

Nixon Is Seeking to Limit His Image as Conciliator

By JAMES M. NAUGHTON

WASHINGTON, Jan. 18— Amid earnest efforts by the White House to establish a conciliatory image for President Nixon, there is an equally fervent attempt to draw the line on how far this may go.

The latest sign of Presidential conciliation was Mr. Nixon's address last Thursday to a student-faculty audience at the University of Nebraska. He urged young Americans to join their elders in "an alliance of the generations."

At least one account of the President's speech troubled Mr. Nixon. That account was published Friday in The New York Times. Mr. Nixon told aides that he felt the report involved a small, but to him important, error of omission.

Mr. Nixon did not object to the main thrust of the account, which was that the tone of the speech was considerably different from that of the 1970 campaign oratory and that he had conceded that his own generation must accept some of the blame for the divisions in the nation.

What bothered Mr. Nixon was that the report did not emphasize anew his determination not to tolerate violence on the part of the minority of the young—a point he repeated in the Nebraska speech.

The implication was that while the President was eager to make a gesture of friendship to the young, particularly, perhaps, in light of the Supreme Court ruling granting voting privileges to 18-year-olds in national elections, he was keenly aware that he must not allow older voters to gain the impression that he suddenly was soft on disruption.

Consistent reports that the White House is either keeping Vice President Agnew under wraps or attempting to reconstitute his image have begun to cause concern among members of his staff.

The aides pointed out this week that Mr. Agnew's current schedule of public appearances was not different from last year's, although it was less hectic than his nonstop Congressional campaigning last fall.

As for changing Mr. Agnew's image, one of his assistants protested, "There's only one way to get rid of the Vice President—to change his image to Mr. Nice Guy. Do that, and we throw away our base of support."

Whatever the speculation, said the aides, Mr. Agnew is Mr. Agnew, a man with certain opinions that he will continue to express frankly.

Whether or not there is a "new" Nixon speaking to the left flank of American political opinion while an "old" Nixon maintains the ties to the Right may be a matter for luncheon discussion here, but even aides to the President are having a difficult time squaring this particular rhetorical circle:

"I should emphasize that divisions in this country are never going to end. There is always going to be a generation gap."—President Nixon at a news conference Dec. 10.

"Those are just a few of the challenges that face us. We must face them together. There can be no generation gap in America."—President Nixon at the University of Nebraska last week. 14 JAN

Another aspect of political image-building at the White House involves the President's increasing willingness to "jawbone," or confront labor and management, about rising wages and prices.

White House officials went out of their way over the weekend to leak details of Mr. Nixon's confrontation with the steel industry over price increases. They were eager to let the public know how tough Mr. Nixon had been in calling in representatives of the United States Steel Corporation and Republic Steel Corporation to discuss the situation and in postponing negotiations with foreign nations over the extension of an agreement that limits steel imports.

The tactics worked. U.S. Steel announced a 6.8 per cent price increase, forcing the Bethlehem Steel Corporation to roll back to that level from a planned 12 per cent increase.

There was speculation that in leaking the tactics the Administration was laying the groundwork for public acceptance of an equally tough attitude toward wage increases in coming weeks.

Talking with reporters the other day about the difficulty of judging an audience's mood by the frequency of its applause, the President said he had been confident his University of Nebraska audience was paying heed to his words despite a minimum of hand-clapping.

Mr. Nixon said he had kept watching a bearded young man and had seen his face "light up like an angel" when the President spoke of 18-year-olds voting.

As a further illustration of the point, Mr. Nixon said he was confident that he would be "interrupted 35 times by applause" when he delivered his third State of the Union message to a joint session of Congress Friday night, "and it won't mean a thing."