

Predictably unpredictable, Nixon makes promising start

NEW YORK — The one predictable thing about Richard Nixon is that he is unpredictable. The man loves a surprise. Who, for example, could have guessed that his first major decision after winning a spectacular "Middle America"

James Reston

election victory, would have been to appoint three Harvard men to his second term cabinet?

As secretary of defense, Elliot Lee Richardson, Harvard '41; Harvard law '47; law clerk to Learned Hand and Justice Felix Frankfurter; Lt. Gov. of Massachusetts; assistant to that gentle progressive man, Sen. Leverett Saltonstall of Massachusetts, lecturer at the Harvard Law School; a Boston Brahmin, a sensible establishment man of peace, former undersecretary of State and secretary of HEW, but certainly no middle American type: handsome, ambitious, almost arrogantly patrician.

As secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Casper Willard Weinberger, 1938 Harvard classmate and friend of Arthur Schlesinger, magna cum laude, Harvard Law School, 1941, Phi Beta Kappa, finance director for Gov. Ronald Reagan of California, member of Gen. MacArthur's intelligence staff, newspaper columnist in the San Francisco Bay area, director of the Office of Management and Budget in the White House: a handsome, sophisticated, moderately conservative Republican, who now has to preside over cutting back the Nixon HEW budget.

Roy Lawrence Ash, electronics manufacturer, president of Litton Industries, efficiency expert, Horatio Alger character out of California, who never went to undergraduate college but came out of Harvard Business School in Boston with highest honors in 1947.

Still, there is something very logical in

all this illogic. It is the theme and contradiction of Nixon's life. He has made one of the great American political careers out of doing the unexpected.

After losing the Presidency in 1960 and the governorship of California in 1962, and announcing his retirement from politics, he made the greatest comeback since Lazarus. He lost the Presidency as an anti-Communist hawk, and won and retained it as a man of peace and accommodation with the Communists.

Generous to critics

And in the last few days, he has been almost more generous to his critics than to his allies in the last election. He has not been defending his White House staff, but insisting that it is too big and has to be cut back.

He has not been arguing for his "winning team" of the last four years, but calling for a new team, for new changes, and for a new and more powerful cabinet, which would be responsible to the Congress and the people.

For a time in his first term, he seemed to be turning the White House into a palace, with uniformed guards in music hall plumes, but now he is retreating from the majesty of the White House and the formality of the Oval Room into the informality of his Camp David retreat high in the Maryland mountains.

A reassuring approach

The historians and psychiatrists of the future will probably be very interested in all this, but for the time being, his approach to his second term is reassuring. Whatever the past, he is now dealing with the future.

He is trying to deal with the lessons of history. Presidential second terms tend to get tired and soft, therefore, they have to get new men, new ideas, new

vigor. Landslide victories tend to bury the victorious president, therefore, he has to think anew and change the question.

Ever since it was clear that Nixon was going to be re-elected — which now seems a long time ago — both his critics and, what is more interesting, even many of his most intimate supporters, wondered whether he would be magnanimous or vindictive if he was re-elected overwhelmingly by his fellow-countrymen.

Generous, serene

In his talk with the reporters at Camp David the other night, he was more gen-

(Also NYT Times 29 Nov 72, filed Nixon.)

erous, more composed and more serene than any of his contemporaries can ever remember. He seemed, almost for the first time, to be thinking of history instead of politics, and this could be a significant change.

For he has not been trusted in the past because he trusted no man, which was the tragedy of his predecessor, Lyndon Johnson; but in his little talk at Camp David, he seemed to be reaching out in a new spirit for a new accommodation at home, as he did with his adversaries in Moscow and Peking. And this could begin a new chapter in American politics, if his critics respond in an equally generous spirit.

©, 1972, New York Times Service



President Nixon: A new accommodation at home?