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# The Hunch Player

An interesting sidelight of President Nixon's surprise wage - price freeze is what it reveals about the man himself.

Mr Nixon has been pictured in the press and the public mind as a chess-player's President, planning each move far in advance.

He has been pictured as the Great Calculator, emotionlessly weighing each fact, plotting each likelihood and consequence on a gray mental graph, moving into action only when all the possibilities have been lined up in neat little rows.

He has been pictured as a set - piece strategist with an obsession for tidy detail unseen since the demise of the Prussian general staff.

All the world has heard about his penchant for gathering up an armload of staff reports and retiring into seclusion to reach a cool, logical, thinking man's decision.

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FOR A LONG TIME I've suspected that picture of the man wasn't accurate.

I've suspected that behind Mr. Nixon's seemingly computerized decisions lurked an essentially impulsive person.

He is Irish, after all, under that Quaker coat.

And I suspect the decisions he reaches in those sessions of seclusion are often akin to hunch bets.

They are hunch bets touched with serendipity. It's true the guy immerses himself in the facts and figures.

But what he comes up with isn't a book-keeper's itemized total but a sales manager's sense of the situation.

There have been glimmerings throughout his career that Mr. Nixon is a man more strongly influenced by intuition and impulse than his public image would suggest.

His decision about the pumpkin papers in the Alger Hiss case was certainly an intuitive thing — if you will, a hunch bet.

His kitchen debate with Nikita Krushchev was an impulsive response to a challenge, and his "last press conference" after losing out on the governorship was a lamentable act of impetuosity.

His remarks in which he prematurely convicted the Manson "family" didn't show a great deal of thinking ahead. And his decision on the Cambodian venture contained elements of a gambler's gamble.

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NOW COMES his Sunday surprise package of economic no-no's that caught not only the American public and the world but even his own inner sanctum staff flatfooted.

In the Monday morning mail the day after the President's epochal pronouncement, Sen. Humphrey received a letter from White House aide Clark MacGregor assuring him no major new economic policies were in the works.

Mr. Nixon wasn't responding to some surprise calamity, like Pearl Harbor. He had plenty of warning that a wage-price freeze might be necessary, and plenty of time to set up the machinery and draw up the rules, complete with footnotes covering the thousands of questions that have gone unanswered all week.

But he didn't do any of those things.

The final touch marking his freeze order as an impulsive decision was his choice of an agency to handle the gargantuan task — the Office of Emergency Preparedness, despite its name, is perhaps the least prepared, most skeletonized agency in the government directory.

I mean these remarks less as criticism than as a commentary on the Real Nixon, who procrastinates, improvises and indulges in guesswork, just like the rest of us.

I would dearly love to play poker with the President. I bet he sometimes draws to an inside straight.