

# Mr. Nixon's Changes

By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, Feb. 24 — When President Nixon came into the White House, he said he was going to emphasize change and reform, and he has kept his word. Having scrapped the old conservative Republican philosophy and transformed the Supreme Court, he is now experimenting with television diplomacy and steadily installing a new Cabinet.

Strong Presidents tend to produce weak Cabinets, and vice versa, and the way things are now going, it looks as if Mr. Nixon, if he is re-elected in November, will go into his second term with virtually a whole new team.

In recent days or months, he has accepted the resignations of Attorney General John Mitchell, Secretary of Commerce Maurice Stans, Secretary of Agriculture Clifford M. Hardin and Postmaster General Winton M. Blount.

In addition to these, he has lost the Deputy Secretary of Defense, David Packard, and the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, Paul W. McCracken, and he is about to lose the Secretary of the Navy, John H. Chafee of Rhode Island.

This is normal procedure in the last year of an administration, when tired and hard-working men quit for personal reasons, or move over to run the re-election campaign (Mitchell) or raise funds for it (Stans). There is no evidence that these top men left for policy reasons (down below it is different), but the extent of the changes is greater than normal, and the pace of change is likely to be even faster when the first term comes to an end.

It has been quietly rumored for some time that Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird wanted out after the first term, and it is hard to imagine that Mr. Rogers would stay on after being kept out of the President's principal meetings with Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai in favor of Henry Kissinger and Mr. Kissinger's White House aides.

Maybe Mr. Rogers does not regard this as a public humiliation, but many of his aides in the State Department certainly do. It seemed odd enough earlier on when Dr. Kissinger began to emerge as the principal adviser to the President, chief diplomatic negotiator on China and Vietnam, and top White House spokesman in private and then public briefings at the White House; but even the embarrassed State Department was not prepared to see the President take the Secretary of State to Peking and then keep him out of the top-level negotiations.

Secretary Laird has not been subjected to such treatment. He has a political constituency of his own in the Republican party and is particularly strong in the House of Representatives,

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where he served for many years, so he has not been short-circuited by Mr. Nixon's powerful White House staff. He is said to be getting out at the end of the year in accordance with a pre-arranged personal plan.

Accordingly, there is already a lot of casual talk around here, not only about whether Vice President Agnew will be replaced on the Republican campaign ticket, but about who will replace Rogers and Laird if Mr. Nixon wins.

The Vice-Presidential question is Mr. Nixon's own secret so there's little point in speculating on it, but it is known that Gov. Nelson Rockefeller of New York would not be entirely hostile to the idea of leaving Albany for the State or Defense jobs. Also, Secretary of the Treasury Connally is said to have ambitions to be Secretary of State, unless, of course, Mr. Nixon decides to put former Under Secretary of State Elliot Richardson in the job, or even give the post, in addition to the power, to Dr. Kissinger.

This is not a particularly happy Cabinet, mainly because it tends to be overshadowed by the White House staff. They came into office in living color, introduced by the President himself on television as giants who would have great latitude and authority, whereupon most of them vanished into the bureaucracy, and even now it is hard to remember who is at Labor and who is at Transportation, and what ever happened to George Romney?

Below the Cabinet level, the turnover, particularly among Negroes working in the field of civil rights, has been much higher than usual. Among the blacks who have quit or were forced out were Arthur A. Fletcher, Assistant Secretary of Labor; James L. Farmer, Assistant Secretary of H.E.W., Frank W. Render 2d, Assistant Secretary of Defense, and Clarence L. Townes Jr., Special Assistant for Minorities to the chairman of the Republican National Committee.

The top level of the President's White House staff remains steady. Robert Finch, former Secretary of H.E.W., and counselor to the President, is returning to California to get back into state politics, and quite a few of Kissinger's National Security Council staff have quit, mainly from exhaustion; but the big three remain: H. R. Haldeman (administration), John D. Ehrlichman (domestic affairs) and Dr. Kissinger (foreign affairs).

Kissinger insisted when he came here that nobody could do his job for more than two years, but how do you keep them down on the Harvard Yard after they've seen Peking?