

President's Aides: A Bland New Type

By JAMES T. WOOTEN

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—One of President Nixon's aides was talking the other day about the rather drab image he and his White House colleagues seem to have with the public and the press.

"We recognize we're perceived as 'dull' and to some extent we are," conceded Raymond K. Price Jr., a special consultant to Mr. Nixon. "But then, we're not here to make this another Camelot."

That, in essence, has become the standard response of Nixon Administration people—the tense technicians toiling day after day in the White House or in any of the hundreds of nooks and crannies in the bureaucratic sprawl—to the talk that they are viewed as bloodless bores with all the color and charisma of amoebas.

But they deeply and proudly believe that, in terms of what the country requires today, bland is beautiful.

"I suppose it isn't unfair to recognize a sort of middle-class, fifties-generation lack of style among us," conceded Patrick J. Buchanan, one of the President's aides. "But we're not ashamed because we're making it work for the good of the nation."

Dull or not, with or without verve, the Nixon man is the President's special imprimatur on the Federal Government and this city—a stamp of his success as a national politician and the uniformity of his appointments.

There are deviations in the pattern, to be sure, but from one corner of the bureaucracy to the other, the Nixon man is quickly becoming one of Washington's more distinct species.

His hair is short, his work-days long.

He likes charts and graphs, single-spaced reports and deductive reasoning.

He sees himself as a thoughtful man and views intellectuals as loose thinkers.

He occasionally admits his own mistakes but never the President's.

He is, simultaneously, a good father, a faithful husband and a male chauvinist—a martinet on the job, a mellow fellow on the weekend.

He has read neither "The Prince" nor "The Breast" but can recite lengthy passages from "My Six Crises" and "The Emerging Republican Majority."

He has seen "Patton" twice—once in a theater, once on television—but

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plans to skip "Last Tango in Paris" and is not familiar with "Cries and Whispers."

He prefers William F. Buckley to Nicholas von Hoffman, Johnny Carson to Dick Cavett, John Wayne to Jack Lemmon and almost anybody to Jane Fonda.

Football, Not Ballet

He is more at home with a safety blitz than a pas de deux and he has little time for Democrats, liberal Republicans, reporters, poker with the boys or parties in Georgetown.

Finally, the Nixon man is firmly persuaded that Richard Nixon is the greatest President in the history of America.

A description of the stereotype of the Nixon man was shown to several experienced journalists.

"That's Ehrlichman," one chortled, referring to John D. Ehrlichman, the President's chief assistant for domestic affairs.

"No, it's Haldeman," one of his colleagues insisted, meaning H. R. Haldeman, Mr. Nixon's chief of staff.

"It's got to be Ziegler," said another, referring to Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary—and as the stereotype made the rounds here and there in Washington, the names matched to its characteristics steadily grew.

Yet, matched and mentioned most frequently was the Nixon Administration's most celebrated trio of names—Mr. Ehrlichman, Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ziegler.

For many in Washington, each of them and all of them are the Nixon man: Close-mouthed, grim-faced, stern-visaged, no-nonsense Trojans who relax by becoming more tense and get away from it all by never leaving.

They reflect with near-perfect mirror images the Nixon view of government. They are technicians, systems-oriented managers, administrators and advertising men—the kind of men who regard budgets as holy writ and computer printouts as life guides.

Their approach is the President's approach: A cool hand, a quick eye and a place in American history far from the noise of the street.

Notable Representative
The 46-year-old Mr. Haldeman is their most notable representative.

Up before 7 o'clock, at his White House desk before 8, back home 12 hours later, he is the epitome of the nose-to-grindstone man the President likes, admires and appoints.

His Prussian-style crew-cut and conservative clothes are merely functional, he has said. Longer hair and more contemporary attire require more time.

His background is in advertising, not government; organization, not innovation, and he deals with the problems of his job with the quick dispatch of a man swatting flies—one at a time, one after another, until the room is clear.

His politics are conservative, his origins are Western, his life-style is consistently quiet and his personal habits are scrupulously disciplined. He neither smokes nor drinks and his recreation consists of a little tennis and a little chess.

"You can quote me as saying I once actually witnessed Bob [Haldeman] laughing," said one White House aide who then remembered to decline to be quoted by name. "But I think it can be assumed that Bob has laughed more than once in his life."

It is that trait—an absence of laughter—that is cited most frequently as the thread that runs through the record of Mr. Nixon's appointees. It is also this trait that seems to make the Nixon Administration's people distinct from those of past White House eras.

For instance, Mr. Ziegler's laconic approach to his task followed eight years of Pierre Salinger, a bubbly wisecracking practical joker; Bill D. Moyers, a quiet but deftly witty jousting; and George Christian and George Reedy, men who found ample time to get out of uniform and into a few hours of social life.

Virtue in Middle Class

"That's because the President's they served were more relaxed themselves," one current White House aide reasoned. "President Nixon is a different man and therefore his people tend to be different too—different in the sense that they either are really like him or try to be."

But there is another perspective on the men of past Administrations. To a man, Mr. Nixon's people agree with him that the Demo-

cratic years were a disaster for the country.

To a man, they find virtue in the middle class and vice elsewhere.

To a man, they are committed to a governmental policy that focuses on the President's work-ethic philosophy.

A Case in Point

To a man, they read the 1972 elections as he does: A vindication of an Administration that projects quiet methodology rather than visionary moments of glory. That interpretation runs consistently through the scores of men named by the President to the jobs he controls in the executive branch.

A case in point is Michael P. Balzano Jr., the new head of Action, the Federal agency that administers several volunteer-citizen programs. A high-school dropout who later worked his way to a diploma and then ultimately to a doctorate in political philosophy, the 37-year-old Mr. Balzano attributes his success to "my willingness to work and to work hard all the time with no time out for anything else."

Even Robert M. Bork, the President's new Solicitor General, maintains the pattern, despite his full red beard.

When the articulate, conservatively oriented Yale lawyer was appointed, some critics carped that it was merely an attempt to disguise a Nixon man in a radical's hair.

"But the fact is that there is a swing in the country that no longer can be traced by the length of hair or style of dress," one White House aide philosophized. "Nixon is loved in America because Nixon is America, in a very real sense. He is middle-class, he is a homebody, and he is dependent for success on very hard work."

That is a recurring theme. Its companion is the premise that, if Mr. Nixon and his men are considered drab and dull, then vive la drabness and dullness.

"Precisely," another White House assistant said. "What the hell else do you think we can sell? Nixon's good looks? Haldeman's sense of humor? The cultural and intellectual Valhalla we've created?"

Of course not, he quickly answered himself, carefully

noting that, of course, he could not be quoted.

"What we have in abundance is a straight face," he continued. "We're not jet-setters or swingers or great

wits or likely topics for the gossip columns—and that makes us just like the majority of Americans." He paused for a moment before concluding: "That, my friend, is a hell of a leg-up in national politics."

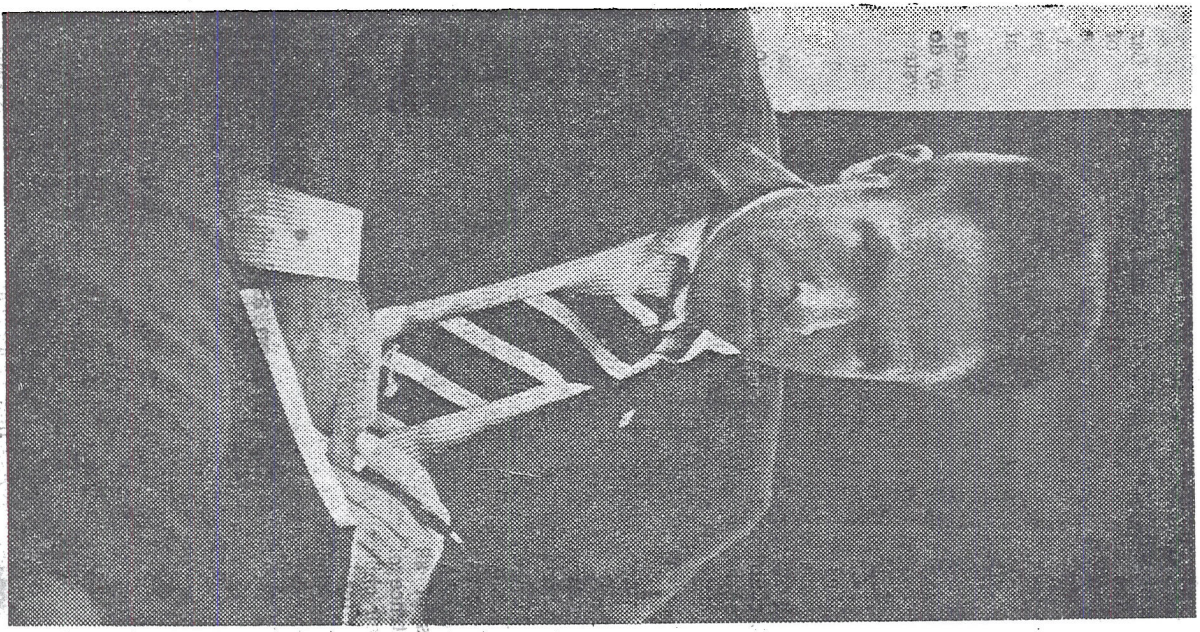
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Patrick J. Buchanan, Presidential aide

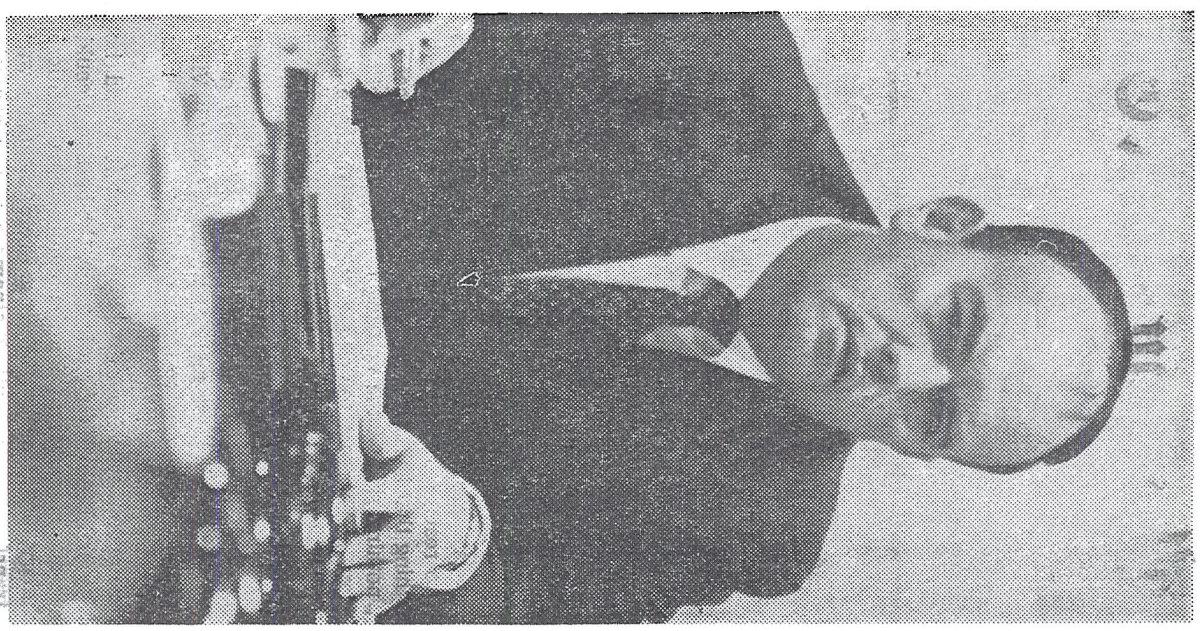


Raymond K. Price Jr., special consultant to Mr. Nixon



H. R. Haldeman, the President's chief of staff

Fred J. Maroon



John D. Ehrlichman, special assistant for domestic affairs

The New York Times/George Tames and Mike Lien