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James Reston Reports

New Cast, Old Attitudes

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President Nixon has changed the cast of characters in the Cabinet and the White House staff, but the new men are still working under the same old closed system and perpetuating the poisonous atmosphere of suspicion and secrecy.

Ehrlichman, Haldeman, and Dean have been replaced in the White House by General Alexander Haig, Roy Ash, and Len Garment, but this is merely another defensive unit calling on the same old signals.

John Connally of Texas was added to this team, but oddly has not surfaced

in Washington since his appointment. In fact, it is reported here that he thought he was going to serve as a private adviser to Mr. Nixon, as Clark Clifford and Justice Abe Fortas worked for President Johnson, while keeping their former jobs, and that Connally was surprised when his appointment was publicly announced, forcing him to take leave of his lucrative law practice.

Nevertheless, even with Connally, the reorganization has not been a transformation of the administration, but a reshuffle, which has not produced the fundamental changes required by the prevailing mood of doubt and mistrust.

Also, while nobody in the administration is excusing the Watergate burglary, the President and his men are not condemning the whole

system of secrecy, wiretapping and espionage, but are defending it on the grounds that it was necessary to defend the security of the republic from leaky officials, nosy reporters, and anti-war militants.

The result of this combination of national security arguments and a closed-shop White House is that, even if the President rallies his party to his defense — which he may very well manage to do — the country will still be divided and mistrustful.

It is for this reason that at least a few of his staunchest supporters are arguing that Mr. Nixon, in his own and the country's interests, should go forward with a much more drastic reorganization of his administration, conduct the public business in a much more open way, and try to give a sense of new beginning with a bipartisan government.

This is what Franklin Roosevelt did at another time of national crisis during the last world war. He wanted the people to feel that they were being led in a nonpartisan way by a coalition government, and for that purpose brought two distinguished Republicans, Henry L. Stimson and Frank Knox, into his cabinet.

Similarly, at the end of the war, when the country was trying to negotiate a peace that would avoid the partisan conflicts that destroyed Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations, President Truman insisted that congressional leaders of both parties join with him and the secretary of state in the negotiations on the peace treaties and the formation of the United Nations.

These were gestures and symbols more than anything else. They did not impair the authority of the President; indeed, they helped both Presidents in the conduct of the war and the transition to a wholly different world

order. But above everything, they were helpful in bringing the White House and the Congress and the leaders of both parties into a common effort, and contributed greatly to the unity of the nation.

This, of course, is not Mr. Nixon's way. Even though he has been badly served by his little band of familiar amateurs and manipulative technocrats, he has turned in his troubles to an Army general, a former law partner, and a business efficiency expert to rebuild his battered staff. He gets little trust for he trusts few men.

He has ignored the likes of Barry Goldwater and John Sherman Cooper, loyal Republicans who have the confidence of the Congress and who would bring him the experience and loyalty of independent minds.

He keeps his same discredited White House spokesman, Ron Ziegler, and while promising to get to the bottom of the present scandals, not only refuses to volunteer information to the courts and the Senate investigators, but also refuses to answer questions from the press.

It is argued that the President could not get distinguished and experienced Democrats like Cy Vance and George Ball to serve him because his administration is now in such trouble. But this is precisely why he could command their support, for this is not merely a personal or a party crisis but a national crisis.

What is needed going into a whole series of fundamental negotiations on trade, money, arms control, and energy overseas, and probably fairly soon into economic phase four at home is not only a new team, but a new spirit of candid talk and bipartisan cooperation, and even after all the turmoil of the last few weeks, this is precisely what is still missing.

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