

Richardson, in New Job, Faces Discontent in Ranks

By PAUL DELANEY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 12

— Employees of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare want Elliot L. Richardson, when he becomes Secretary of the department, to convene with them the meeting that the outgoing Secretary, Robert H. Finch, missed because of illness.

Bulletin boards at the department still prominently display Mr. Finch's letter announcing the meeting of May 18 that he missed when he went to the Walter Reed Army Hospital after a numbness developed in his left arm.

Activist members of the department said they plan to press Mr. Richardson for a meeting as soon as he is confirmed by the Senate. His nomination was unanimously approved today by the Senate Finance Committee.

"There are two things we will ask Mr. Richardson to do when he takes over," said one activist, Michael Tabor. "We will ask him to meet with our Thursday group [a discussion group] and to hold the meeting with employees that Mr. Finch never made."

Apprehension Is Voiced

"Actually, we shouldn't have to ask him to meet with his employees," Mr. Tabor went on. "As a good administrator, he should set up such a meeting himself."

Talks with employees in their offices, at lunch, in the corridors and outside the buildings disclosed apprehension about Mr. Richardson, continuing hostility, and increasing anti-war and anti-Administration activity at the department. There appears to be a mixture of cynicism, anger and frustration.

"Mr. Richardson is coming into a situation where there is a lot of hostility, not to him but to the Nixon Administration," Mr. Tabor remarked. "This is a very uneasy situation and we're not sure how he'll cope with it."

One black employe said that he hoped Mr. Richardson "is not being brought in here to quiet things down without dealing with the problems."

Another worker active in the protest movement within the department said:

"There is a very strong feeling that, no matter who takes this job, he will have to pay the price, the same price that Mr. Finch paid. And that price is to cater to the 'Southern strategy,' to end inflation by

curbing domestic programs rather than by ending the war, and to support expansion of the war. If the new Secretary is bound to these, he will automatically have problems here."

Doubtful About War

Jeffrey Schwartz, a lawyer in the general counsel's office, said, "There is no way—and this feeling is among younger and some older members of the general counsel's staff—that the domestic situation can change until the war situation changes. The Nixon strategy is not to bring American involvement to an end within a year. And what bothers us is, there will be no change as long as the war goes on."

On the other hand, a staff assistant for a high official said that the word had come down about the official response to reporters' questions as to the mood in the department. He described that response as "The attitude is one of wait and see, to give Mr. Richardson a chance."

"Mr. Richardson sounds good to me," remarked Susan Eddy, a member of the staff of an aide to Under Secretary John G. Veneman. "Maybe Mr. Richardson will be better because too much was expected of Mr. Finch."

Finds Credentials Good

A high staff member said that Mr. Richardson, who was with the department in the Eisenhower Administration, had good credentials and should be given a chance. He added:

"Some of the older guys who were here when Mr. Richardson was here before think highly of him, but what do I know about him? I've been here only three years."

Mr. Tabor said that many

people believed the new Secretary would not make much difference in the way the department operates.

"People feel that the bridge was crossed several months ago, when it was shown that H.E.W. doesn't have the ability to deal with racism and other problems," Mr. Tabor said. "Many people feel it just doesn't make any difference anymore, not just H.E.W., but the whole country, and the Administration has given us that attitude."

The activists said they were aware that Mr. Richardson, now Under Secretary of State, has supported the Administration's policies in Indochina, and they feel that his commitment conflicts with the goals of the department.

They reported that their activities had not decreased since the announcement that Mr. Finch would join the White House staff as a counselor to the President.

They said that current activity includes an organization in the general counsel's office to

engage in peaceful protest, and organizing by blacks around black interests, such as desegregation, rather than peace. They said that they planned to sponsor newspaper advertisements and to call a one-day strike by department employes later in the month. They said they were also forming coalitions within the department and that they hoped to form coalitions eventually with other Federal agencies.

The activists said that they were concerned that their increased activity had precipitated a similar increase in the activity of the department's internal security unit.

"I see this as the reactionaries coming out of the woodwork, which is radicalizing and polarizing more people," Mr. Tabor said. "The internal security people are checking what employes do, what they say, whom they visit and who visits them."

Asked about this contention, Frederick H. Schmidt, chief of internal security, refused to comment.