

In The Nation: A Good Move by Mr. Nixon

By TOM WICKER

WASHINGTON, June 8 — Whatever the deepest motives of those involved, which may be some time in emerging, the Richardson-for-Finch swap at the troubled Department of Health, Education and Welfare looks like an intelligent move by the President and maybe even for the country. This could be canceled out if the new Under Secretary of State is not chosen with care.

There seem to be at least three ways in which this high-level shuffle is of benefit. The first lies in the obvious fact that H.E.W. was in a real mess—with major posts unfilled, damaging resignations being tendered, revolt brewing among civil servants of all grades, and Secretary Finch worn down by all these cares. Underscoring all that were the difficulties of the department's substantive programs—school desegregation slowed or repatterned, health programs held down in the budget, and the welfare reform—the most innovative Nixon domestic program—in trouble in Congress.

Elliott Richardson, the new Secretary, has shown himself at the State Department to be a forceful administrator and a quick learner. With former ex-

perience in H.E.W. and a term as Massachusetts Attorney General under his belt, he has a good background for his tough new assignment. In the state H.E.W. is in, it can hardly fail to benefit from a new hand at the tiller, particularly one as firm as Mr. Richardson's appears to be.

Liberal Republican Element

But the Richardson appointment brings another gain that is mostly promise. He has solid credentials in previous stages of the civil rights movement, and is one of those "modern Republicans," as they used to be called in the Eisenhower era, who knows his party's deepest traditions derive from Lincoln. As such, he should be a strong and needed force in the Administration for a progressive desegregation policy.

He will represent, more directly than could Mr. Finch—a Californian always associated with Mr. Nixon—the oncestrong Eastern and liberal elements of the Republican party, perhaps even re-establishing some of their lost confidence in the Administration. With their backing, with his freedom from any entangling personal relationship with the President, and with the high standing he earned at State, Mr. Richard-

son might prove a different breed of cat for Attorney General John Mitchell to tangle with in the inner councils.

Finally, Mr. Finch's shift to the White House staff, in addition to providing Mr. Richardson the kind of essential support at the top that Mr. Finch himself seldom had, might well have good general effect. More than most in this Administration, he has moved around the country, keeping as much in touch with it as he could, even daring to make some commencement addresses in the wake of the Cambodian uproar. And while he was never the "liberal" some publicity suggested, and did not claim to be, he is still a good deal to the left of Mr. Mitchell and Vice President Agnew, and considerably more knowledgeable politically than either.

Hope for Sound Counsel

In his new role, relieved of administrative and policy battles, Mr. Finch may provide the sound political counsel that seems to have been lacking in the making of the Cambodian mess. In the Carswell nomination, and that has been most conspicuous by its absence from the Administration's handling of students and blacks. It is not even too much to hope that, in

the White House, the scope and soundness of Mr. Finch's counsel to the President might be as great as they appeared to be in Mr. Nixon's '60-68 campaigns.

This leaves the question of a successor for Mr. Richardson at the State Department, and it is a good omen that Secretary of State Rogers is talking of bringing in someone from "outside." That would be useful for more reasons than that the present State Department organization is overloaded at the top with career officers of the kind who have always approved the Vietnam war and who, in the most recent revelation of this mentality, were happy to pay the Thais \$50 million a year to bolster the cause with one combat division.

It is even more important that a new voice and a fresh outlook be injected into the high councils of the Administration, after it has been a year and a half in office. Vested interest in the success of a policy of one's own making, ambition, sycophancy, even simple fatigue, as time goes along, tend to fix any Administration inflexibly on an established policy line; and none ever suffered from having someone free of all these handicaps move in near the top and ask a few skeptical questions.