

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

The Connally Story: Advice and Dissent

The flat refusal of John B. Connally to consider postponing a 60-day private trip around the world starting early next month with his wife, Nellie, is the conclusive piece of evidence that his one-month tour of duty as a White House consultant has been unrelieved disaster.

Uninvited to the White House for the long, private chats that used to be a normal routine of his life as Secretary of the Treasury, Connally has been cut off from the flow of traffic so vital to the business of top-level government. Mr. Nixon has found neither the time nor inclination to receive Connally's criticism and recommendations.

Accordingly, John Connally, object of the President's unstinting admiration when he developed the New Economic Policy in 1971, is joining the heap of Nixon advisers who fell because their advice was unpalatable. Connally's resignation as consultant now seems certain and his return to the administration in Mr. Nixon's second term doubtful. Thoughts of seeking the Republican presidential nomination in 1976 seem far from Connally's mind.

After his dramatic switch to the Re-

publican Party May 2, Connally had not the remotest intention of accepting any assignment in Richard Nixon's White House, just then starting to feel the heat of Watergate.

But when the White House publicly announced he had agreed to become a "part time" consultant, Connally was hooked. He accepted it in good grace, even though he was forced to take leave from his law firm and resign from corporate boards of directors. Connally assumed he would move into a lofty, obviously powerful perch in the White House, from which to help Mr. Nixon find a way out of the Watergate wilderness.

"It seemed like an attractive challenge," one Connally intimate told us. "It took him back to 1971, when he saved Nixon by finding a way out of the inflation wilderness."

If that in truth was Connally's mood, it lasted only until his first day in Washington, May 10. On that day, he spent close to one hour with Mr. Nixon in the total privacy of his office.

Speaking from his experience as an uncommonly shrewd political operative, Connally pulled no punches with



By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

the President. Watergate was a potential administration-killer, he said. He warned Mr. Nixon with polite but Dutch-uncle frankness that he could "turn the situation around" only if he acted immediately to let out the facts and only if he took immediate "minimal steps" to show that his administration was still functioning.

That was more than President Nixon apparently bargained for, from Connally or anybody else. It was the severest critique of Mr. Nixon's deepening predicament ever heard by a President whose dislike for either advice or bad news is notorious.

As a result, according to friends of both Mr. Nixon and Connally, the President has not seen Connally alone for a single conversation since that first day.

Thus, when the President asked Connally to study a new anti-inflation program with the regular White House and Treasury economic advisers, Connally found himself without staff, without statistics and without a factual basis for recommendations. Too proud to ask for special aid from the White House, he worked the past month, often alone and lonely, from Suite 681 at the Mayflower Hotel.

Moreover, Connally found a chaotic situation among the President's regular economic advisers: contradictory and conflicting economic theories, constantly changing input from the same officials, and continuous procrastination.

It has become an abhorrent situation for Connally, strongman in the 1971-1972 Nixon administration. Then, he kept H. R. (Bob) Haldeeman, the justly-feared White House chief of staff, waiting to see him outside his Treasury office on three occasions and once bawled out Haldeeman for throwing his weight around. Now, Connally has become "a floating eunuch in charge of nothing," in the words of a devoted Connally intimate.

In that context there is nothing surprising in Connally's decision not to postpone his leisurely round-the-world tour. What now worries Republican politicians hoping for a miraculous Nixon cure from the ills of Watergate is whether that other tough, independent and versatile Republican, Melvin R. Laird, will encounter similar pitfalls in the White House after he begins Monday. The fall of Connally is regrettable; the fall of Laird could be fatal.