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Out Of Frying Pan, Into Fire

NYTimes by Tom Wicker

After a sufficiently stimulating lunch hour, or at practically any other time, Pat Moynihan can be one of the world's most engaging men and his is not the kind of temperament to be intimidated by the vastness and complexity of the world East of Suez. So sending this imaginative and energetic Irishman as Ambassador to India may be the best idea President Nixon has had; Mrs. Gandhi had best look to her neutralism and her wine cellar.

But elsewhere in the new Nixon Administration, the country appears to be out of the frying pan, into the fire. Now that at least the upper levels of the apparatus have been made flesh, answers are available to the two most-asked questions since Nov. 7:

Will Mr. Nixon in the sanctuary of a second term, with no constitutional chance at re-election, broaden the scope and vision of his Administration

IN THE NATION

at home and abroad? Will he, as he himself pledged, in fact relinquish some of the powers that have been steadily accruing to the White House, in domestic as well as foreign policy?

The answers appear to be No and No, probably to the surprise of no one but newspaper columnists in whom hope springs fatuously eternal. No doubt the handwriting was on the wall as soon as Mr. Nixon announced that he intended to spend more time on the mountaintop at Camp David; up there, he will be harder than ever to get at or bring to book.

Taken all in all, the appointments of hard-hat Peter Brennan to Labor, Strom Thurmond's friend Frederick Dent to Commerce, oilman Claude Brinegar to Transportation, and the reappointments of Earl Butz to Agriculture and Richard Kleindienst to Justice deliver the message loud and clear. The second Nixon Administration is going to be more narrowly conservative, Southern-suburban, hard-line, law'n order-oriented and America First-ish in economic and social policy, at home and abroad, than the first. Some of the President's broadest-gauged and ablest men—such as Peter Peterson and Richard Helms—are out, or about to be, and so are most of those—like George Romney and Melvin Laird—who had some independent political standing.

Those who regard Elliot Richardson, the new Secretary of Defense, as a more liberal man than the tough and intelligent Mel Laird, for instance, may be right; but they ought to remember that that did not prevent Mr. Richardson—a former state attorney-general—from acquiescing as Secretary of H.E.W., in Mr. Nixon's dubious notion that Congress could constitutionally make the courts stop ordering busing to desegregate schools, and should do so as a matter of policy.

Incidentally, and with no slur intended on Ambassador George Bush, what does it say of Mr. Nixon's view of the United Nations that two years ago he appointed a defeated candidate to head the American delegation and now intends to shift the same man to the chairmanship of the Republican National Committee, as if these were equivalent posts? No wonder the U.N. has so little prestige or power, when one of its two or three most powerful members treats it with such contempt-by-appointment.

As for White House power, the record since Nov. 7 suggests lots more. For one thing, almost all the shifts in Cabinet offices appear to make the Cabinet, as a whole, less independent and representative of various groups and ideas and more subordinate to the White House view of things; clearly, H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, the President's right- and left-hand men, have tailored the new Cabinet to fit their own measure of the Administration.

Dr. Henry Kissinger obviously eclipses still the Secretary of State. George P. Shultz is to have wide-ranging control of foreign and domestic economic policy, not as Secretary of the Treasury but as an Assistant to the President, with five other Cabinet officers serving under his chairmanship of a new White House Council on Economic Policy. Two White House aides, John C. Whitaker and Egil Krogh Jr., are being dispatched, respectively, to the Interior and Transportation Departments as No. 2 men; they are not expected, surely, to make these agencies more independent of their old superiors, the Messrs. Haldeman and Ehrlichman.

Refusing to allocate to the states all the funds for cleaning up polluted waters that Congress had voted over Mr. Nixon's veto hardly represents a retreat from White House power. Mr. Shultz made it plain yesterday that the President would continue to insist on a \$250-billion spending ceiling this fiscal year and will ask Congress for extension of his authority to maintain a system of wage-price controls. These may be necessary policies but neither they nor Mr. Nixon's plan to create by executive order a Cabinet-level Department of Natural Resources suggests a weaker White House next term.

In fact, nothing does—nothing except the President's unsupported word; and by what means can he be made to live up to that?