

Changes at State . . .

President Nixon has taken a remarkably long time to get himself a new Secretary of State. The promotion of Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, just announced on Wednesday, was in fact decided upon immediately after the last election.

Before the new year, however, Secretary of State William Rogers requested to be allowed to serve another six months. Since he was the President's best friend in government, the request was granted. When the half year expired, he further renewed his plea, this time asking for another two months. This was also granted.

When the second reprieve was about to run out, the President then sent his old friend the message that this time, there could be no more delay. Even so, Secretary Rogers still resisted resignation. The President, equally, hesitated to be blunt. So it was touch and go up to the last moment.

In view of the minimal policy-making role so long allotted to him, it is bewildering that Secretary Rogers was so intensely reluctant to hand over to Secretary Kissinger. In other circumstances, the change might never have been made at all, because of the President's well known detestation for hard confrontations with anyone he likes.

The fact that the change has now been made is in truth a measure of the President's sense of his own and the country's political plight. In the old Nixon White House, before the Watergate horror blew up in the President's face, there was simply not enough steam to overcome Secretary Rogers' eagerness to stay where he was.

Beginning this spring, however, the need for the boldest possible new look began to be insisted upon by a number of politicians the President respects. A few were also shrewd enough to point out that Dr. Kissinger as Secretary of State might just be able to do what no one has thus far managed to do since April: that is, make the country think about some other subjects besides Watergate.

Of the change itself, one can only say that the late Dean G. Acheson's sole rival as an American master of foreign relations has now got the recognition he has long deserved. Post-war, the first great creative period will always be remembered as belonging to Truman and Acheson. The second such period, making needed adjustments to the interchanging changes in the world, has been that of Nixon and Kissinger.

Nonetheless, there was another political factor working to keep Henry Kissinger out of the State Department. If we are to be bluntly honest, some people found it hard to imagine a Secretary of State of the U.S. who was the son of a poor Jewish refugee family with a detectable foreign accent. So it is another particularly agreeable aspect of the great change that this kind of sordid nonsense has counted for nothing in the end.

As to what the change portends, one may be reasonably certain there will be a good deal of blood on the floor in the first phase of Kissinger's secretaryship of State. The department that Acheson left was the most powerful engine of the U.S. government. But the rot quickly set in with the late John Foster Dulles' unremitting attack on the entire professional element in the Department he inherited from Acheson.

Since then, despite the service of

fine men like Dean Rusk, the decline of the State Department has been continuous. With no natural feeling for foreign affairs, Secretary Rogers further inherited a department in ruins, with the ruins ruled by a strange Mafia passionately dedicated to dimness and mediocrity. The leaders of the State Department Mafia were in turn the leaders of a continuous guerrilla war against Dr. Kissinger and his supposedly upstart, non-dim, anti-mediocre staff in the White House.

As to this aspect of the future, a single fact tells the tale. When the deed was done, the first man called to San Clemente was the brilliant but somewhat abrasive Helmut Sonnenfeld. But the great changes now likely at the State Department, will not amount to much in the end unless Dr. Kissinger achieves something else that is far more urgent. Unless he can get the country's ear for great national problems, he cannot succeed.

Watergate is a first class horror, but it does not constitute a great national problem. Huge national problems, some of them menacing to the national future in rather new ways, have been building up all around us through this spring and summer. They are becoming desperately dangerous to neglect—but they will always be neglected as long as the country itself has no time for them. So Dr. Kissinger has his job cut out for him.

© 1973, Los Angeles Times



Dr. Henry Kissinger—By John Twohey