

At 60, Nixon seems determined to settle old scores

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Item

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WASHINGTON — President Nixon, who will be 60 on Jan. 9, is now at the very pinnacle of his political power, and yet, coming into his second term and his seventh decade, he is still in trouble.

He is not in trouble with his own party. He is its unquestioned master. The divided Democrats cannot challenge him, and despite his savage bombing of Vietnam, he is undoubtedly more popular at the end of his first term than he was at the beginning.

Power to divide

Still, he has used his power since the election, not to unite but to divide the nation, and has misjudged the deepest longings of the people for peace and reconciliation.

In the reorganization of his administration for the second term, he let go the cabinet members like George Romney and Peter G. Peterson, who had ventured to express independent judgments on his policies, or what's worse, to associate with his political critics.

In the name of increasing the power of the cabinet, he decreased its power and put his own deputies into the State and Defense Departments, and centralized even more authority in the White House staff.

He announced the resignation of Erwin N. Griswold as solicitor general without a public word of thanks, and even replaced some of the new assistant attorneys general brought into the government only a few months before the election by the new attorney general, Richard G. Kleindienst.

Most severe bombing

When he ordered the most severe bombing of the war in Vietnam, he did so without consultation with the leaders of Congress, and without any personal explanation of its purpose. His White House Press Secretary, Ronald L. Zie-

gler, linked the bombing to another North Vietnamese offensive in South Vietnam, though no evidence of this has ever been offered by Ziegler or anybody else.

And when the Swedish premier compared the U.S. bombing to Nazi atrocities in the last world war the President had the State Department tongue-lash a Swedish diplomat and asked Sweden not to send an ambassador to the United States.

Has The Washington Post been criticizing the Republicans for bugging and burglarizing the Democratic headquarters at the Watergate? Suddenly The Post's society columnist is not invited to cover social events open to other reporters at the White House.

Not available

When the Congress returned, Sen. J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, invited Secretary of State Rogers and Henry A. Kissinger to explain the breakdown in the peace negotiations and the bombing of Hanoi. They were not available to testify.

After the President's spectacular victory over George McGovern in November, there was a pause in the party strife and even Senators Kennedy and Humphrey, who presumably read the election returns, were calling for cooperation with the victorious President. But the events since then, particularly in Vietnam, have changed the mood and even Speaker Albert, who normally supports the President on foreign policy questions, is now predicting that unless there is peace in Vietnam, Congress will probably cut off funds from the war.

A constant topic

How to explain the President's ap-

proach to his second term is now a topic of constant conversation in the capital. He is entering into a critical phase of domestic legislation, in which he needs the support of the Democratic majority in Congress to win consent for the reforms he has announced.

He is approaching new realignments of the nation in both Europe and Asia, but has been roundly condemned by allies and adversaries both places for his diplomatic bombing of Vietnam.

Beyond this, he talked endlessly in the campaign about creating, not a stronger party of loyal Republicans, but a "new majority" drawn from the ranks of both major parties and the growing body of independents.

His second term was not to be a period of strife and confrontation, but of negotiation abroad leading to a "genera-

tion of peace" and period of moderation and reform, bringing the people together at home.

Precisely the opposite

The period between the election and the inauguration, however, has been precisely the opposite—more war without either presidential consultation or explanation; more confrontation between the executive and the legislative branches; more vindictive reaction to dissent.

It is almost as if the President, coming up on 60, was determined, not to heal old sores, but to settle old scores, and the odd thing about it is that his privately expressed ambition has been to preside over a unified nation on its 200th anniversary in 1976 at the end of his last term in office.

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'Die! Die! Die!'



—Flannery in The Baltimore Sun.