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President Nixon's Flourishes of Drama

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BY NOW the theatrics are familiar. The setting is invariably the East Room of the White House or the President's Oval Office.

Richard M. Nixon's appearance is preceded by an announcement from the press office that the President will have an important statement.

An international audience of tens of millions awaits in suspense. While the people have no way of knowing what the President will say, their expectations are conditioned by their knowledge of his background and oft-stated purposes.

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THUS they know he has promised to bring the troops home from Indochina. They know that he was a hardline anti-Communist and insisted in his 1968 campaign that it was no time to recognize Red China or admit Peking to the United Nations. They know he had an economic "game plan" of his own and was stubbornly opposed to wage-price controls, devaluation of the dollar, tax cuts and that sort of thing.

"The President of the United States," the announcer intones.

The show is on.

It is, for example, Aug. 15, 1971: "Good evening, my fellow Americans . . . the time has come for a new economic policy . . . I am today ordering a freeze on all prices and wages . . . I have directed Sec-

retary Connally to suspend temporarily the convertibility of the dollar into gold."

World-wide shock, upheaval and incredulity ensue. "Bold," said the Boston Globe after the economic policy speech. "Courageous . . . decisive," said the Washington Post. "Flair for the long ball . . . grandstanding," observed the Wall Street Journal.

These are qualities that a number of people had not expected to find in Mr. Nixon as President. His flourishes of drama have come as a surprise to many.

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BUT HIS career was built upon political theatrics. Though cautious in his preparations, the President has long had a penchant for the bold stroke. If the President can be bold, he is rarely too bold. He didn't talk about going to Peking in 1968 or about freezing wages and prices a year ago. Like Franklin Roosevelt, he is clever about letting public opinion gradually develop in favor, say, of economic controls or a new era in Sino-American relations.

Of course, it took political guts to scrap the economic game plan and go whole hog in the other direction — the very direction his opponents had been urging. On the other hand it would have been downright reckless for the President to have let the economy drift on as it was. So in one sense he acted "boldly," yet in another sense it was practically impossible for him not to have acted. His administration might have been destroyed otherwise.

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