachers to transit operators.

And in the meantime, the public still holds the Administration accountable; the President must still try to run the Government.

A second course, thus, is to permeate—cynics might say “infiltrate”—the bureaucracy with the appointment of tried and true officials responsive to the President's policies.

There can be little doubt, now, that Mr. Nixon is pursuing this course. Nine present or former White House aides have been proposed so far for major jobs in six departments and major agencies, and there may yet be more.

The nomination as Director of Central Intelligence of James R. Schlesinger, who won his spurs in the Office of Management and Budget, is only the newest on the list.

John C. Whitaker is to be the new Under Secretary at Interior, Egil Krogh Jr. at Transportation. Edward L. Morgan has been nominated as an Assistant Secretary of Treasury, Ron Walker as director of the National Park Service. Alexander H. Butterfield is to become Federal Aviation Administrator, Frank C. Herring to direct urban mass transit.

And to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, a fountainhead of social bureaucracy, Mr. Nixon will dispatch both the director and deputy director of his budget office, Caspar W. Weinberger and Frank C. Carlucci.

Beyond permeation, insiders see signs of a third, more systematic effort to harness the bureaucracy. This effort, already under way, involves the conscious development of an interdepartmental network, responsive to the White House, out of a series of little known positions in each department.

These are the jobs of Assistant Secretary for Administration. Traditionally they have been occupied by career men who do not depart with changes in party control in the White House. And it is from these officials, who deal with departmental budgets, that Congressional committees have exacted considerable allegiance.

Now it appears that the Administration will seek to turn these jobs into a powerful instrument of control—what one knowledgeable official describes as “an instant bush telegraph into the jungle.”

The center of this operation is to be Frederick V. Malek, a tough specialist in management and recruiting, who is moving from the White House staff to the No. 2 job in the Office of Management and Budget.

Three administrative Assistant Secretary posts are now occupied by men recruited to the Administration by Mr. Malek. And with these positions open in at least four other departments, there is talk of the appointment of still other Malek recruits.

‘Supersecretaries’

The fourth form of bureaucratic harness is the development of several, informally designated “supersecretaries” to oversee broad areas of Federal responsibility.

Secretary of the Treasury George P. Shultz, already designated by the President as the chief economic policy official, is viewed as one such supersecretary. Henry A. Kissinger, given his pre-eminence in national security affairs, has been described as another.

Whether there will also be such over-arching posts in the areas of human resources, natural resources, and community development remains to be decided, according to insiders. But Mr. Nixon is said to believe that some sort of coordinating process, moving collectively against a problem, must be devised.

If the President should settle on the informal supersecretary approach, he might be accused of trying to accomplish by fiat the very organization plan he has proposed to Congress. Critics might observe that while Cabinet secretaries remain accountable to Congress and the public, informally designated supersecretaries—shielded by the doctrine of executive privilege—would not.

There are ready answers to such criticisms. For example, if it is accountability Congress is concerned with, the Administration might say, then let it pass the formal reorganization plan calling for formal supersecretaries.

But in any event the other harnesses are being fashioned and the larger, jelly-nailing effort proceeds.