

The Same Old White House

How little both the substance and style of policymaking have changed at the White House is reflected by the fact that the same economist who wrote President Nixon's last economic speech expects to write President Ford's speech concluding his economic summit conference Sept. 28.

The speechwriter is economist Sidney Jones, a major backstage policymaker at the Nixon White House who remains highly influential in planning the Ford economic summit. What's more, Jones has no apologies for the last Nixon economic speech in Los Angeles July 25 which advocated "the old time religion"—that is, fiscal and monetary conservatism—and not much else.

Although Nixon's July speech was in itself a depressant on the economy, other government officials expect Jones to follow the same general script for Mr. Ford. Apart from perpetuating Nixonomics, this shows that economic policy is still being made in the White House rather than by Secretary of the Treasury William Simon, as once seemed probable.

Such a pattern generally holds true for all government policymaking during President Ford's first six weeks in office. Despite his genuine desire to decentralize power away from the

White House and back to Cabinet-level departments, little has changed. Indeed, the White House Domestic Council under Nixon holdover Ken Cole, is more influential than ever. No wonder, then, that policies remain as they were.

This can be partly explained by the lack of the usual transition period between Presidents. Moreover, there never was much chance for appreciable change as long as Gen. Alexander Haig maintained the old Nixon system as White House Chief of staff, with Haig leaving this week, administration officials outside the White House hope a new day will dawn for them.

Nevertheless, intimate Ford advisers are deeply disappointed about the first six weeks at the Ford White House. What follows is a sampling of recent incidents there which are disturbingly similar to the prevailing pattern of the Nixon White House.

• The recent legislative message sent Congress by Mr. Ford was prepared entirely by the Domestic Council. When one White House aide bootlegged a copy to a Cabinet member, angry Domestic Council staffers launched an investigation to discover the "leak."

• A dozen conservative Republican

senators, led by Sen. Carl Curtis of Nebraska, some two weeks ago asked for a private session with the President to discuss their complaints about what they consider his leftward drift. The lack of any response to the senators is the responsibility not of Mr. Ford but of his staffers. For various strategic reasons, they did not want the senators to see him now.

• The Domestic Council staff has dominated the presidential decision-making about the government's new energy policy machinery—a decision crucial to both diplomatic and economic problems. The Domestic Council paper on the subject, submitted to Mr. Ford last week, was treated as a top secret document not available to high government officials outside the White House.

• Rep. Albert Quie of Minnesota, a highly regarded Republican moderate, had argued unsuccessfully that President Nixon should not veto funding of anti-poverty community action programs. When he renewed the argument with the Ford White House, Quie encountered exactly the same resistance and exactly the same arguments in reply. That was hardly surprising; he was talking to exactly the same Domestic Council staffers.

But the aftermath of this last incident shows that, for all the similarities between the Nixon and Ford White Houses, there are differences which hopefully will be dominant eventually. Unable to make his point with the Domestic Council staff, Quie insisted on seeing the President himself, a friend and ally for 16 years. Quie got into the Oval Office, made his pitch to Mr. Ford and came away convinced there would be no veto.

The point is that Quie never would have gotten close enough to Nixon to contradict the staff. In contrast, close personal aides brought to the White House by Mr. Ford feel open access will be the essence of his presidency. Once Haig leaves, they believe, Mr. Ford's personal inclinations for a de-emphasized White House staff will be translated into reality.

Whatever happens in the post-Haig White House, however, the last six weeks cannot be washed away. At a time when Mr. Ford's closest advisers felt changes in both the policies and procedures of the administration were imperative, the new President was unable to budge more than slightly the monolithic Nixon system that he inherited.