

WASHINGTON—As power ebbs, the sense of humor sours and the hatchet hand loses its skill. Some examples:

At the Rambouillet conference, one of the seats next to President Ford was momentarily empty when Secretary Kissinger's helicopter was delayed by weather. Happy to provide an old friend with a souvenir, the President sat economic adviser William Seidman next to him for that morning's picture-taking, and left word for Mr. Kissinger when he arrived not to claim his seat immediately.

When Mr. Kissinger arrived and was told the President's wish, he brushed Presidential aides aside and gruffly told Bill Seidman: "I'll take my chair now, Secretary Richardson." Nobody smiled; the President pretended not to notice.

Another example of ill-humored mockery took place at the airfield at Mildenhall, England, when President Ford's party took coffee in a small room with Ambassador Elliot Richardson and his wife. "Ron Nessen points out that there is a Bible on the coffee table, Mr. President," said Secretary Kissinger loudly. "Is there to be a swearing-in?" The smiles were forced; those present knew that Henry envisioned Mr. Richardson's swearing-in at State and not at Commerce, and his remark was edged with self-pity.

The most obvious examples of the debilitation that sets in as the loss of power looms is in the heavyhanded manner in which Mr. Kissinger has been wielding his bureaucratic hatchet. His campaign to undercut the position of our outspoken Ambassador to the United Nations, Pat Moynihan, lacks the surgical skill he used to practice on William Rogers. The finesse is gone.

At Rambouillet, he had a private breakfast and other talks with his friend, British Foreign Secretary James Callaghan. With uncharacteristic vehemence, British and American spokes-

ESSAY

By William Safire

men insist that at no time during those long talks was a single word mentioned about British dissatisfaction with the style or position of the American Ambassador to the United Nations.

That's curious; immediately after Rambouillet, the British Ambassador to the United Nations—Ivor Richard, a Labor Party politician anxious to follow Mr. Callaghan up the ladder—launched into an oblique but savage personal attack on America's U.N. Ambassador.

Implying archly that much of the fury in New York City at Gen. Idi Amin's call for Israel's extinction was "self-induced," politician Richard derided Pat Moynihan's speeches objecting to anti-Semitism at the U.N. as a "theological crusade" by "an avenging angel preaching retribution and revenge." As an argument against confrontation, Richard's blast was highly confrontational.

Since this denunciation was later described as "an informal reflection of official British policy," one might think that a friendly British Foreign Secretary would have tipped off his American counterpart that an attack of that magnitude was forthcoming. A quick "by the way, our chap is clobbering

your chap tomorrow, first time this century" would be expected between allies.

No wonder Ivor took advantage of the kick-me sign that Henry pinned on Pat. Truckling to General Amin is standard British Labor Party procedure; here was a chance for an ambitious politician to become a third world hero while secretly pleasing his boss's friend, the fading phantom of foggy bottom.

But Henry's hatcheting was all too obvious; even Ivor's reference to Wyatt Earp carried overtones of the Kissinger lonesome-cowboy interview with Oriana Fallacci. When Moynihan made known his intention to resign, Henry panicked—he could not afford to be caught with another severed intellectual head in his hands—and backtracked furiously. When Moynihan delayed his departure at the last-minute request of the White House's Richard Cheney, Henry passed the word to his coterie that this was "Moynihan's Salzburg," a phony resignation threat.

But Ambassador Moynihan is not playing those games. He is serious about the need to confront unreasoned hatred with rational rhetoric. When he meets with President Ford today, he will be strongly supported, and probably reminded that as a member of the Cabinet, the Ambassador to the United Nations report directly to the President.

This will stimulate more unfunny cracks by Mr. Kissinger about the hot breath of Elliot Richardson. But our Ambassador to the U.N. offers a President a more affirmative form of irreverence. Last year, when Indira Gandhi crushed freedom in India, the wryly upbeat Mr. Moynihan was heard to tell the President after a Cabinet meeting "Look at it this way—history will remember that it was during the Administration of Gerald Ford that America became the world's largest democracy."

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